

# SignWriting in Germany & Ethiopia

Report & Photos by Stefan Woehrmann, September 27, 2009



Above: Stefan Woehrmann explains SignWriting on German TV on the Sehen Statt Hoeren program, 2005.

## 2009 Report

by Stefan Woehrmann, September 27, 2009

Eyasu Tamene from Ethiopia and I have been working together on a document showing the hand-shapes of the Ethiopian Manual Alphabet (EMA), for several years now, but our work has always been through the internet. Even though we have exchanged photos, we had never met in person. So when I learned that Eyasu was attending a conference in Cologne, Germany, I invited Eyasu to take a train from Cologne to Osnabruck, so we could meet. I met Eyasu at the train station (see photo below). We liked each other from the first moment!!



# SignWriting in Germany & Ethiopia

Report & Photos by Stefan Woehrmann, September 27, 2009

## 2009 Report continued...

Eyasu Tamene is one of the coordinators of the new Bachelor's program in Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture, in the Department of Linguistics at Addis Ababa University. SignWriting is included in the student's studies there. Some of the students are in touch with the SignWriting List and some write SignWriting by hand already!

There is an Ethiopian Sign Language SignPuddle online, where students and teachers can add their signs and documents written in SignWriting:

### Ethiopian SignPuddle Online

<http://www.signbank.org/signpuddle/index2.html#sgn-ET>



**New BA Program in  
Ethiopian Sign Language  
and Deaf Culture  
Department of Linguistics  
Addis Ababa University  
<http://www.aau.edu.et>**



**Above:** Eyasu Tamene, from Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, writes Ethiopian letters on the blackboard in Germany.

# SignWriting in Germany & Ethiopia

Report & Photos by Stefan Woehrmann, September 27, 2009



## 2009 Report continued...

We went to the school where I teach...the Os-nabrück School for the Deaf. Eyasu took part in some lessons in my classroom and showed some Ethiopian signs to my deaf students - a wonderful opportunity to broaden their insight about deafness and Sign Languages in the world!

Eyasu and I are working on developing a document on the Ethiopian Manual Alphabet (EMA). I am working on the large task of creating a TrueType Font (TT) of all drawn handshapes so that the students in Ethiopia will be able to understand easily the SignWriting symbols for these handshapes.



**Above:** Eyasu Tamene demonstrates the Ethiopian Manual Alphabet (EMA) for deaf students in Germany. Ethiopian fingerspelling includes some unusual and new handshapes for western signers.

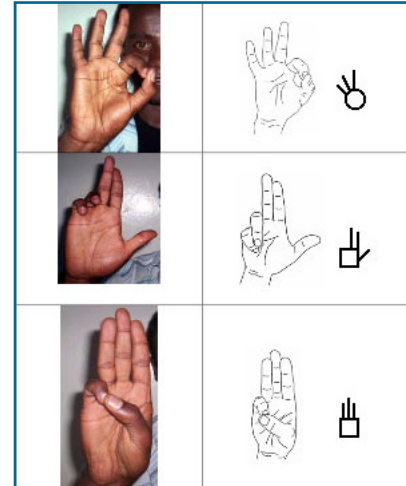
# SignWriting in Germany & Ethiopia

Report & Photos by Stefan Woehrmann, September 27, 2009

## 2009 Report continued...

Eyasu is learning SignWriting and SignPuddle. I tried to show some basics on how to use SignPuddle software, for example, how to access and use the dictionary. We wrote a short phrase in Ethiopian Sign Language and copied and pasted signs and went through the “translation” option. I showed him how to use the SignMail function and how to look for signs by symbols.

Eyasu had to leave the same day he arrived, in the late afternoon, so we did not have much time, but the good thing is that we met in person. Thanks for the visit, Eyasu. I hope to visit Ethiopia someday!



SignWriting in Ethiopia  
<http://www.signwriting.org/ethiopia>

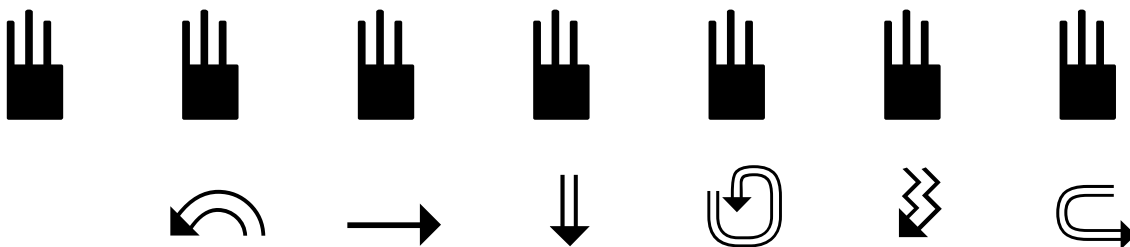
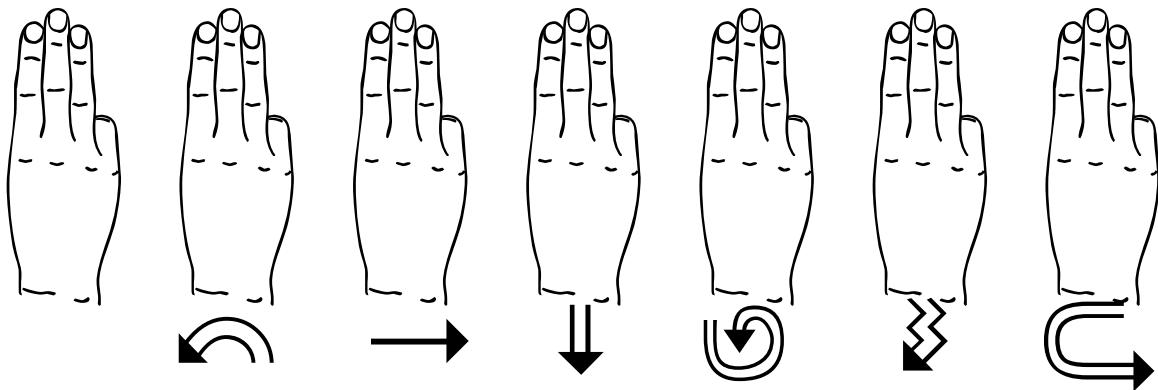
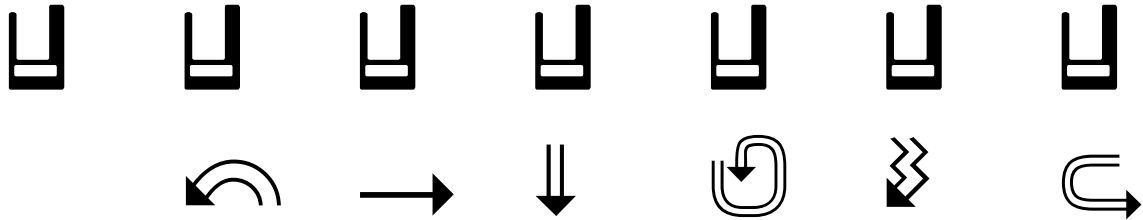
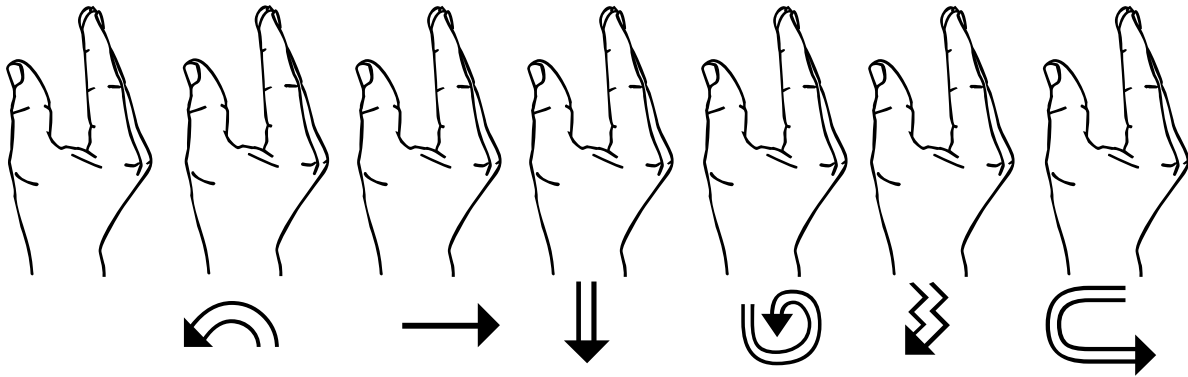
**Below:** Stefan demonstrates the sign for HEARING, while Eyasu uses SignPuddle Software.
















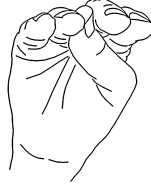







# SignWriting in Germany & Ethiopia

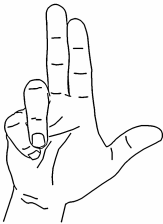
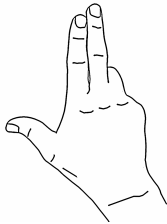



















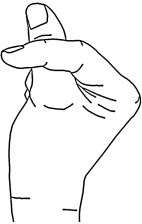


Report & Photos by Stefan Woehrmann, September 27, 2009


















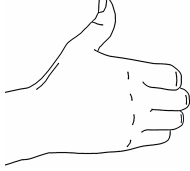


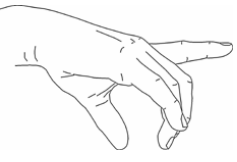
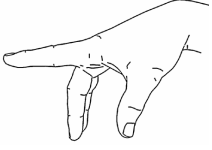


I (Stefan) am creating True Type Fonts of Ethiopian Handshapes, based on Eyasu's demonstrations and teachings. On the following pages you will see some examples, although there is much more work to complete.




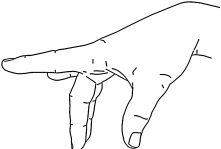












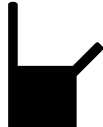









2 examples of one handshape with 7 variations


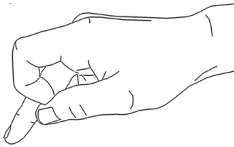



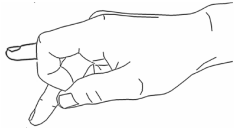






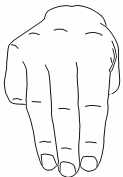











hands drawn by Stefan Wöhrmann receptive point of view	expressive point of view		EMA number 1- 33
			
			
			
			
			



	 seen from top down expressive		



Valerie Sutton, inventor, completed the International SignWriting Alphabet in 2008.

## The International SignWriting Alphabet Includes Ethiopian Handshapes...

The International SignWriting Alphabet (ISWA 2008) is the newest SignWriting symbolset, designed by Valerie Sutton for the latest SignWriting software: SignPuddle Online. The ISWA includes many of the handshapes needed to write Ethiopian Sign Languages, thanks to the work of Eyasu Tamene and Stefan Woehrmann, who provided Valerie with the photos and information needed to add the symbols into the ISWA. To write Ethiopian signs and sentences in SignPuddle Online, go to:

**SignPuddle Online for Ethiopia**

[www.signbank.org/signpuddle/index2.html#sgn-ET](http://www.signbank.org/signpuddle/index2.html#sgn-ET)

## The International SignWriting Alphabet (ISWA 2008)

There are 30 groups of symbols in the ISWA. The symbols can be written by hand or by computer.

When using SignPuddle software, the user clicks on a group symbol to view other symbols in that group. There are symbols for writing handshapes, movement, facial expressions, head movement, torso movement, limbs, dynamics, timing and punctuation.

The ISWA can be compared to the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet for spoken languages). Like the IPA, the ISWA provides symbols that can be used to write many languages.

Sign languages are NOT international. There is a different sign language in each country, and some countries have more than one sign language.

The International SignWriting Alphabet IS international, because the symbols write body movement. SignWriting can write any sign language in the world, because it writes the way signs are “pronounced” in each country.

The SignWriting Alphabet is used to write Sign Language Literature, such as novels and children’s stories.

