ABSTRACT

Digital collaboration with machine-readable
sign language text in the SignWriting script

by
Stephen E. Slevinski, Jr.
Software Developer of SignPuddle,
SWIS, & Sign Language Wikipedias
slevinski@signwriting.org

There are primarily 2 types of natural languages for humans: spoken and signed. A spoken language relies on a sequentially ordered list of sounds. A sign language relies on 3 dimensional space with simultaneous action.

If we imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge, this ideal relies on targeting each person's primary language. This dream is incomplete when sign languages are not included.

The SignWriting Script is an international standard for writing sign languages by hand or with computers. From education to research, from entertainment to religion, SignWriting has proven useful because people are using it to write signed languages.

Initially created in 1974, the SignWriting Script has matured and spread around the world. Today, SignWriting is used in dozens of countries and able to write any sign language. The symbol set has been stable since 2010 and the machine-readable encoding has been stable since the beginning of 2012.

The developers of SignWriting support open content. While the name SignWriting is trademarked, the script itself is free to use for anyone in the world. The fonts are available under the Open Font License. The documentation is available under creative commons. The machine-readable encoding is covered in an Internet Draft submitted to the Internet Engineering Task Force: draft-slevinski-signwriting-text.

The SignWriting Script is available to use on Wikimedia Incubator. The American Sign Language Wikipedia has 50 articles. Other sign languages are primed to start. The technical infrastructure is maturing nicely and widespread adoption continues to increase.

It is the dream of sign language writers to share in all of the benefits of the spoken language users who so easily share and collaborate in an international world.

This presentation will cover the history, today's reality, and tomorrow's dream for written sign language using the SignWriting Script.