

Read and Write Sign Language with SignWriting



Contents

SignWriting

Signing Space

Viewpoints

Hands

Movement

Finger Movement

Contact

Head

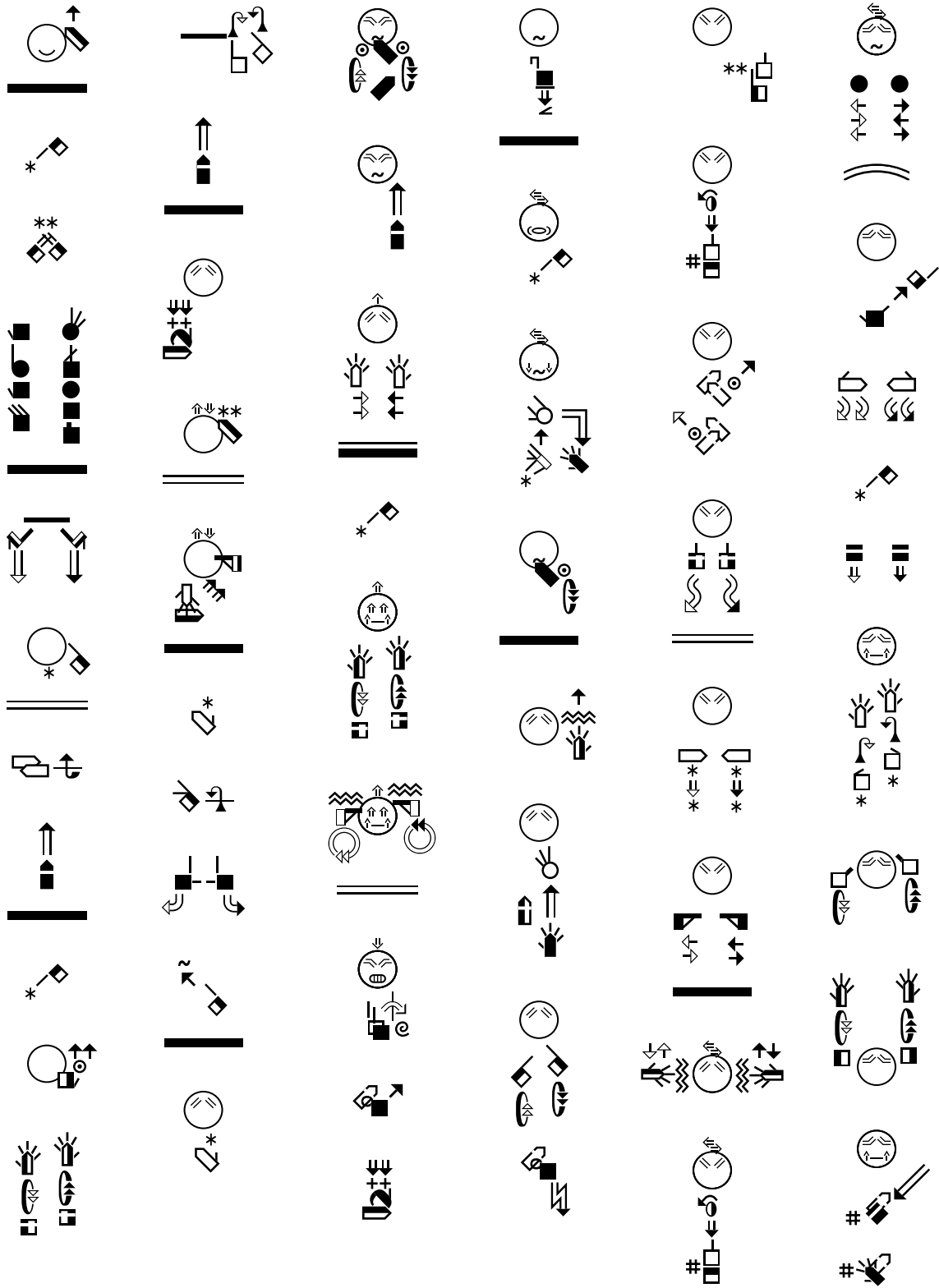
Face

Writing Signs

Writing Sentences

Credits

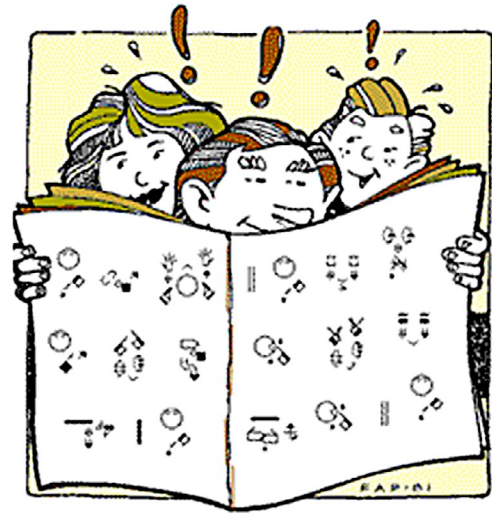
SignWriting



What Is It?



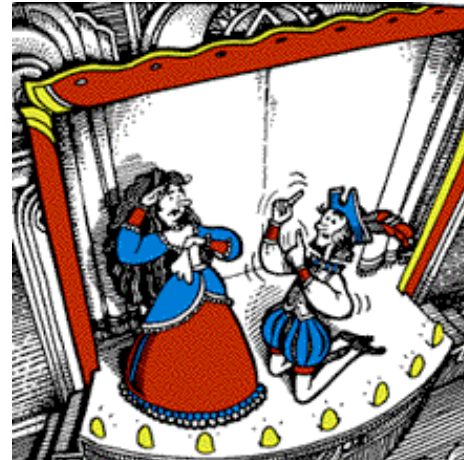
With SignWriting,
you can...



 **READ**
Sign
Language



 **WRITE**
Sign
Language



 **PRESERVE**
Sign Poetry
and Theater




LEARN
 Sign
 Language




TRANSCRIBE
 Sign
 Language




SHARE
 Sign
 Language




MEET
 Other People
 Who Write
 Sign Language

SignWriting

SignWriting is a **writing system** for the sign languages of the world (including American Sign Language, Brazilian Sign Language, Danish Sign Language, and many others).

SignWriting includes symbols which represent the handshapes and movements of sign language. It also includes symbols for the head and face, since they are also used in sign language.

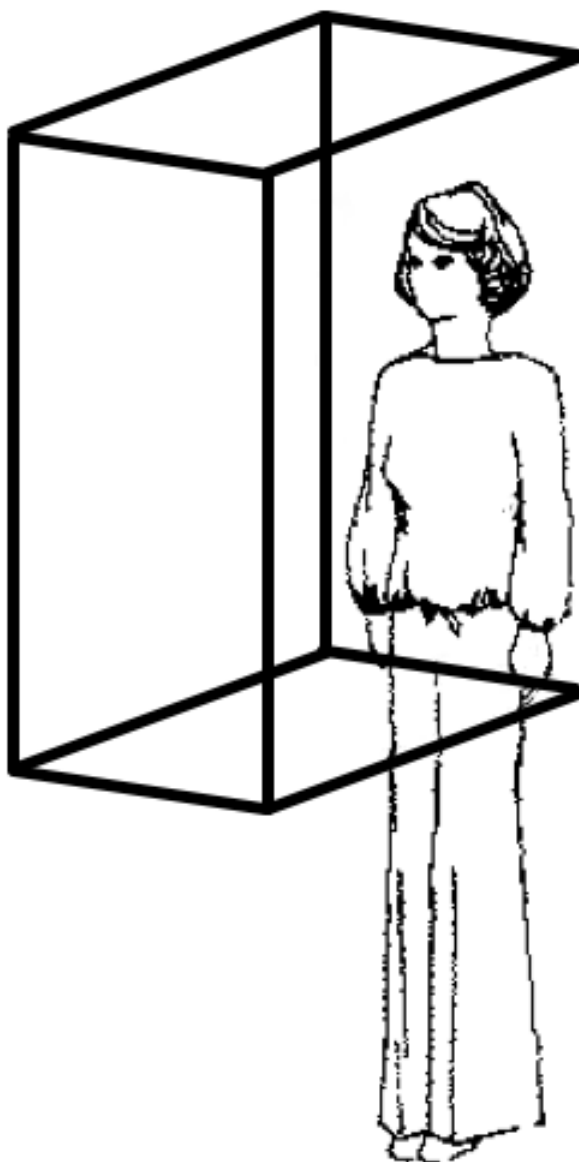
SignWriting is precise enough to be used by researchers, yet simple enough to be learned by children. It is used around the world, and is the first writing system for sign language to be included in the Unicode Standard. Several software applications are available for using SignWriting.

This book presents an introduction to SignWriting, using examples from American Sign Language. For more information on SignWriting – including books that describe all the SignWriting symbols – go to **www.signwriting.org**.

Signing Space

Signing Space is the area around you which you sign in.

The SignWriting symbols are used to show the **position and movement** of your hands in the signing space.

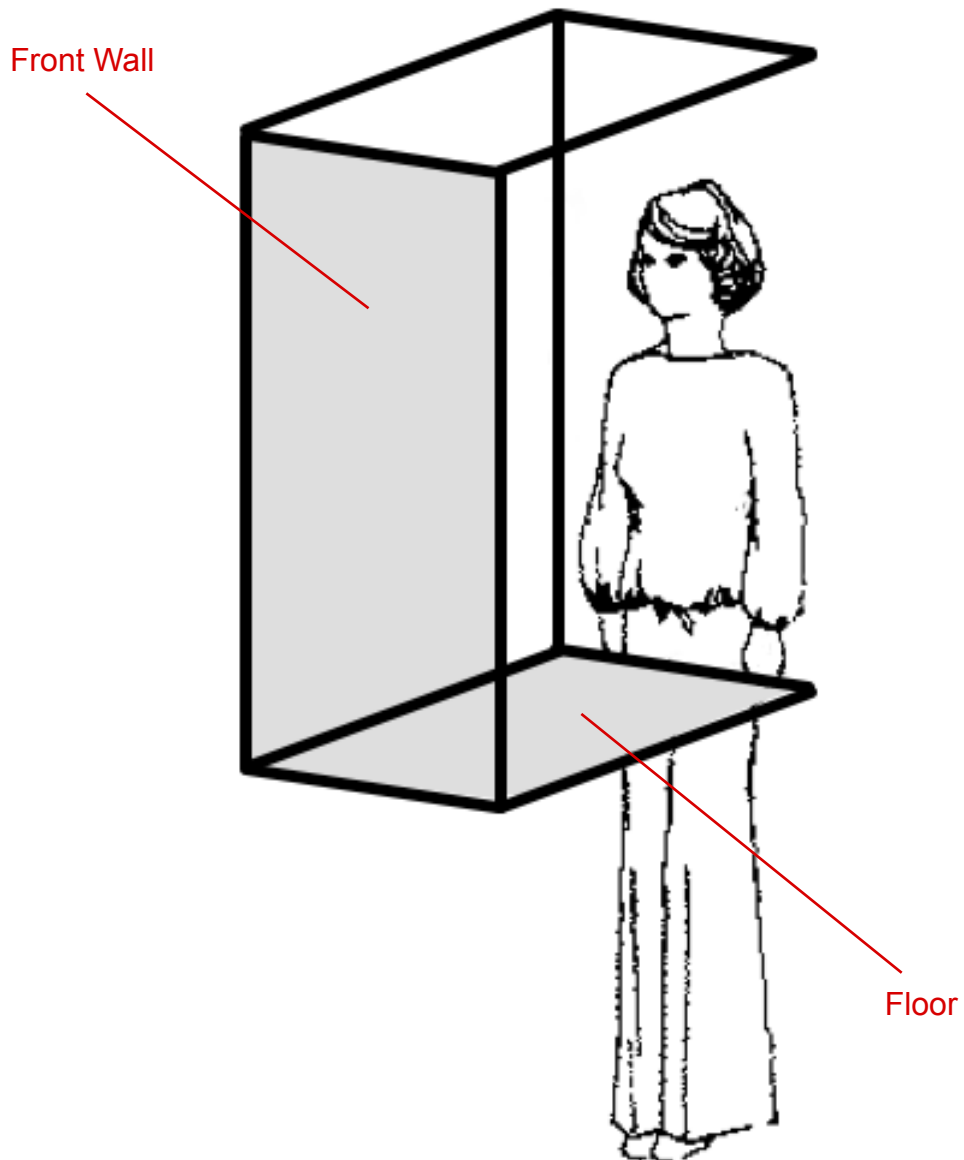


Signing Space

Signing Space

The SignWriting symbols show **two** kinds of positions and movements in the signing space:

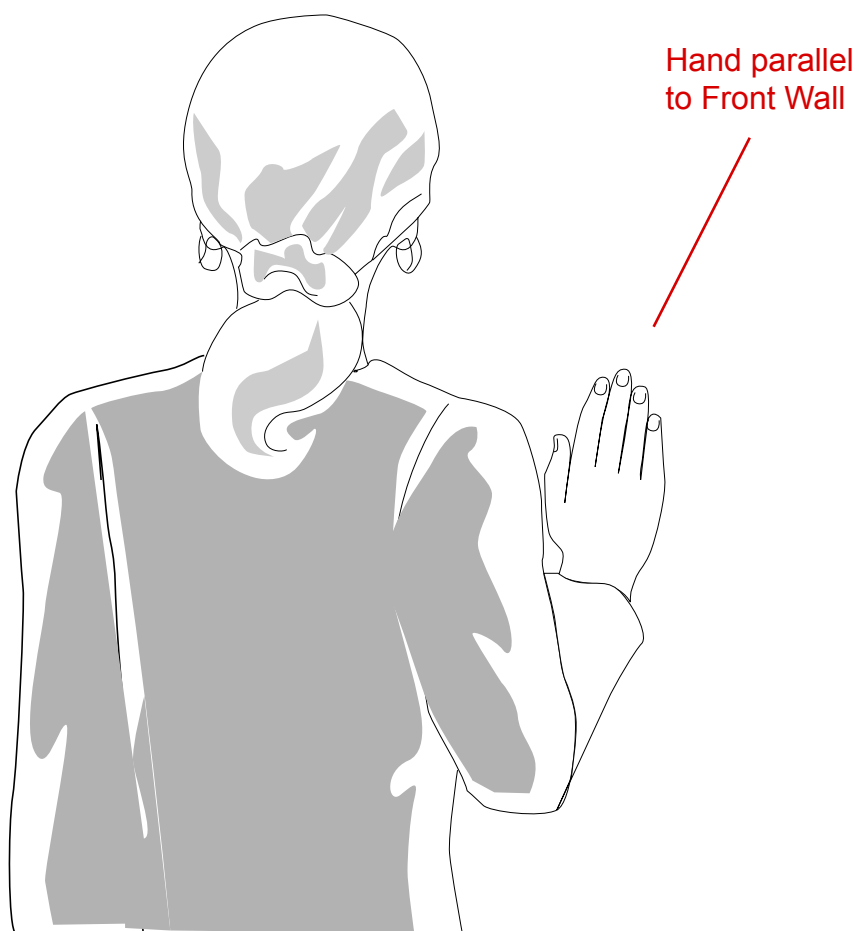
- Positions and movements that are **parallel to the Front Wall**
- Positions and movements that are **parallel to the Floor**



Signing Space

Signing Space

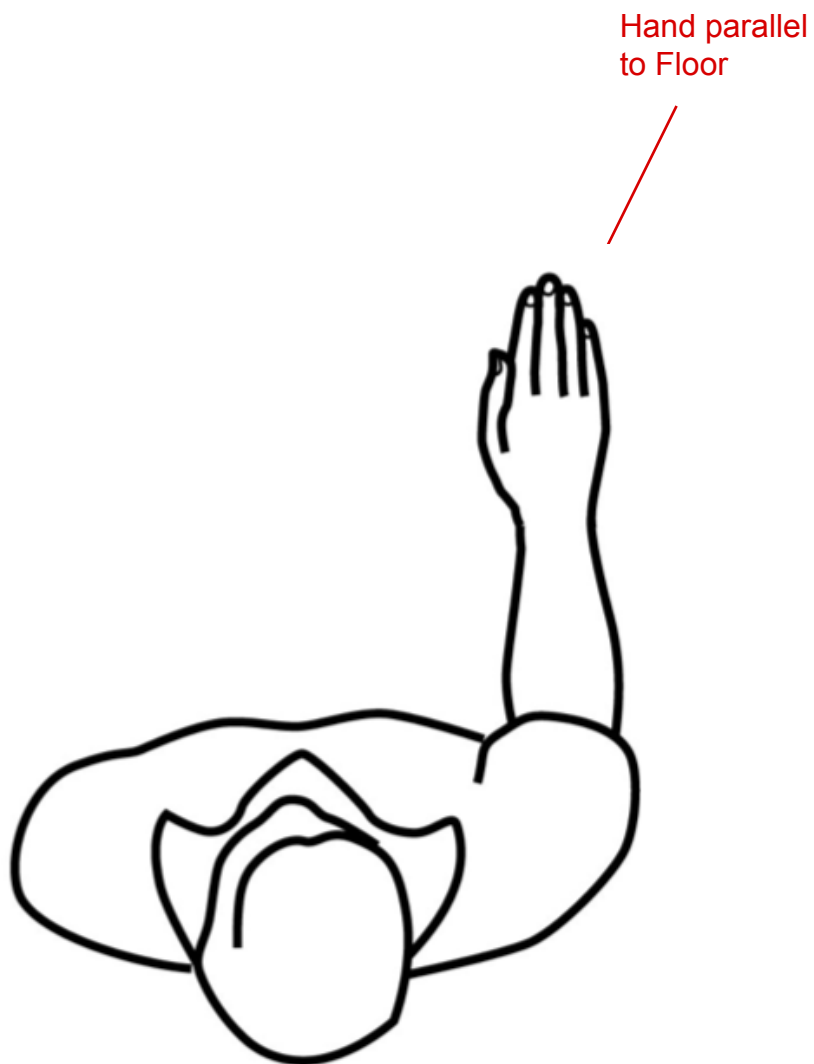
Positions and movements that are **parallel to the Front Wall** of the signing space are always shown in **Front View**, which shows the signing space from your point of view.



Front View

Signing Space

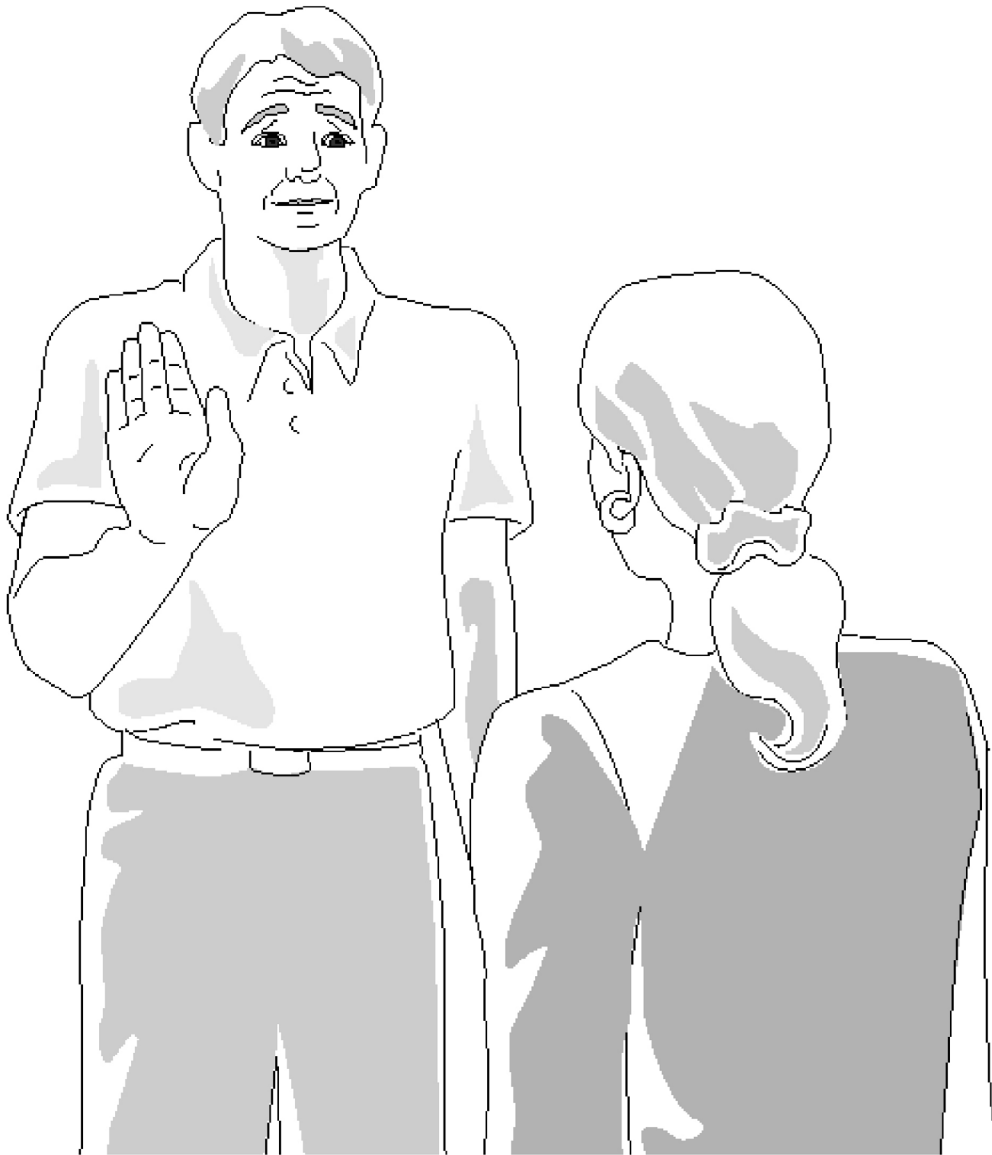
Positions and movements that are **parallel to the Floor** of the signing space are always shown in **Top View**, which shows the signing space as seen from above you.



Top View

Viewpoints

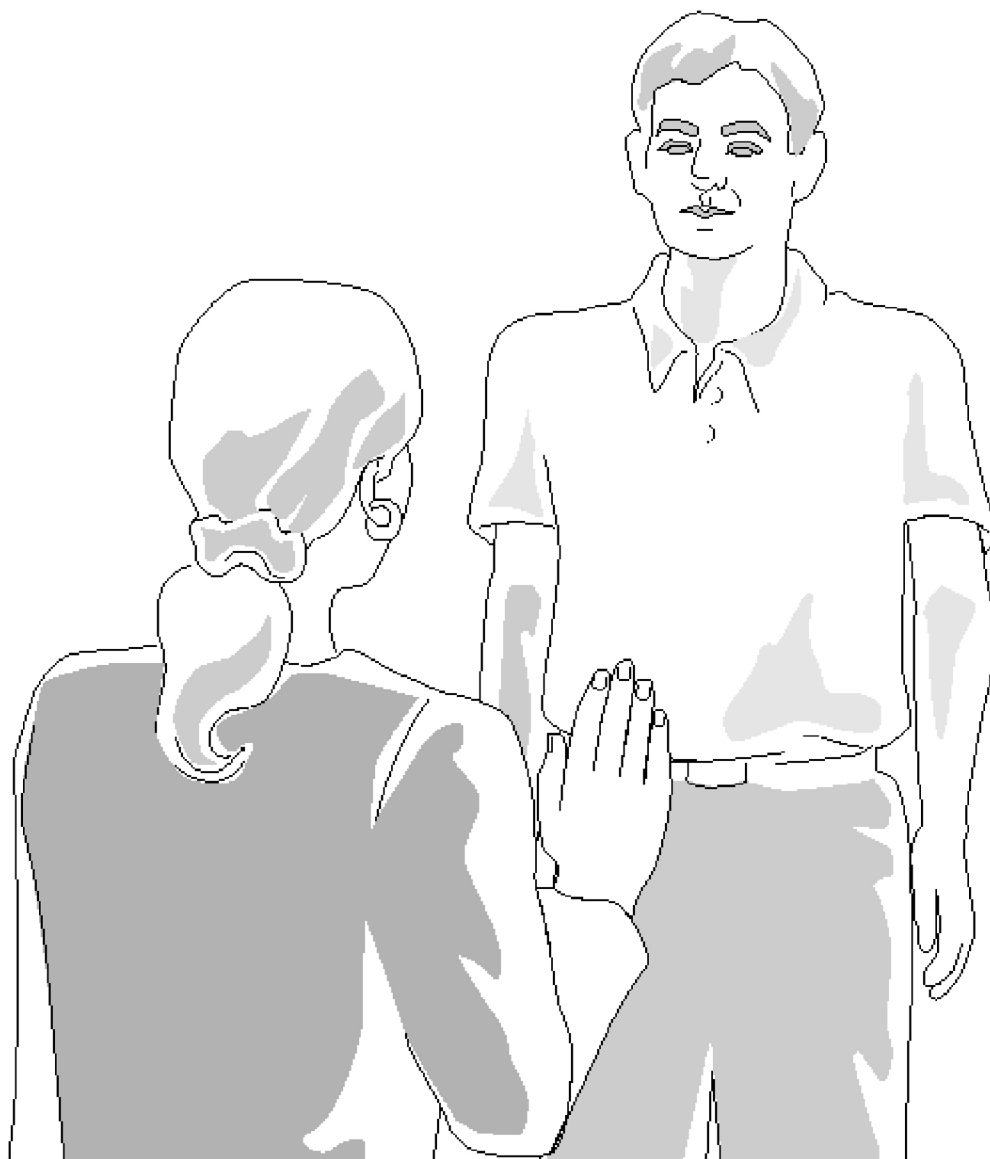
When someone is signing to you, you see the signs as an observer. The signer's right hand is on your left. This is called the **Receptive Viewpoint**.



Receptive Viewpoint

Viewpoints

When you are signing to someone else, you see the signs from your own point of view. This is called the **Expressive Viewpoint**.

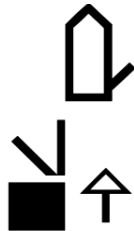


Expressive Viewpoint

Signs are Written in the Expressive Viewpoint







Signs are always written in the **Expressive Viewpoint**, where you see the signs from your own point of view.

When you think in sign language, you see your own hands signing. When you read or write SignWriting, you do the same thing.



Hands

Hand Symbols show the handshapes and position of your hands while you are signing.

	Closed Fist
	Open Fist
	Flat Hand
	Index on Closed Fist
	Index on Open Fist
	Five Fingers Spread

Many more hand symbols exist in SignWriting – this is only an introduction.



know



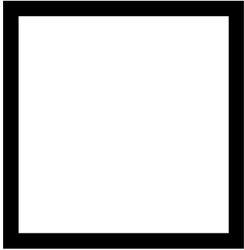
hit



dinner

Basic Handshapes

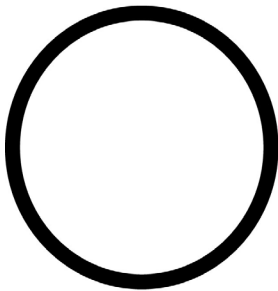
Closed Fist



The hand symbol **Closed Fist** is written with a square.

It represents a fist where the fingertips touch the palm of the hand.

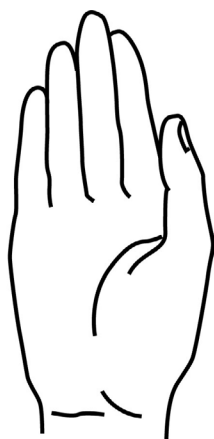
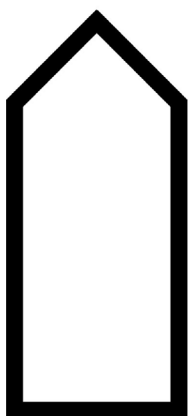
Open Fist



The hand symbol **Open Fist** is written with a circle.

It represents a fist where the fingertips touch the tip of the thumb.

Basic Handshapes



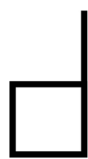
Flat Hand

The hand symbol **Flat Hand** is written as a rectangle with a tip at one end.

It represents an open hand where the fingers extend straight up, while touching each other.

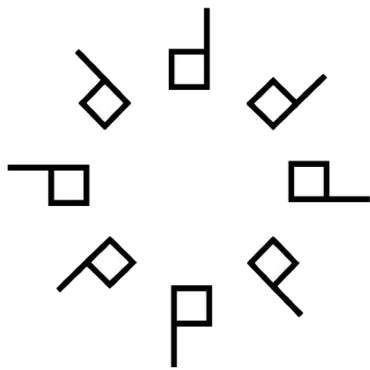
Related Handshapes

Many hand symbols in SignWriting are related to one of the basic hand symbols. They add one or more fingers to the basic hand symbol, creating a new hand symbol.

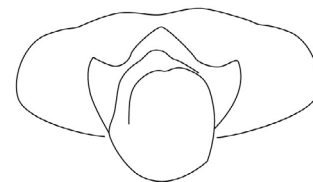
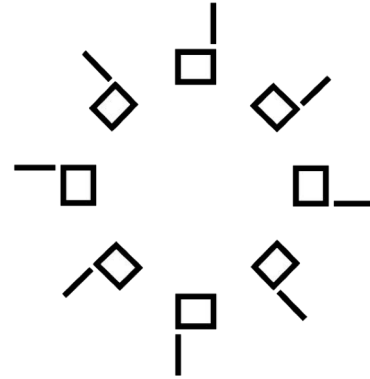


Hand Direction

Hand symbols can point in eight different **directions**, to show which way your hand is pointing in the signing space.



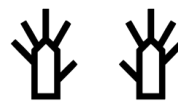
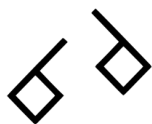
Front View



Top View

Mirror

Hand symbols can be **mirrored** to show the left- and right-hand versions of a handshape.



Palm Facing

Palm Facing changes a hand symbol to show which way the palm of your hand is facing in the signing space.

When your palm faces forward or back, your hand is parallel to the front wall. When your palm faces up or down, your hand is parallel to the floor.



Palm faces back



Palm faces sideways (hand parallel to front wall)



Palm faces forward



Palm faces up



Palm faces sideways (hand parallel to floor)



Palm faces down



Palm Facing

When you see **the palm of your hand** while you are signing, the symbol for the hand is a light, hollowed-out symbol.

The palm of the hand is always written with a light symbol.



Palm Facing

When you see **the side of your hand** while you are signing, the symbol for the hand is partly filled-in, so it is half light and half dark.

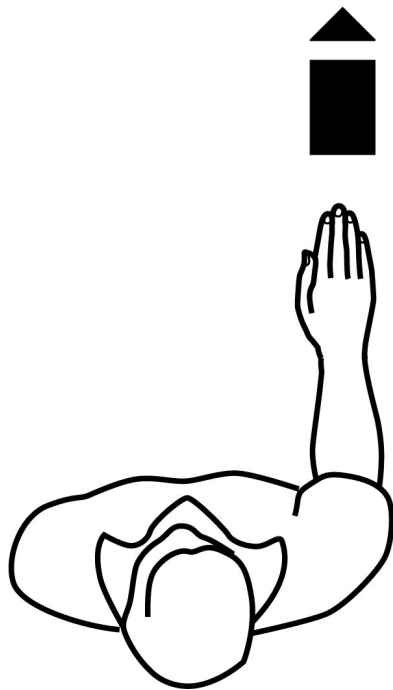
The light part of the symbol shows which way the palm of the hand faces. The dark part indicates the back of the hand.



Palm Facing

When you see **the back of your hand** while you are signing, the symbol for the hand is a dark, filled-in symbol.

The back of the hand is always written with a dark symbol.



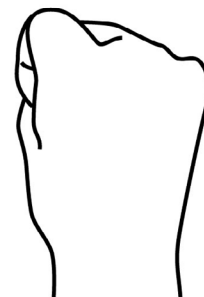
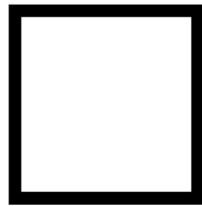
Palm Facing

When your hand is **parallel to the floor**, the symbol for the hand has a **visible gap** in it. Hand symbols without gaps are parallel to the front wall.

Different hand symbols have different ways of showing the gap.

Closed Fist

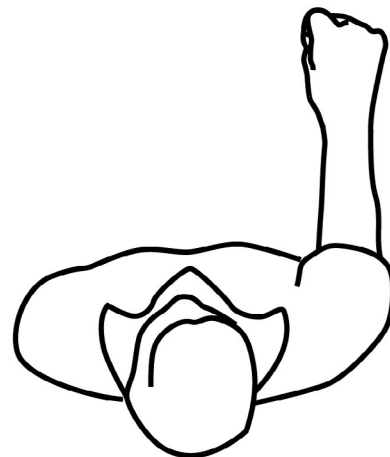
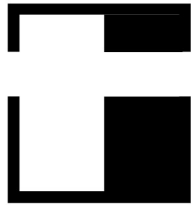
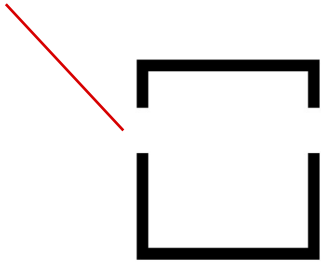
The hand is parallel to the front wall, and is shown in Front View.



Closed Fist

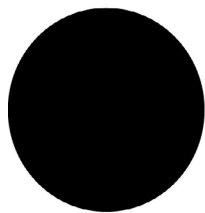
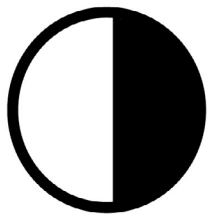
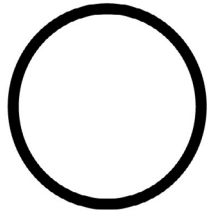
The hand is parallel to the floor, and is shown in Top View.

Gap in symbol means
hand is parallel to floor



Open Fist

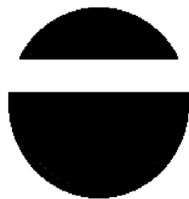
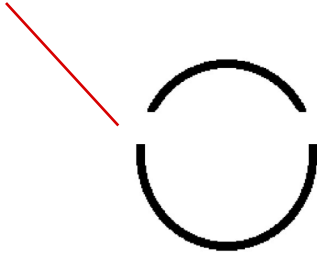
The hand is parallel to the front wall, and is shown in Front View.



Open Fist

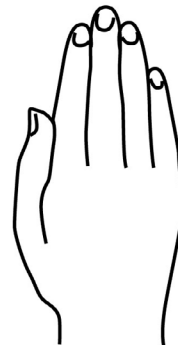
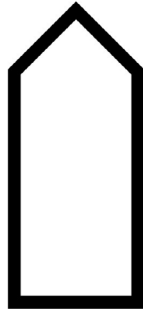
The hand is parallel to the floor, and is shown in Top View.

Gap in symbol means
hand is parallel to floor



Flat Hand

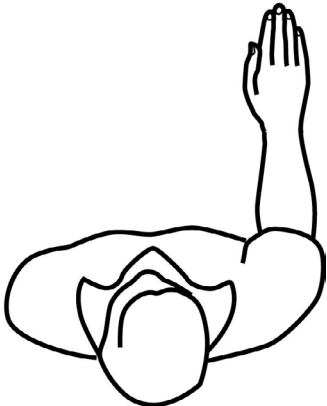
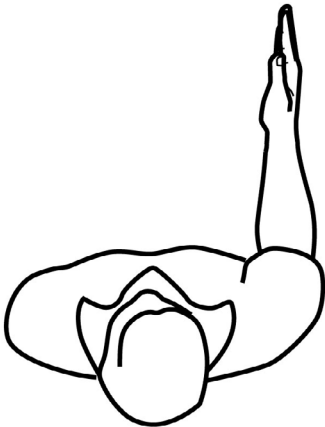
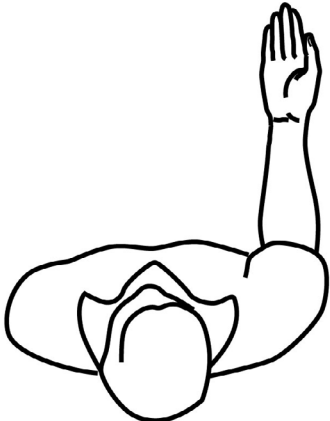
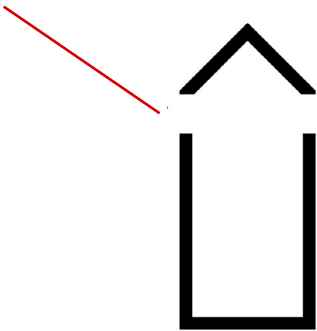
The hand is parallel to the front wall, and is shown in Front View.



Flat Hand

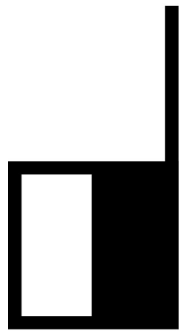
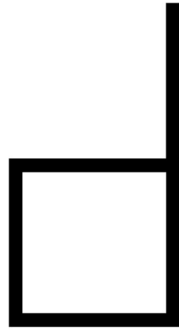
The hand is parallel to the floor, and is shown in Top View.

Gap in symbol means
hand is parallel to floor



Index on Closed Fist

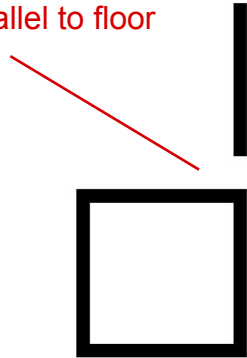
The hand is parallel to the front wall, and is shown in Front View.



Index on Closed Fist

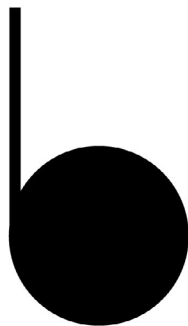
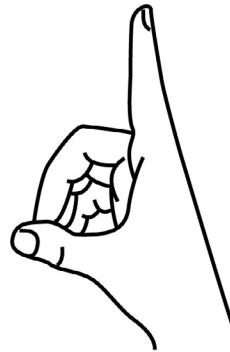
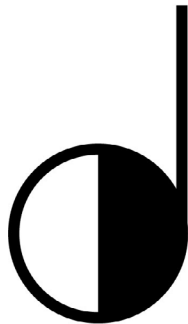
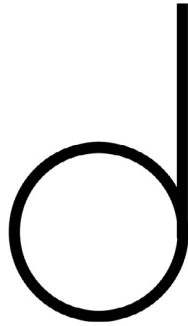
The hand is parallel to the floor, and is shown in Top View.

Gap in symbol means
hand is parallel to floor



Index on Open Fist

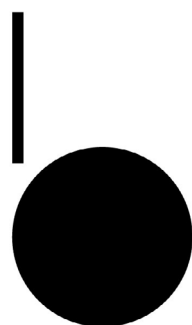
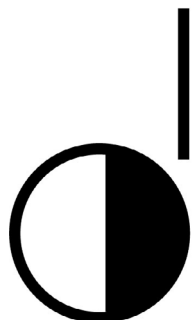
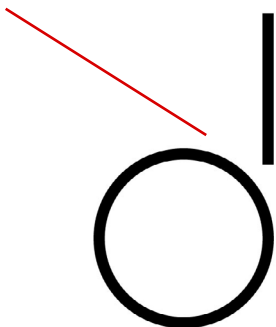
The hand is parallel to the front wall, and is shown in Front View.



Index on Open Fist

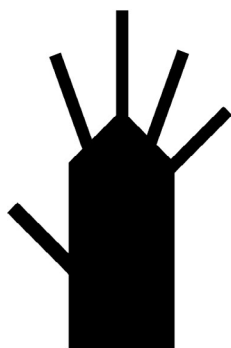
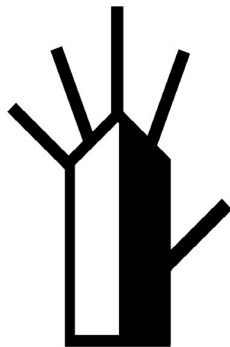
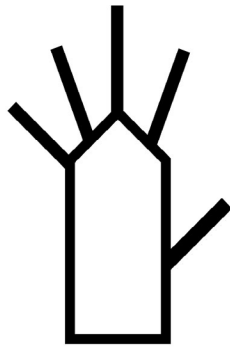
The hand is parallel to the floor, and is shown in Top View.

Gap in symbol means
hand is parallel to floor



Five Fingers Spread

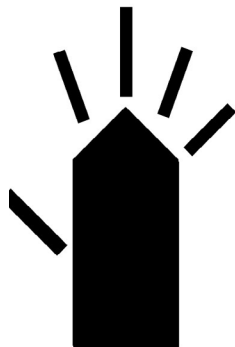
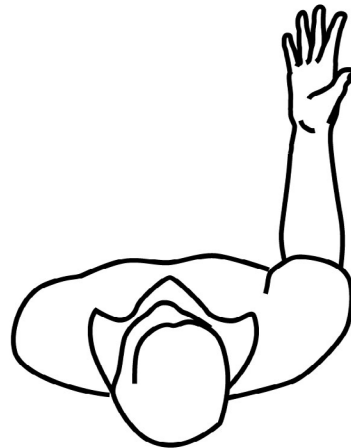
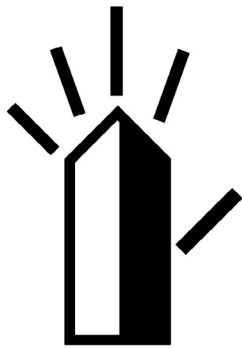
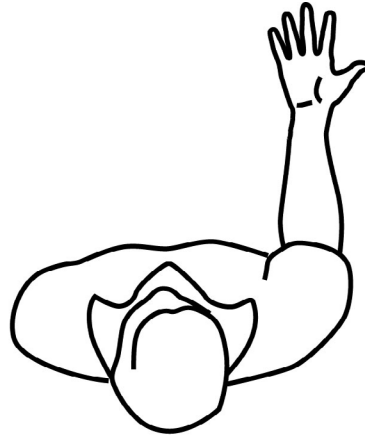
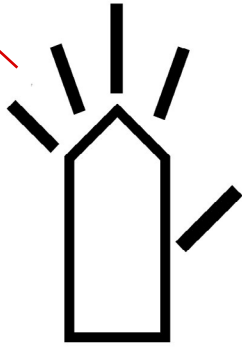
The hand is parallel to the front wall, and is shown in Front View.



Five Fingers Spread

The hand is parallel to the floor, and is shown in Top View.

Gaps in symbol mean
hand is parallel to floor



Movement

Movement Symbols show the movements you make in the signing space.



Straight Movement Parallel to Wall



Straight Movement Parallel to Floor

Many more movement symbols exist in SignWriting – this is only an introduction.

Movement



Straight Movement Parallel to Wall



one half



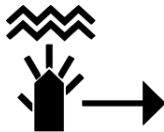
disappear

The movement symbol **Straight Movement Parallel to Wall** is written with a double-stemmed arrow.

It represents straight movement which is parallel to the front wall of the signing space.



Straight Movement Parallel to Floor



fingerspell



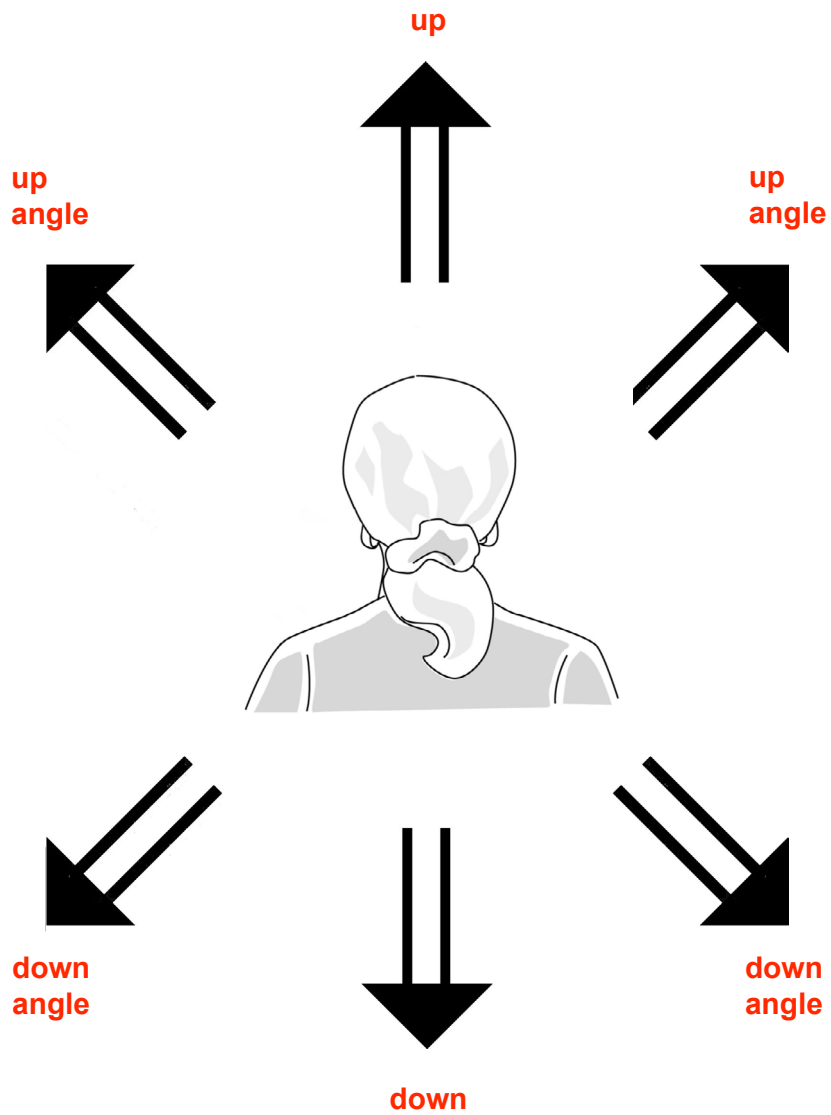
hit

The movement symbol **Straight Movement Parallel to Floor** is written with a single-stemmed arrow.

It represents straight movement which is parallel to the floor of the signing space.

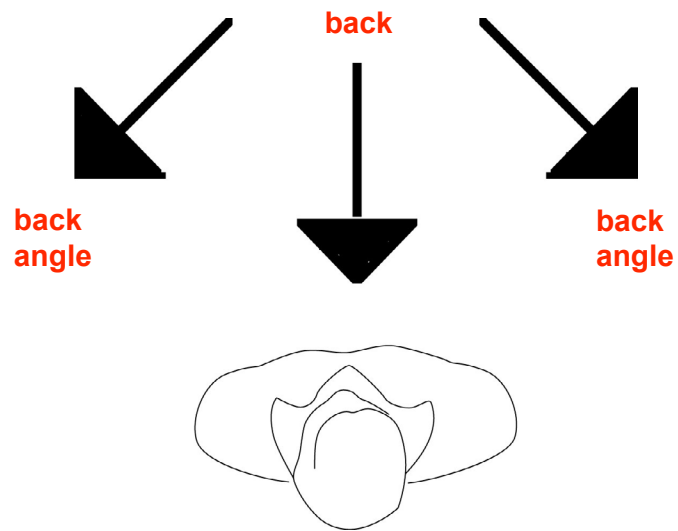
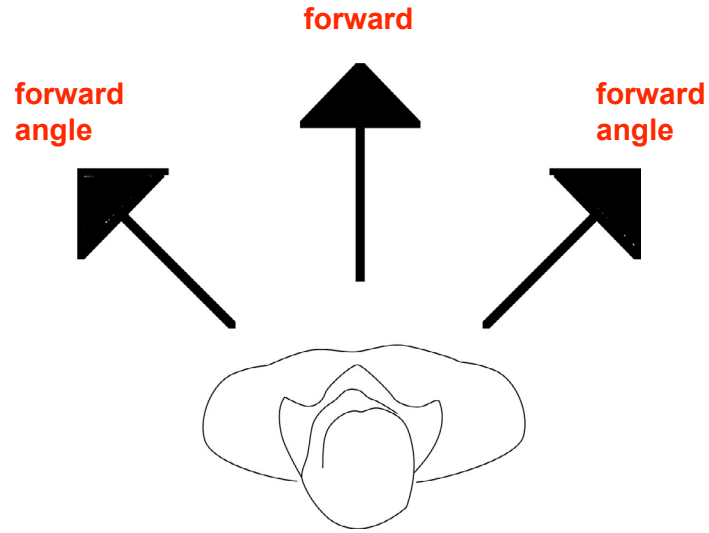
Movement Direction

Movement symbols can point in eight different **directions**, to show the path of the movement through the signing space.



Front View

Movement Direction

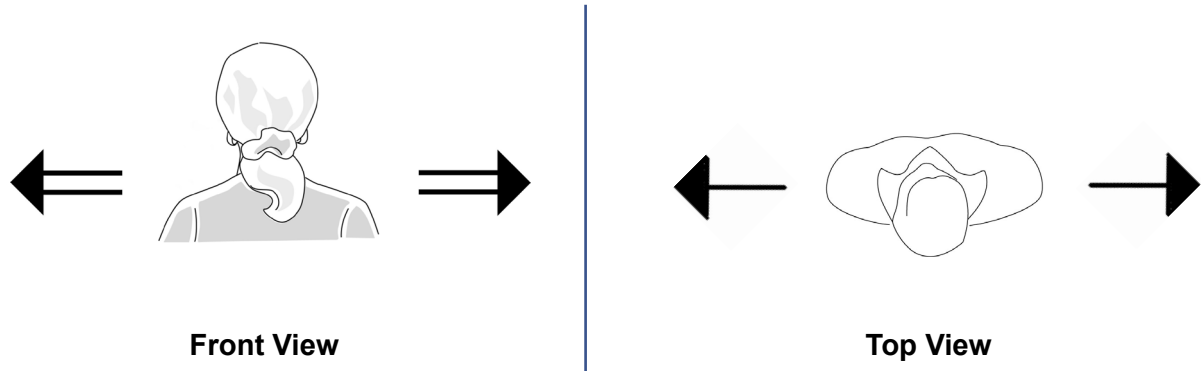


Top View

Movement Direction

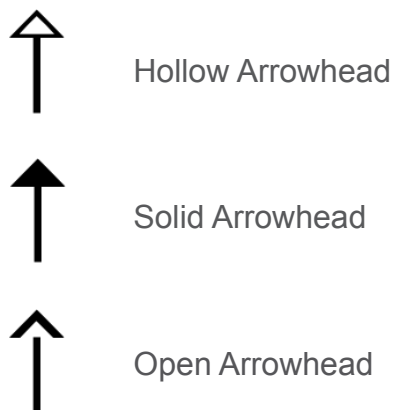
Movement symbols can point **straight to the side**.

Movement to the side is the same from both the Front View and Top View of the signing space. It can be written with **double-stemmed** or **single-stemmed** movement symbols.



Movement Arrowhead

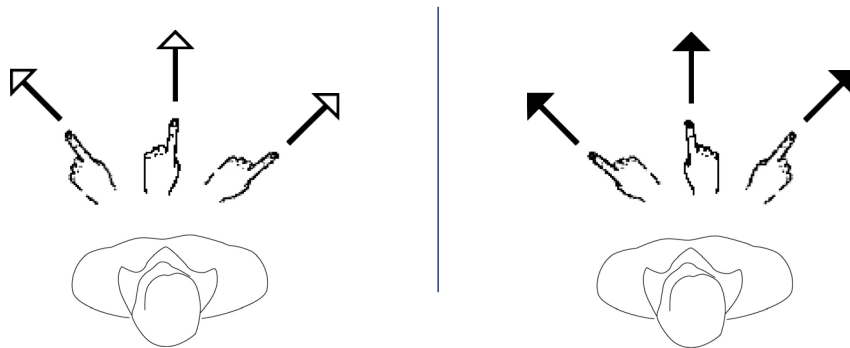
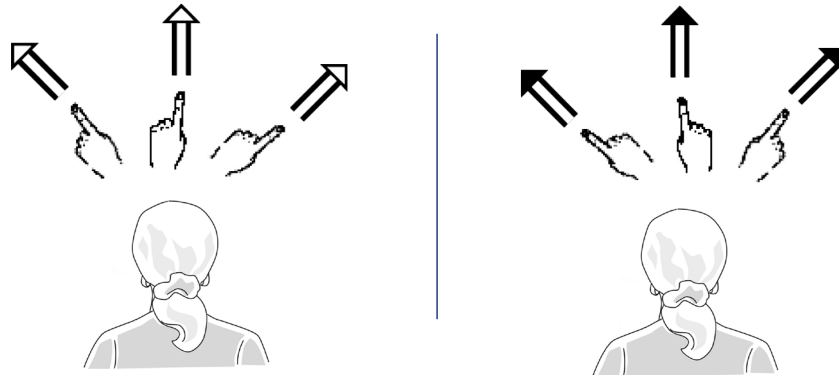
The **arrowhead** on a movement symbol identifies what is moving.



Movement Arrowhead

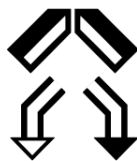
When a movement symbol shows your **left hand** moving, it has a hollow arrowhead.

When the symbol shows your **right hand** moving, it has a solid arrowhead.



Left Hand

Right Hand



house



way

Movement Arrowhead

For hand movements, a movement symbol defines a **path** through the signing space which the hand follows as it moves.

A hand movement symbol with an **open** arrowhead shows **both** your hands sharing the same movement path.

Hands sharing the same movement path either stay in contact as they move, or remain close to each other.



I help you



follow



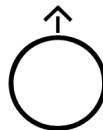
plan

For face and head movements, an **open** arrowhead shows movement of the specified part of the face or head.

Because it is used to show several types of movement, the open arrowhead is called a **General Arrowhead**.



Eygaze
Forward Angle



Head Movement
Forward

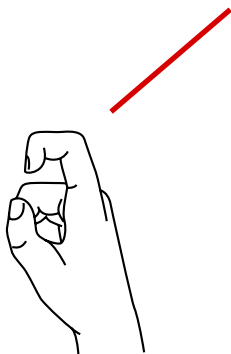
Finger Movement

Finger Symbols are movement symbols which show the movement of your fingers in the signing space.

- Finger Bends in Middle
 - Finger Straightens in Middle
 - ∨ Finger Bends at Knuckle
 - ∧ Finger Straightens at Knuckle
 - ∩ Fingers Bend and Straighten Together at Knuckles
 - ⋈ Fingers Alternately Bend and Straighten at Knuckles
-



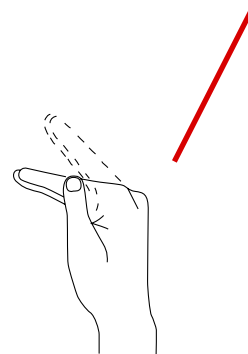
Finger Bends and Straightens in Middle



Finger bend and straighten movements in the **middle** of a finger are called **Squeeze** and **Flick** movements.



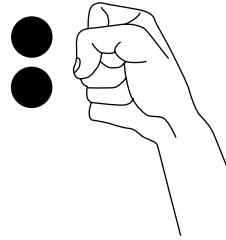
Finger Bends and Straightens at Knuckle



Finger bend and straighten movements at the **knuckle** are called **Hinge** and **Trill** movements.



Finger Bends in Middle



This symbol is written with a **dark dot**. It shows a finger bending in the middle, like a claw. It is also called a **Squeeze** movement.



huh?

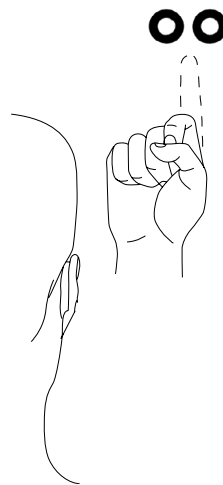
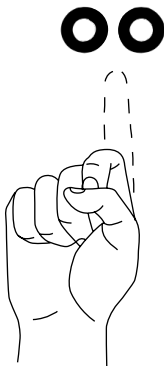


milk

This symbol is placed near the finger that bends. Two of these symbols represent two bends of the finger.



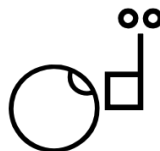
Finger Straightens in Middle



This symbol is written with a **light dot**. It shows a finger bent in the middle straightening out. It is also called a **Flick** movement.

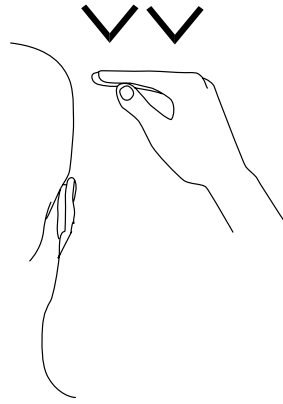
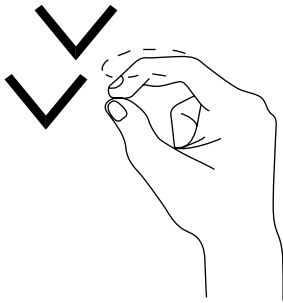


eleven



understand

This symbol is placed near the finger that straightens. Two of these symbols represent two straightenings of the finger.



twenty



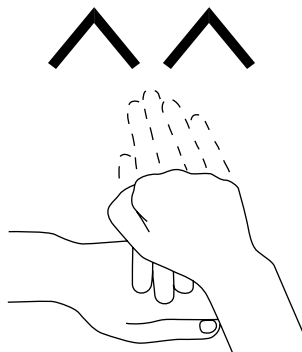
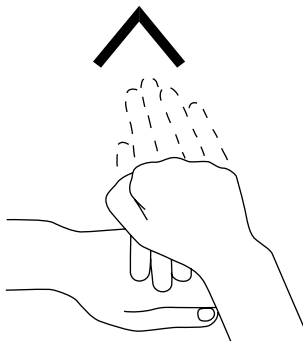
boy



Finger Bends at Knuckle

This symbol is written with a **down arrow**. It shows a finger bending at the knuckle, like the hinge on a door. It is also called a **Hinge** movement.

This symbol is placed near the finger that bends. Two of these symbols represent two bends of the finger.



send



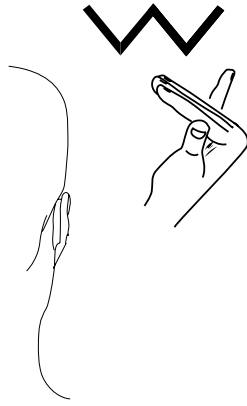
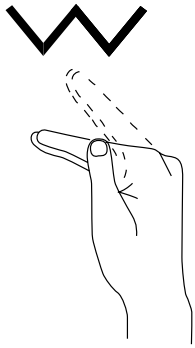
send-send



Finger Straightens at Knuckle

This symbol is written with an **up arrow**. It shows a finger bent at the knuckle straightening out, like the hinge on a door. It is also called a **Hinge** movement.

This symbol is placed near the finger that straightens. Two of these symbols represent two straightenings of the finger.



Fingers Bend and Straighten Together at Knuckles

This symbol is written with a row of connected **down arrows**. It shows that all four fingers bend and straighten together as a unit, at the knuckles, like the hinge on a door. It is also called a **Hinge** movement.

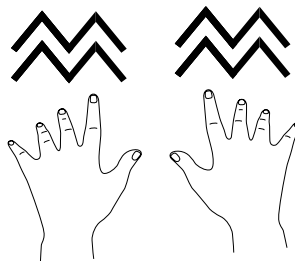
This symbol is placed near the fingers that bend and straighten together.



goodbye



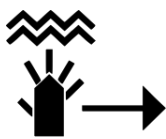
why



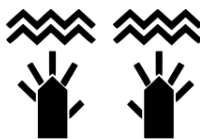
Fingers Alternately Bend and Straighten at Knuckles

This symbol is written with a double row of connected **up arrows**. It shows that all four fingers bend and straighten independently, at the knuckles, like typing on a keyboard. It is also called a **Trill** movement.

This symbol is placed near the fingers that alternately bend and straighten.



fingerspell



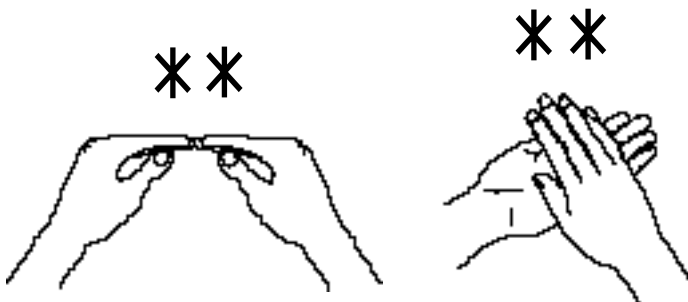
typing

Contact

Contact Symbols show different kinds of contact between your hands, or between your hand and another part of your body.

*	Touch
+	Grasp
*	Between
#	Strike
⊙	Brush
Ⓢ	Rub

Repeated contact is written by placing multiple contact symbols next to each other in a sign.



more



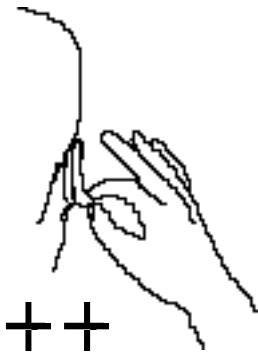
school



Touch

The contact symbol **Touch** is written with an asterisk.

It shows the hand gently contacting another part of the body.

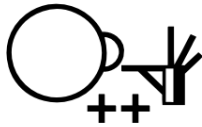


+

Grasp

The contact symbol **Grasp** is written with a plus symbol.

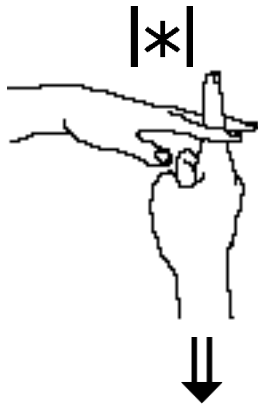
It shows the hand grasping or pinching a part of the body or a prop, such as clothing.



earring



congratulations



|*|

Between

The contact symbol **Between** is written with an asterisk between two lines.

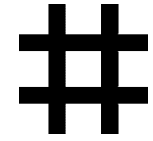
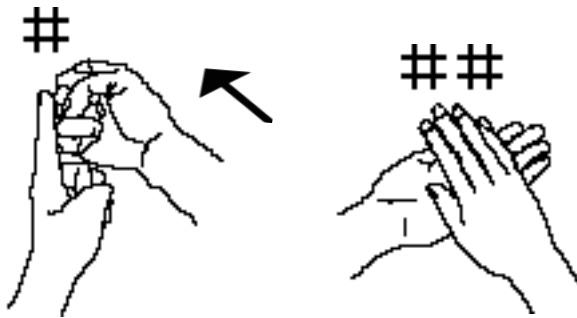
It shows contact between two fingers or other parts of the body.



disappear



America



Strike

The contact symbol **Strike** is written with a hashtag.

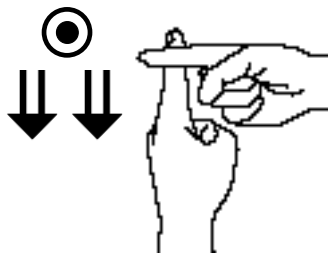
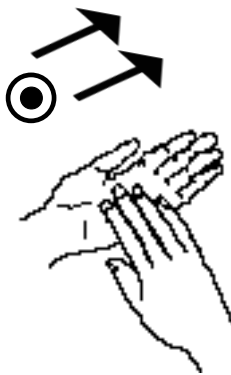
It shows the hand contacting a surface **with force**.



hit



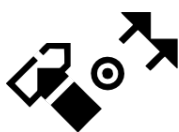
clap



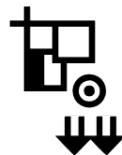
Brush

The contact symbol **Brush** is written with a circle containing a dot.

It shows movement that first contacts and then **moves off** the surface.



excuse me



monthly



Circular Rub

The contact symbol **Circular Rub** is written with a spiral symbol.

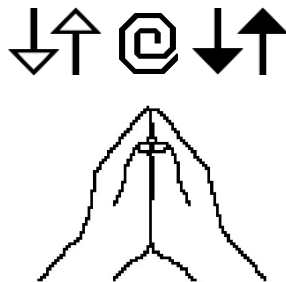
It shows contact that **moves in a circle** while **remaining** on the surface.



coffee



chocolate



Straight Rub

The contact symbol **Circular Rub** can show rubbing in a **straight line** (rather than a circle).

Straight rub contact is written by placing movement symbols next to the rub symbol.

The contact moves in the direction of the movement symbols.



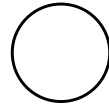
neat



eager

Head

Head Symbols show the movement of your head, and contact between your hand and head, in the signing space.



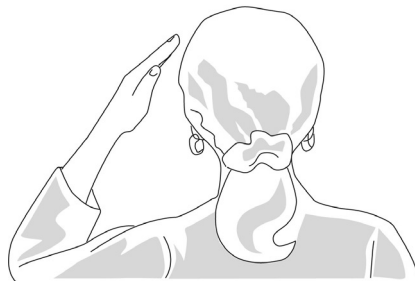
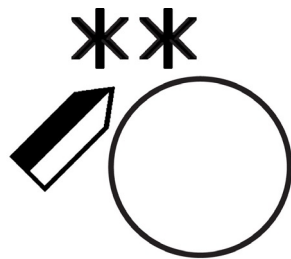
Neutral Head

Many more head symbols exist in SignWriting – this is only an introduction.

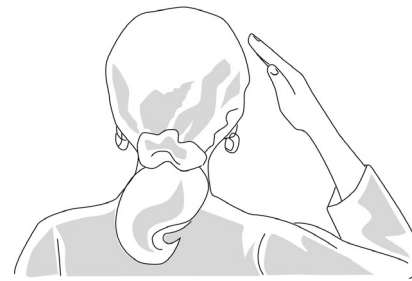
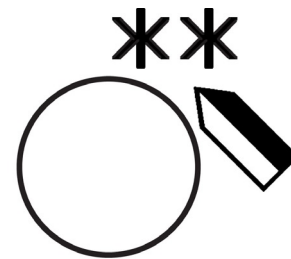
Neutral Head

The head symbol **Neutral Head** is written with a circle. It represents your head, as seen from behind you.

Because signs are written in the **Expressive Viewpoint**, any contact with one side of your head is represented by symbols placed on the same side of the head symbol.



know
(left-handed signer)



know
(right-handed signer)

Face

Face Symbols show your facial expressions, which are used in sign language.



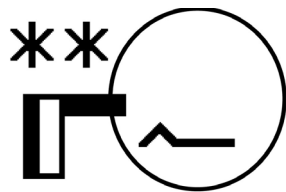
Lip Corner Up Lip

Many more face symbols exist in SignWriting – this is only an introduction.

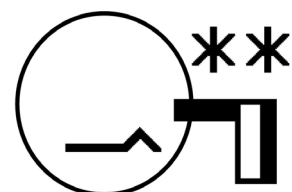
Lip Corner Up Lip

The face symbol **Lip Corner Up Lip** is written with a circle containing a **facial expression**. It shows your lip raised up on one side of your face, as seen from behind you.

In this version of the sign for **know**, your hand contacts your face next to your raised lip.



know
(left-handed signer)

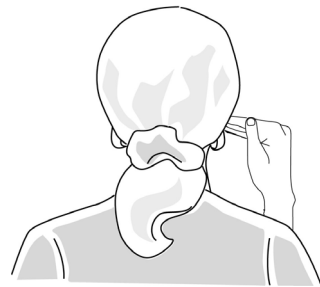
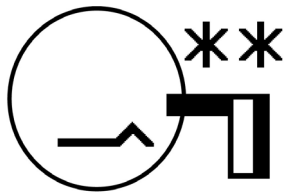


know
(right-handed signer)

Face

In face symbols your head is transparent, so you can see your facial expressions (and any hands contacting them) through the back of your head.

Because signs are written in the **Expressive Viewpoint**, any contact with one side of your face is represented by symbols placed on the same side of the face symbol. You write how your face **feels** to you, not how it looks to someone else.



know
(right-handed signer)

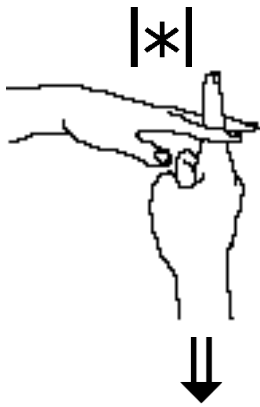


Your face
(seen from behind)
feels like this

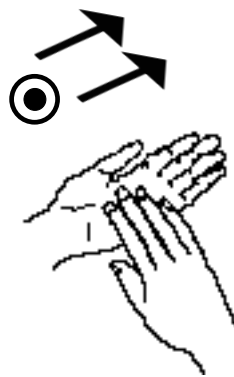
Writing Signs

Hand symbols in a sign are written in the same arrangement as the hands have in the signing space.

The hand symbols may **touch** or even **overlap** to represent contact between the hands.



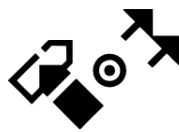
disappear



excuse me



I help you



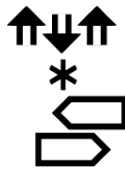
Writing Signs

Movement symbols are usually written next to a hand symbol, to make it clear which movements belong to which hands.

But in some signs the hand symbol placement (**left** or **right**) determines which movements belong to which hands.



disappear

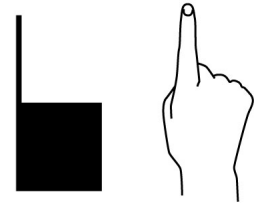
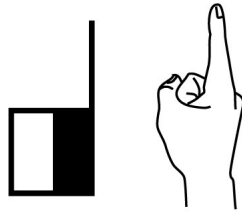
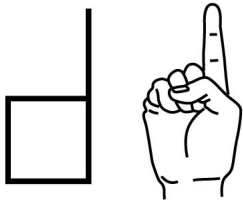


window



hit

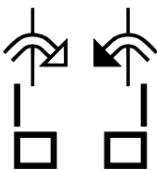
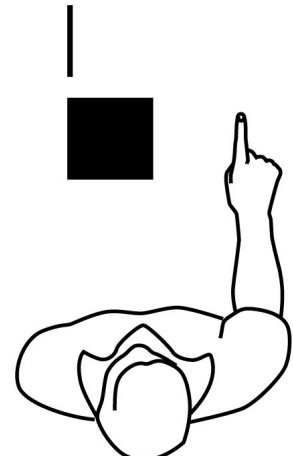
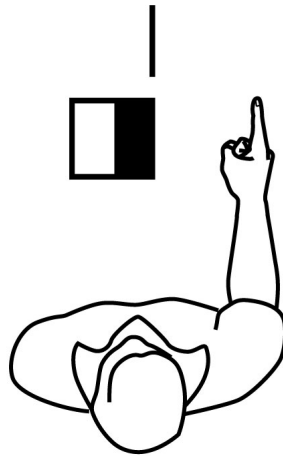
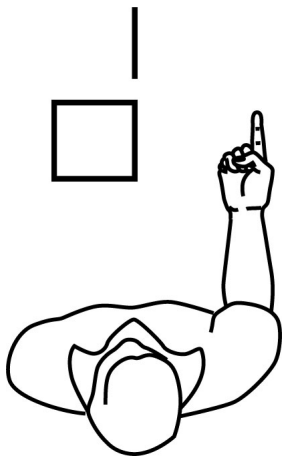
Writing Signs



one half

Deaf

where

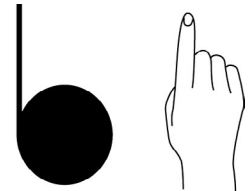
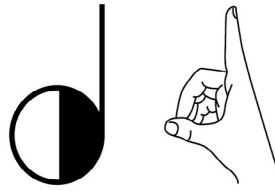
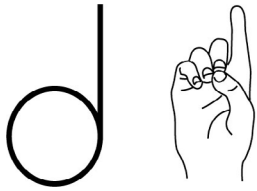


happen

you

also

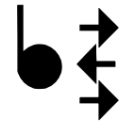
Writing Signs



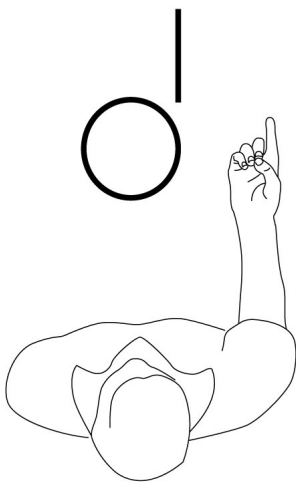
dinner



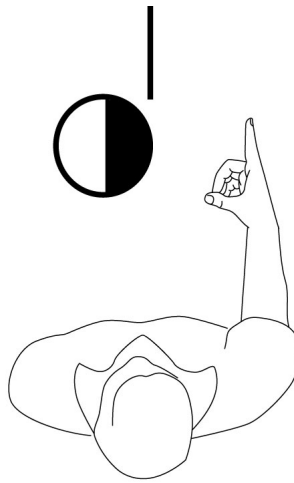
dating



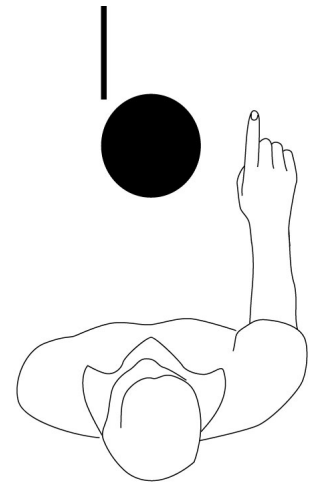
democracy



do-do?



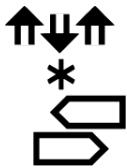
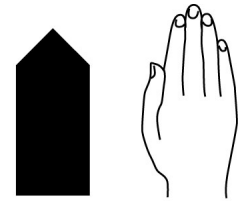
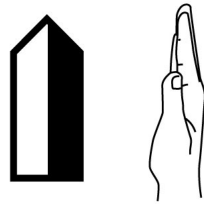
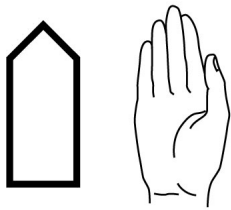
dessert



doctor



Writing Signs



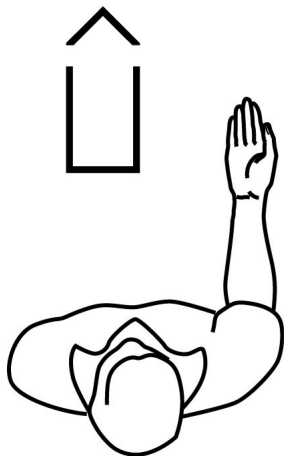
window



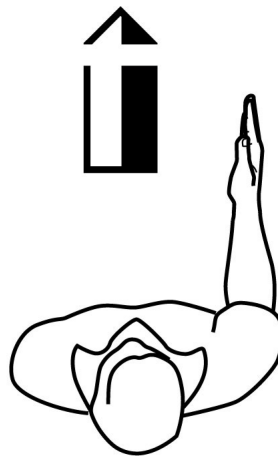
house



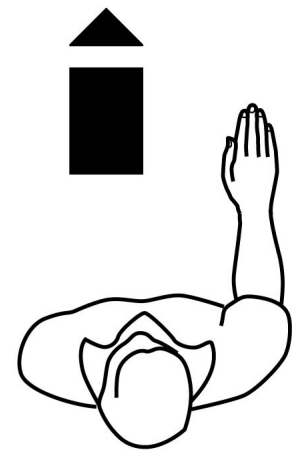
his, hers



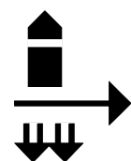
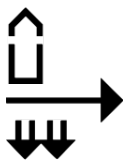
things



way, street



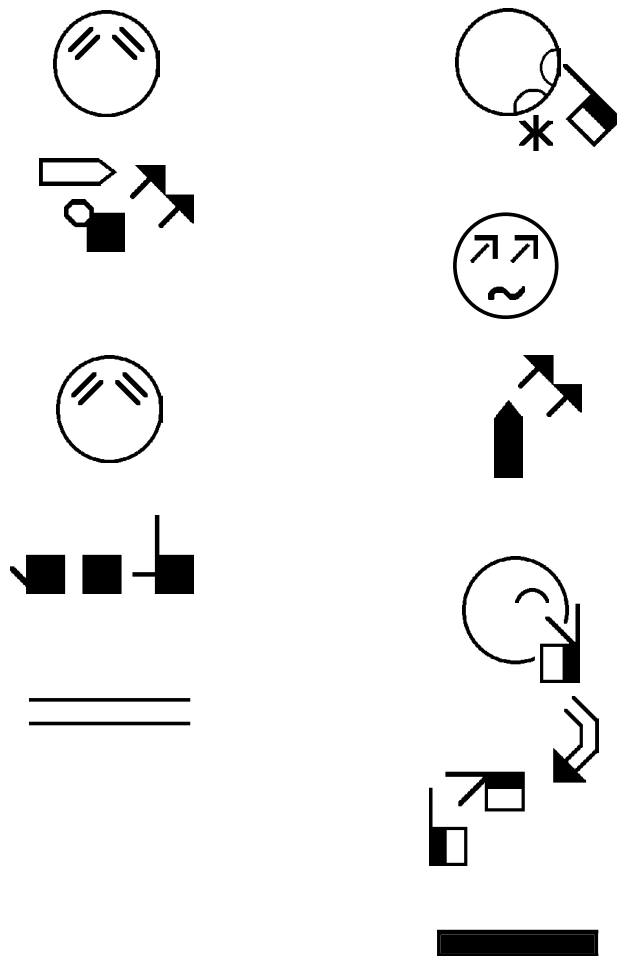
children



Writing Sentences

Sentences in SignWriting are written **down the page**, from top to bottom.

Successive lines of writing are written from left to right, across the page.

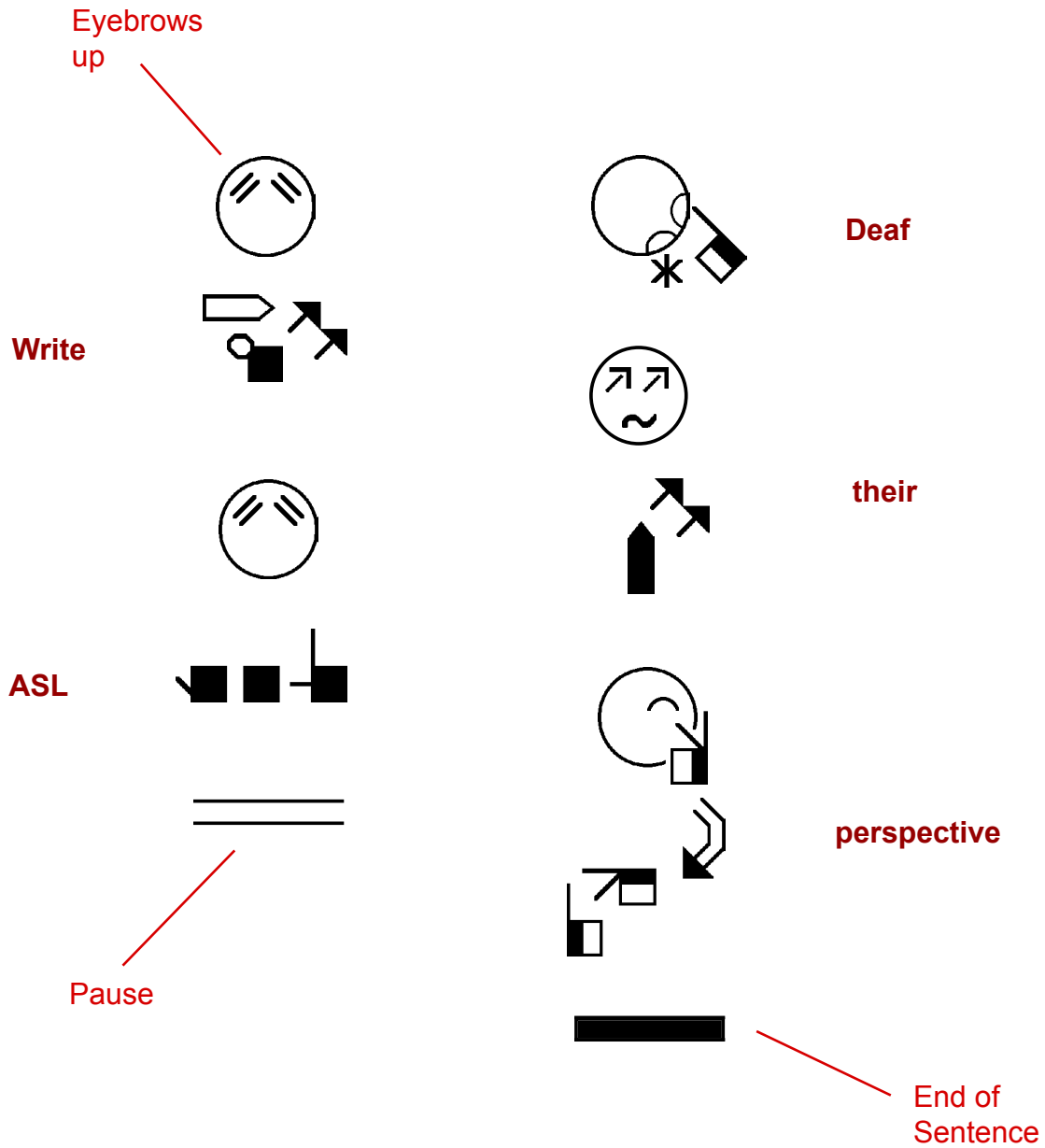


Writing ASL from the Deaf perspective.

Writing Sentences

Sentences in SignWriting are written **down the page**, from top to bottom.

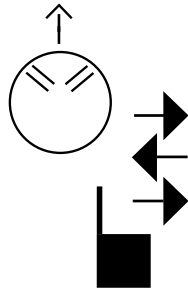
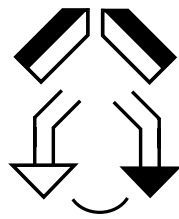
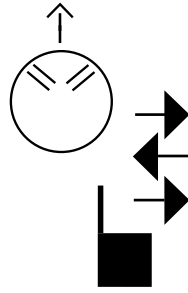
Successive lines of writing are written from left to right, across the page.



Writing ASL from the Deaf perspective.

Writing Sentences

Questions in SignWriting are marked by the sign language grammar and a special punctuation symbol.

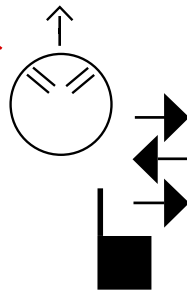


Where is the house?

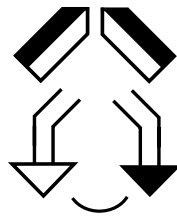
Writing Sentences

Questions in SignWriting are marked by the sign language grammar and a special punctuation symbol.

Eyebrows down

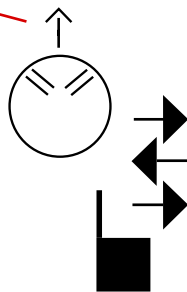


Where



house

Head forward



where



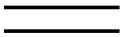


?

Question
Pause

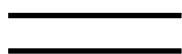
Where is the house?

Writing Sentences

Punctuation symbols in SignWriting perform the usual functions, but are designed to be easily visible in written signs.

	Pause
	End of Sentence
	Question Pause

More punctuation symbols exist in SignWriting – this is only an introduction.



Pause

The **Pause** symbol is written with two thin lines. It is similar to a **comma** in English.



End of Sentence

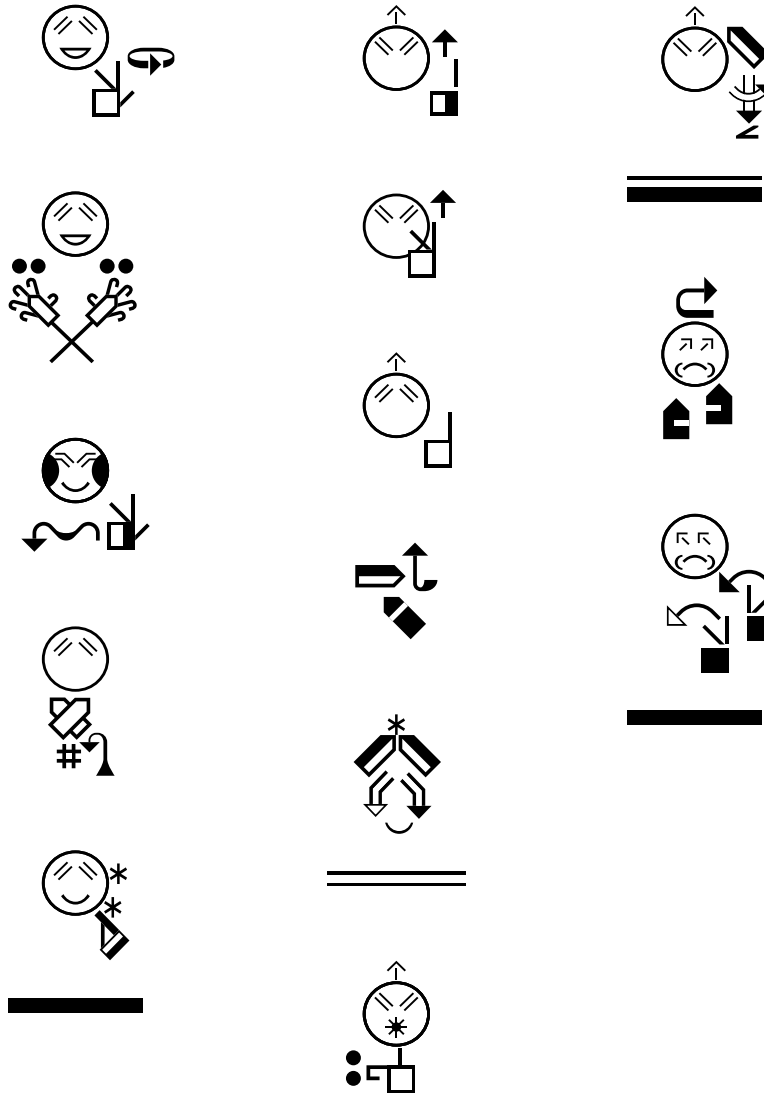
The **End of Sentence** symbol is written with a single thick line. It is similar to a **period** in English.



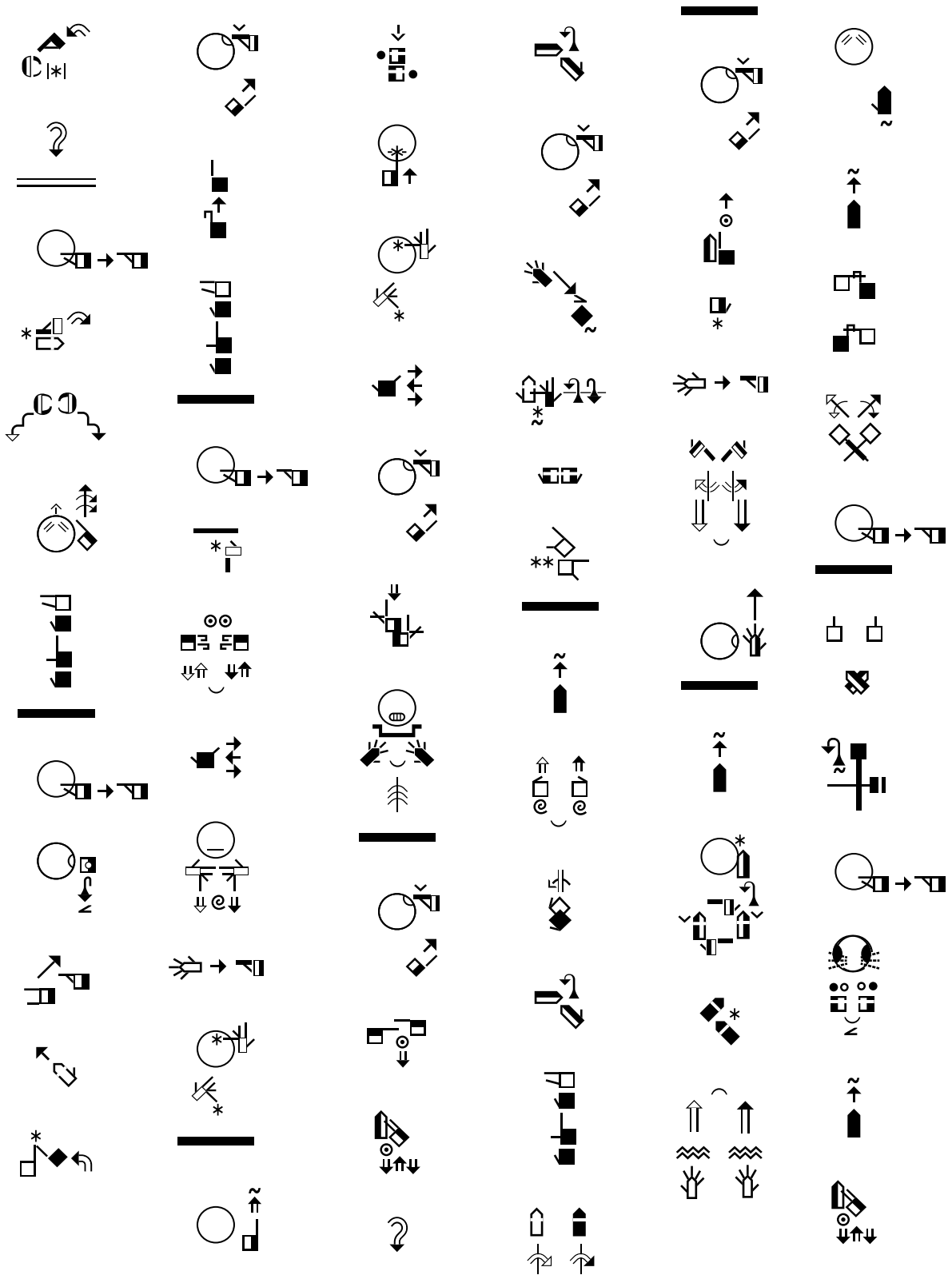
Question Pause

The **Question Pause** symbol is written with a thin and thick line. It is similar to a **question mark** in English.

Writing Sentences



The three bears arrive home. They see someone has entered the house. Who? They don't know. The door is already open a crack. They push the door open and look around.



www.signwriting.org

Read and Write Sign Language with SignWriting

ISBN: 978-0-940361-03-4
Second Edition

This book is based on the
SignWriting Basics Instruction Manual
by Valerie Sutton

SignWriting texts by
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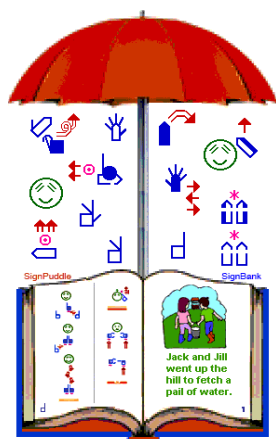
Cartoons by Frank Allen Paul
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The signs in this book were written with SignPuddle
SignPuddle software by Stephen E. Slevinski, Jr

Edited by Richard Gleaves

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