

ASL-131: AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE I



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ASL 131 Workbook Overview and Course Expectations

Welcome to ASL 131! This workbook has been designed to support your learning and understanding of American Sign Language (ASL), Deaf culture, Deaf history, and important topics related to the Deaf community. Throughout this course, you will explore the historical, cultural, and social experiences that have shaped Deaf communities in the United States and around the world.

This workbook will serve as a resource to help you develop a deeper understanding of Deaf history and the many contributions Deaf individuals have made in education, communication, technology, the arts, and society. The chapters will introduce important events, individuals, and cultural concepts that have influenced the development of ASL and the Deaf community.

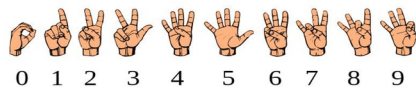
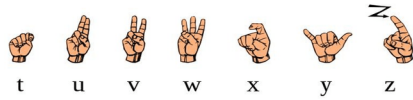
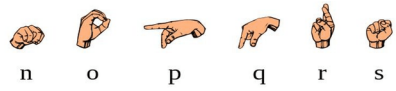
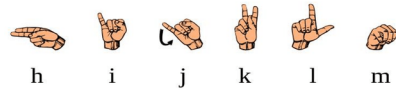
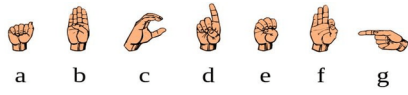
Every two weeks, you are responsible for completing one assigned chapter reading and the accompanying writing assignment. These assignments are designed to encourage reflection, critical thinking, and a greater appreciation of Deaf experiences and perspectives. Assignment due dates can be found in the course syllabus or will be announced during class meetings.

As you work through this workbook, remember that learning ASL involves more than learning signs—it also requires understanding the language's history, cultural values, and the experiences of the people who use it. Respect for Deaf culture and an appreciation for ASL as a complete and natural language are essential parts of this course.

If you have questions, concerns, or need clarification about any assignment or course requirement, please contact your instructor or review the information provided in the course syllabus. Your active participation, curiosity, and willingness to learn will help you succeed in ASL 131.

Welcome to the journey of discovering American Sign Language and Deaf Culture!

American Manual Alphabet



Palo Verde College

ASL-131: American Sign Language I

René Lopez-Roedel and Jacob A Roedel

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The history of ASL demonstrates that languages are shaped by communities over time. ASL did not originate from a single individual or institution; rather, it developed through the interaction of Deaf communities, educators, and various signing traditions. The contributions of de l'Épée, Clerc, Gallaudet, and generations of Deaf signers remain central to understanding the linguistic and cultural history of ASL. However, there already were forms of sign language already in the United States before Gallaudet had decided to build the first American school of the deaf, with the three most notable being the Sandy Creek Sign Language, Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, and Plains Indian Hand Talk. These languages had faded away due to ASL's prominence, but they remain important and worth remembering because of the role they played as the steppingstones to the foundation of modern ASL.

Pedro Ponce de Leon, first teacher for the deaf. Charles Michèle de l'Epee, the man who empowered deaf people"

In the pre-modern era, disabilities were often misunderstood because scientific and medical knowledge was limited. Many societies view disabilities as burdens on the community or as

signs of divine punishment, supernatural influence, or evil spirits. Deafness was often interpreted through these religious and cultural beliefs rather than recognized as a natural difference in hu-man communication. As a result, Deaf individuals were often isolated and excluded from every-day community life. Without a shared language for communicating with hearing people, they had limited access to education, employment, and full participation in society. Families kept Deaf relatives at home with little social interaction, while others placed them in institutions. Although some facilities accepted Deaf individuals, several were asylums that functioned more like prisons than places of care. These institutions often housed people with physical, intellectual, and mental disabilities together, regardless of their individual needs. Religious institutions and churches such as monasteries and churches sometimes provided shelter and basic care, but opportunities for education and language development remained extremely limited.

Despite these hardships, the experiences of Deaf individuals during this period laid the foundation for later advocacy and educational reforms. Beginning in the Renaissance and continuing into the Enlightenment, scholars and educators gradually challenged the belief that Deaf people were incapable of learning. These changing attitudes eventually led to the development of formal Deaf education and, centuries later, the recognition of signed languages as complete and natural human languages.

Most cases, the deaf and mute were had settled in small villages of their own making and had developed their own cultures and sign languages due to their isolation. As European nations expanded their exploration and colonization of the Western Hemisphere, Deaf individuals traveled alongside other settlers, bringing with them their own experiences, communication methods, and signing traditions. Deaf people who migrated to North America came from diverse European backgrounds, including English, French, Spanish, and other communities, each with their own forms of visual communication. These early signing systems contributed to the larger history of language development among Deaf communities in the Americas.

Like Europe, many Deaf individuals in colonial North America lived in small, rural, and isolated communities. Because populations were often spread out geographically and transportation was limited Deaf individuals frequently had limited contact with one another. As a result, isolated communities developed their own local sign systems based on their specific environments, cultures, and communication needs. These local signing systems, sometimes referred to as

village sign languages, developed naturally among both Deaf and hearing community members who needed a way to communicate across language barriers.

One well-known example of a community sign language developed in isolation was Martha's

Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL). Beginning in the seventeenth century, a high rate of

hereditary deafness on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, resulted in many Deaf and hearing residents using shared sign language. Unlike many societies where Deaf individuals were separated from the larger community, Deaf and hearing people on Martha's Vineyard were fully integrated with each other and commonly communicated through signing, allowing Deaf individuals to participate fully in social, economic, and community life.

These early signing communities demonstrate an important principle in linguistics: languages develop when groups of people have a shared need to communicate. The development of sign languages in North America was not simply the result of European influence; rather, it was shaped by the interaction of multiple communities, including European settlers, Indigenous peoples, and

Deaf individuals who created and maintained their own communication systems. These various signing traditions later influenced the development of American Sign Language (ASL).

When formal Deaf education began in the United States during the nineteenth century, these existing community signs interacted with French Sign Language brought by educators such as Laurent Clerc. The combination of Old French Sign Language, local American signing systems, and the natural language development of Deaf communities contributed to the emergence and growth of modern ASL.

Understanding these early signing communities helps demonstrate that ASL is not simply a collection of gestures or a translation of English. ASL is a natural language that developed through generations of Deaf individuals who created, preserved, and passed on their language and culture. Out of these, it was three languages, from Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, Sandy River Valley, Maine, and Henniker, Connecticut, had taken and integrated into the founding of the new American Sign Language.

LANTZ MILL DEAF VILLAGE

EDINBURG, VIRGINIA



Ellen Mansfield, 2022
Ceramic Tile, 10 3/4 in. by 7 1/4 in.

commissioned by
Kathleen L. Brockway, author

EST.1761

Starting in 1760, Lantz Mill became a rare "shared signing community" where both Deaf and hearing residents communicated fluently in local sign language.

Essay #1

Essay Assignment: The Development of Sign Language in America

Students write a 750–900-word essay explaining the development of sign languages in America, focusing on village sign languages, Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL), and the emergence of American Sign Language (ASL).

In your essay, address the following:

- Explain what village sign languages are and why they developed in isolated communities.
- Describe the importance of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) and how it allowed Deaf and hearing residents to communicate within the community.
- Explain how sign languages and Deaf communities contributed to the development of American Sign Language (ASL) in the United States.
- Discuss how learning about this history has expanded your understanding of ASL, Deaf culture, or the experiences of Deaf individuals.
- Identify at least one new concept or piece of information you learned from this material and explain why it was meaningful or important.

Your essay should demonstrate your understanding of the historical development of sign languages and the role Deaf communities play in shaping ASL. Use specific examples from the lab workbook materials and include citations for any outside sources used.

Requirements:

Minimum length: 750 words to 900 words

Organized paragraphs with clear explanations and examples Proper grammar and academic writing style

Include citations and a reference page if outside resources are used.

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2: Martha's Vineyard Sign Language- A Foundation in Deaf Community and Language Development

Martha's Vineyard Sign Language is the most famous of the colonial pre-Revolutionary era sign languages found in the thirteen colonies, found on the island of Martha's Vineyard off the coast of Massachusetts. The entire island functioned as both a fishing settlement and a deaf enclave, with the hearing and deaf populations proficient in Martha's Vineyard Sign Language. Fishers and whalers on the island used it to communicate between ships, farmers used it to talk from beyond fields, and schoolchildren used it to talk without distracting class and the teachers. This widespread usage of sign language among both hearing and deaf people in the same group helped ensure that the language survived beyond the initial families of deaf individuals that moved there.

It has its roots in Old Kentish Sign Language, though it had diverged in a different direction due to colonial and indigenous influences. While it was the main colonial sign language that had the most impact on the development of American Sign Language, no original traces of it remain, with no signers or records of its signs found anywhere. The last traces of it were erased in the 1950s when the last generations that knew of MVSL passed away. When research began on the language in the 1980s, researchers traveled to the island and showed video tapes of ASL conversations to the elderly population and they had managed to remember the signs used, though they could not remember enough to record.

The main source of MVSL's signs is from native sign languages, with the main source being suspected to be a sign language known as Eastern Woodlands Algonquin Sign Language, a now-extinct sign language used by the indigenous tribes found in modern day Massachusetts.

Considering the location of Martha's Vineyard, the two tribes that utilized this sign language were the Massachusetts and Wampanoag tribes, as they were the two languages that had the most contact with colonial settlers in the New England and Long Island area. Like many of the other sign languages of the time, there is little to no documentation of what it had actually looked like. Even while it can be assumed that the native sign language had a strong influence on the deaf population of Martha's Vineyard, neither language still exists today.

Part of the reason Martha's Vineyard developed sign language in the first place was the fact that a significant deaf population had settled there. Unlike the modern day, deaf populations in Europe and Eurocentric places often had populations of deaf people separated from the hearing community. Congenital and hereditary deafness had run rampant in these communities, and as they were often only allowed to marry other deaf people, the deafness was carried on through the bloodline and to the New England colonies. Many of the deaf people that migrated to the New World had previously lived together in the same villages in England.

The language had begun to decline with the foundation of the American School for the Deaf and the development of American Sign Language. While MVSL had a strong influence on ASL and the first signers of ASL were already fluent in MVSL, the new language had spread further than MVSL had ever had. With the advent of newer transportation technologies, more people, deaf and hearing, were able to spread further than before, and the teachings of the new ASL schools soon overtook other sign languages, both colonial and indigenous. Returning students brought ASL to Martha's Vineyard and slowly eroded the traditional colonial sign language before it had finally evaporated in the mid-20th century.

Today, there are no known fluent users of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL), and no living community continues to use the language as a primary means of communication. Although the language became extinct during the twentieth century, historical records, personal accounts, and linguistic research have preserved valuable information about its vocabulary, grammar, and role within the community. Researchers have relied on written documents, photographs, genealogical records, and interviews with descendants to better understand how MVSL functioned and influenced the development of signed languages in the United States.

In recent years, scholars, historians, and members of the Deaf community have renewed interest in studying Martha's Vineyard Sign Language. While a complete revival of the language is unlikely due to the absence of native signers, researchers continue to document and reconstruct aspects of MVSL to preserve its historical significance. This work has contributed to a greater understanding of the origins of American Sign Language (ASL) and the significant role that Deaf communities played in shaping language and culture in the United States.

Interest in signed languages has also grown beyond the Deaf community. Many middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities now offer American Sign Language courses as part of their world language or elective curriculum. These programs

introduce students to Deaf culture, Deaf history, and visual communication while promoting accessibility and inclusion. Although these courses teach modern American Sign Language rather than Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, they reflect a broader recognition of signed languages as complete, natural languages with their own grammar, history, and cultural importance.

Before the establishment of formal Deaf education in the United States, several village sign languages developed within isolated rural communities. These sign languages emerged naturally as Deaf and hearing individuals created shared systems of communication based on their daily interactions, family relationships, and community needs. Because many colonial settlements were geographically isolated, Deaf individuals often had limited contact with other Deaf communities. As a result, unique local sign languages developed independently in different regions.

One important example was Sandy River Valley Sign Language (SRVSL), which developed in the Sandy River Valley region of Maine. Like Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, SRVSL developed because of a high concentration of hereditary deafness within a small, interconnected rural community. Both Deaf and Hearing residents used the signing system, allowing Deaf individuals to participate in family life, education, work, and community activities. Language existed for multiple generations and demonstrated how communities naturally create language when there is a shared need for communication.

Another significant settler sign language was Henniker Sign Language, which developed in Henniker, New Hampshire. Like Sandy River Valley Sign Language, Henniker Sign Language developed within an isolated community where Deaf and hearing individuals interacted regularly. The development of these local sign languages shows that signed languages are not simply created by educators or institutions; they emerge naturally through communication among people.

Along with Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL), Sandy River Valley Sign Language and Henniker Sign Language represent some of the major settler village sign languages that contributed to the linguistic foundation of American Sign Language (ASL). When the first permanent school for Deaf students in the United States, the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, was established in 1817, students arrived with their own local signing systems. These community signs interacted with Old French Sign Language, which was introduced by Laurent Clerc, a Deaf educator from France who helped establish the school with Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet.

The development of ASL was therefore the result of multiple influences, including French Sign Language, existing American village sign languages, and the natural language practices of Deaf communities. These early signing systems demonstrate that ASL developed through the contributions of many Deaf individuals and communities rather than from a sole source.

Studying village sign languages helps us understand that language develops through human connection and shared experiences. The history of Sandy River Valley Sign Language, Henniker Sign Language, and Martha's Vineyard Sign Language provides important evidence that Deaf communities have always been active creators, users, and preservers of language. However, there are no records of the actual signs of these sign languages, which makes academic study extremely difficult, a status it shares with MVSL. However, what makes this impossible is that there is a significant lack of overall academic study in these languages, making research into this aspect of ASL history impossible. It is impossible to say even where these languages might have come from, much less how they contributed to ASL or how long these languages survived before finally fading away. What can be surmised is that these languages had emerged in very much the same way that Martha's Vineyard Sign Language had emerged, with villages full of deaf and mute people forming in England and being sent across the sea to the American colonies.



Martha's Vineyard once had its own sign language By [Community Advocate Staff](#)

However, their languages never gained the wide usage nor the popularity of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language nor the dialects and variants of Plains Indian Hand Talk, limiting the amount of information that is readily available for researchers.

Essay #2

Essay Assignment: Martha's Vineyard Sign Language and Deaf Community History

Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) is an important part of the history of signed languages in North America. It demonstrates how languages develop naturally within communities and how Deaf individuals have historically created and maintained their own systems of communication.

Assignment

Write a 500–700-word essay explaining the historical significance of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL).

In your essay, address the following:

- Describe the history and development of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language.
- Explain why both Deaf and hearing residents used MVSL within the community.
- Discuss how the Martha's Vineyard community challenged traditional views about Deaf individuals and their ability to participate fully in society.
- Explain what MVSL teaches us about how languages develop and why communities create shared forms of communication.
- Reflect on one new concept or piece of information you learned from this material and explain how it expanded your understanding of Deaf history, sign languages, or ASL.

Requirements

- Length: 500–700 words
- Font: Times New Roman, 12-point Spacing: Double-spaced
- Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Include specific examples from the ASL Lab Workbook and assigned course materials. Include in-text citations and a References page if outside sources are used.
- Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of the importance of Martha's Vineyard Sign Language and its role in showing that signed languages are natural languages created and shaped by communities.

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3: Plains Indian Hand Talk - Indigenous Sign Communication in North America

Plains Indian Hand Talk is one of indigenous languages used by indigenous peoples that lived in North America. Unlike colonial sign languages, Plains Indian Hand Talk had been able to survive, due to preservation efforts from resolute tribal elders and anthropologists outside of the First Nations and Native American peoples. Hand Talk was widespread throughout North America, with dialects and variants of it were used of Native American tribes from as far south as Mexico to as far north as Canada. Long before the development of American Sign Language (ASL), Indigenous peoples throughout North America used a variety of sign languages to communicate across tribal and linguistic boundaries. One of the most well-known of these systems is Plains Indian Hand Talk (PIHT), also known as Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL). Unlike ASL, which developed primarily within isolated Deaf enclaves as a natural language for everyday communication, Plains Indian Hand Talk served a broader purpose. It functioned as a shared intertribal trade language, allowing hearing individuals from different tribes who spoke mutually unintelligible spoken languages to communicate effectively through sign.

The Great Plains was home to many Indigenous nations, each with its own spoken language and cultural traditions. Because tribes regularly interacted through trade, diplomacy, hunting expeditions, ceremonies, and alliances, they needed a common method of communication. Plains Indian Hand Talk fulfilled this need by providing a visual language that could be understood across many different tribal groups. Historical accounts indicate that dozens of tribes, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Blackfeet, Crow, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, and others, used variants of Plains Indian Hand Talk to communicate during intertribal gatherings.

Although hearing people widely used the language, it was also an important means of communication for Deaf members of Indigenous communities. In many tribes, Deaf individuals participated fully in community life because Plains Indian Hand Talk was already familiar to many hearing members of the tribe. This widespread knowledge of sign communication helped create more inclusive environments than those often experienced by Deaf individuals in many European societies during the same period.

Plains Indian Hand Talk was not the only Indigenous sign language in North America. Anthropologists and linguists have documented several regional Indigenous sign languages that served similar purposes within specific communities. However, Plains Indian Hand Talk became the most widespread and influential of these systems because it was used across a vast geographic area extending from present-day Canada to Mexico and from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River.

It is important to understand that Plains Indian Hand Talk is not a direct ancestor of American Sign Language. ASL developed primarily through the interaction of French Sign Language, village sign languages, and Deaf communities in the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Plains Indian Hand Talk demonstrates that sophisticated visual languages existed in North America centuries before the establishment of formal Deaf education. Together with village sign languages such as Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, these Indigenous signing traditions illustrate the rich diversity of visual communication systems that existed across the continent before ASL emerged.

Today, Plains Indian Hand Talk is recognized as an important part of the cultural heritage of many Indigenous nations. Community members, educators, and researchers continue efforts to document and revitalize the language, preserving an important aspect of Native American history and culture for future generations. Despite the language's contributions in ASL, much of it was threatened by the spread of ASL and it was explicitly target in assimilation efforts by American and Canadian officials through reservations and the boarding school system. However, the most devoted of signers and anthropologists had managed to preserve elements of the language and protect it from eradication.

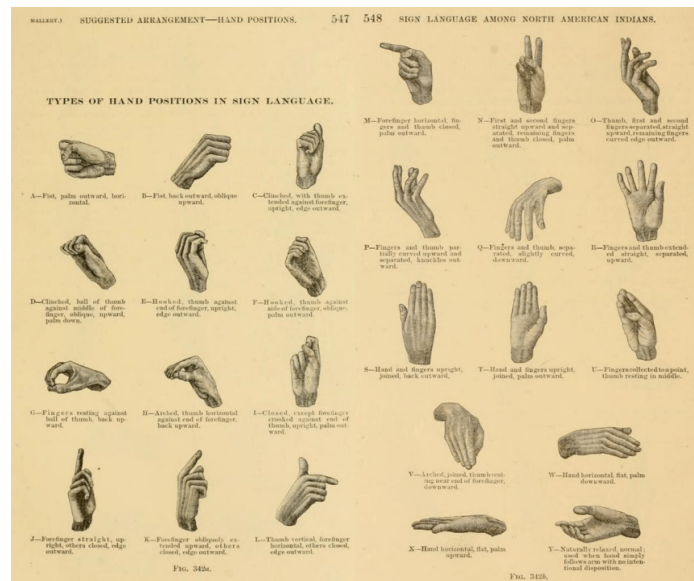


Figure 3.1: Garrick Mallery's original 1880 handshape glossary

The most fascinating of all this is that Plains Indian Hand Talk has its own writing system, with a series of hieroglyphs and pictographs for every word and sign, something that many other sign languages lack. Typically speaking, the sign language uses the same written language as the spoken language, but many the Plains Indian Hand Talk and its variants, spoken and sign languages each have their own dedicated writing system. Typically found on cave walls and cleaned animal pelts, there have been recorded instances of indigenous people using this in residential schools in letters home.

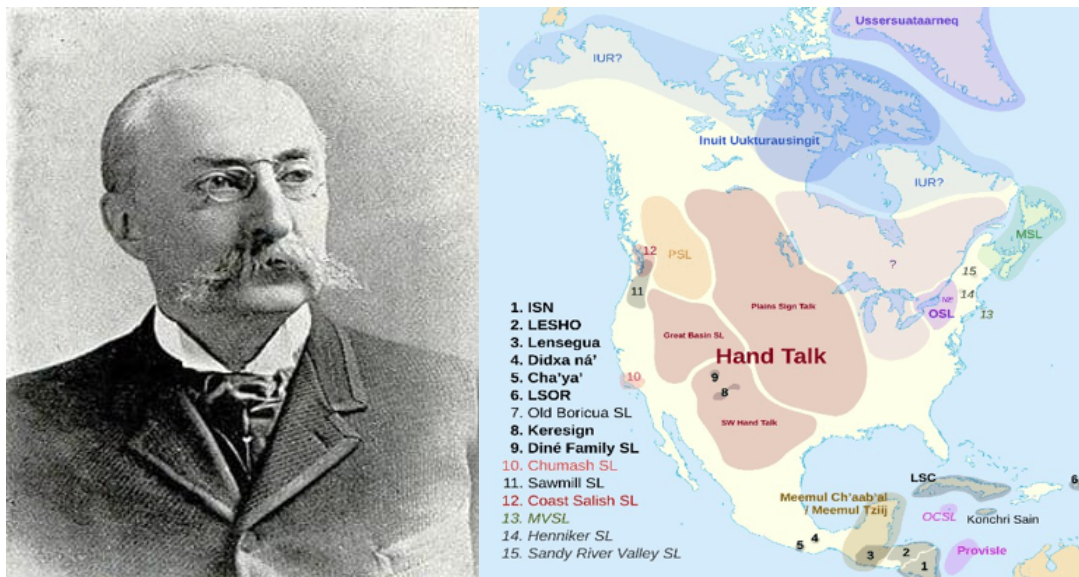


Figure 3.2: (left) Garrick Mallery was an American ethnologist and pictographs.National Anthropological Archives. (right) Plains Sign Language is labelled in red as Hand Talk specializing in Native American sign language

Essay #3

Plains Indian Hand Talk and the History of Signed Communication

Plains Indian Hand Talk (PIHT) is one of the oldest and most widespread signed communication systems in North America. Used by many Indigenous nations, it served as a shared language for trade, diplomacy, and communication among people who spoke different spoken languages.

Studying PIHT alongside Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) helps us understand how different societies developed signed languages to meet their unique social and cultural needs.

Assignment

Write a 500–700-word essay that examines the historical significance of Plains Indian Hand Talk (PIHT) and compares it with Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL).

In your essay, address the following:

- Explain the history and primary purpose of Plains Indian Hand Talk.
- Describe how PIHT was used among Indigenous nations for communication, trade, diplomacy, and everyday interactions.
- Compare the sociological needs that led to the development of PIHT and MVSL.
- Why did each language develop?
- Who used each language?
- How did the social and cultural environments influence their development?
- Discuss one similarity and one difference between PIHT and MVSL.
- Reflect on one new concept or historical fact you learned and explain how it expanded your understanding of signed languages and Deaf history.

Requirements

- Length: 500–700 words
- Font: Times New Roman, 12-point
- Spacing: Double-spaced with 1-inch margins
- Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Support your discussion with examples from the ASL Lab Workbook and assigned course materials.
- Include in-text citations and a References page if outside sources are used.

Your essay should demonstrate an understanding that signed languages develop in response to the communication needs of communities. By comparing Plains Indian Hand Talk and Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, you will explore how different societies created effective visual communication systems to meet distinct social, cultural, and linguistic needs.

4: Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet - A Pioneer of Deaf Education in America

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (December 10, 1787–September 10, 1851) is recognized as one of the most influential pioneers of Deaf education in the United States. His dedication to improving educational opportunities for Deaf individuals helped establish the foundation for formal Deaf education in North America and played a significant role in the development of American Sign Language (ASL).

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, Gallaudet demonstrated exceptional academic ability from an early age. He enrolled at Yale University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1805 at just 17 years old. He continued his studies at Yale and received a master's degree in 1808. Initially planning to enter the ministry, Gallaudet became interested in educating children after meeting Alice Cogswell, a young Deaf girl who lived in his neighborhood. Realizing that Alice had little access to education because of her deafness, Gallaudet became determined to find an effective method of teaching Deaf children.

In 1815, Gallaudet traveled to Europe to study educational methods for Deaf students. After visiting England, he continued to France, where he observed the successful teaching methods used at the National Institute for Deaf-Mutes in Paris. There, he met Laurent Clerc, a highly respected Deaf educator who agreed to return to the United States with him to establish a school for Deaf students.

On April 15, 1817, Gallaudet and Clerc opened the first permanent school for Deaf students in the United States in Hartford, Connecticut. The school was originally named Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, reflecting the terminology commonly used during the early nineteenth century. Today, the institution is known as the American School for the Deaf (ASD) and remains the oldest permanent school for Deaf students in the United States.

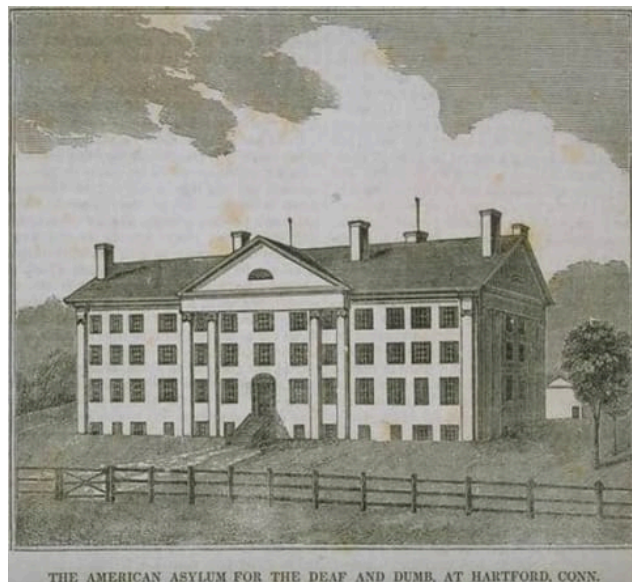


Figure 4.1: Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Persons. Hartford. 1840

The partnership between Gallaudet and Clerc was instrumental in the development of American Sign Language. Students from across the country brought their own local signing systems to the school, where they interacted with Old French Sign Language introduced by Clerc. Over time, these languages blended and evolved into what is now recognized as modern American Sign Language (ASL). Gallaudet's commitment to accessible education and Clerc's expertise as a Deaf teacher helped transform the educational opportunities available to Deaf Americans and laid the foundation for the growth of the Deaf community in the United States.

Thomas Gallaudet's legacy extends far beyond the school he helped establish. His work demonstrated that Deaf individuals are fully capable of academic achievement when provided with accessible education in a language they can understand. His

contributions continue to influence Deaf education, ASL instruction, and Deaf culture now nearly two centuries later.

His first student was the daughter of his neighbor, Alice Cogswell, at age nine. The two had met when Gallaudet had returned to his family home during a brief summer sabbatical, where he had noticed that she had avoided the other children. Her father, Dr. Mason Cogswell, was a trained physician and Revolutionary War veteran who was one of the first American surgeons to perform cataract surgery and did so successfully. Dr. Cogswell had struggled to teach his daughter and so when he had realized that Gallaudet had managed to teach his daughter the names of various objects by printing their names in the dirt, he had hired Gallaudet to continue her education throughout the summer. The following year, Dr. Cogswell and several businessmen and clergy had paid Gallaudet to travel to Europe to study deaf teaching methods. His first stop, the Braidwood Academy in Scotland, proved untenable as the staff of Braidwood used oral communication methods, something that Gallaudet found to be too unreliable for his pedagogy. Regardless, the Braidwood staff were too uncooperative to share this methodology anyway, so Gallaudet would soon leave for greener pastures in the rest of Europe. In London, he met Abbe Sicard, the head of the *institute Nationale des Sourds-Muets* a Paris, and through him, met Laurent Clerc and Jean Massieu. Gallaudet followed them to Paris and studied their manual communication methodology and French Sign Language from the three educators.

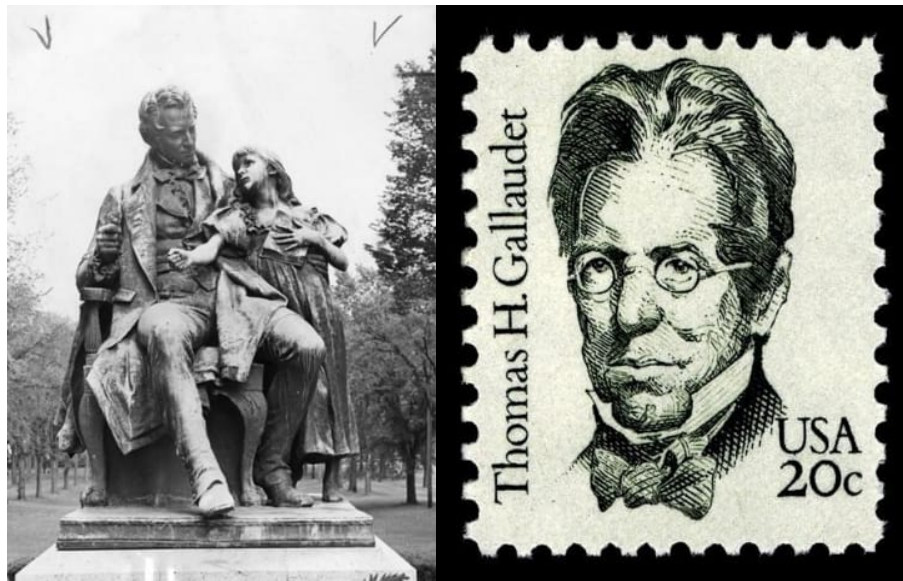


Figure 4.2: (left) Daniel Chester French, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Alice Cogswell, 1888 (cast 1924) bronze, West Hartford. (right) Copyright United States Postal Service. National Postal Museum. June 10, 1983.

Gallaudet had convinced Clerc to accompany him to America and with Dr. Cogswell's help, raised funds to build a school for deaf students in Hartford, Connecticut, which would open in April of 1817. Alice Cogswell, now age twelve, would be the first of a class of seven in the future American School for the Deaf.

Thomas Gallaudet would later marry Sophie Fowler, one of his future students, and have eight children, the youngest of which, Edward Miner Gallaudet, would continue his work by founding Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. 1864, the first higher education facility of its kind to cater specifically to the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing.

Essay #4

Essay Assignment: Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet—A Pioneer of Deaf Education in America

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet played a pivotal role in the history of Deaf education in the United States. His efforts to establish the first permanent school for Deaf students, along with his partnership with Laurent Clerc, helped transform educational opportunities for Deaf individuals and contributed to the development of American Sign Language (ASL).

Assignment

Write a 500–700-word essay explaining the historical significance of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and his contributions to Deaf education in America.

In your essay, address the following:

- Describe Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet's educational background and what inspired him to become involved in Deaf education.
- Explain the importance of his partnership with Laurent Clerc and how their collaboration led to the establishment of the first permanent school for Deaf students in the United States.
- Discuss how the founding of the American School for the Deaf influenced Deaf education and the development of American Sign Language (ASL).
- Explain how Gallaudet's work changed opportunities for Deaf individuals in the United States.
- Reflect on one new concept or historical fact you learned and explain how it expanded your understanding of Deaf education, ASL, or Deaf history.

Requirements

- Length: 500–700 words
- Font: Times New Roman, 12-point
- Spacing: Double-spaced with 1-inch margins
- Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Support your discussion with examples from the ASL Lab Workbook and assigned course materials.
- Include in-text citations and a References page if outside sources are used.

Your essay should demonstrate your understanding of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet's lasting impact on Deaf education and his role in laying the foundation for the growth of the Deaf community and American Sign Language in the United States.

5: The American School for the Deaf- Expanding Educational Opportunities

First known as the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, the modern-day American School for the Deaf opened on April 17th, 1817, in Hartford Connecticut. Founded by American pastor Thomas Gallaudet, surgeon and physician Mason Cogswell, and French deaf teacher Laurent Clerc, the American School for the Deaf was the first institution for educating the deaf and hard of hearing in North America.

The American School for the Deaf (ASD) in Hartford, Connecticut, holds a unique place in the history of Deaf education in the United States. Established in 1817 by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc, it was the first permanent school for Deaf students in North America. The school provided Deaf children with access to a structured education through signed communication, demonstrating that Deaf individuals could achieve the same academic success as their hearing peers when given an accessible learning environment.

The American School for the Deaf also played a significant role in expanding educational opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds. In 1830, the school admitted African American Deaf students, making it one of the earliest schools in the United States to provide formal education to Deaf students regardless of race. Although opportunities for African American Deaf students remained limited and educational equality was far from achieved, their enrollment represented an important milestone in the history of Deaf education during a period when racial segregation and discrimination were widespread throughout American society.

As the American School for the Deaf grew, its graduates became instrumental in spreading Deaf education across the United States. Many former students returned to the school as teachers or helped establish new schools for Deaf children in other states. Because these educators shared a common signed language and educational philosophy, they helped promote the use of what would become American Sign Language (ASL) in classrooms throughout the country. This network of Deaf and hearing educators contributed to the rapid growth of Deaf education during the nineteenth century.

The school's greatest contribution was providing Deaf students with the opportunity to learn through a fully accessible language. Before the establishment of formal Deaf education, many Deaf individuals experienced social isolation and had limited access to communication and schooling. At the American School for the Deaf, students could communicate freely with one another and with their teachers using sign language. This shared language allowed students not only to develop academically but also to form lifelong friendships, exchange ideas, and build a powerful sense of community.

As graduates established schools, organizations, and social networks across the country, they helped create a distinct Deaf culture based on shared language, values, traditions, and experiences. Rather than viewing deafness as a disability that needed to be overcome. Many Deaf individuals began to recognize themselves as members of a linguistic and cultural minority. The widespread use of ASL strengthened this identity and allowed Deaf communities throughout the United States to preserve and pass on their language and cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

The legacy of the American School for the Deaf extends far beyond education. It helped establish the foundation for modern Deaf culture, promoted the recognition of ASL as a legitimate language, and inspired generations of Deaf leaders, educators, and advocates who continue to shape Deaf education and culture today. The method of communication its teachers had advocated for, manual sign language, was able to spread across the vast swaths of territory of the former colonies and the then-uncharted territories westward. This did have the unfortunate consequence of eroding older sign languages among both the American and indigenous territories, but the new overarching deaf culture did enable the deaf and hard of hearing to be able to contribute to deaf and hearing society. After the death of Gallaudet, the school continued to teach manual communication, but much of the curriculum focused on oralism, the methodology of teaching deaf peoples to use their voices for communication rather than sign languages.

Even though the American School for the Deaf had allowed African American students in 1830, many of the other deaf schools in the United States that followed it were often segregated, forcing non-white students to go in segregated deaf schools. These segregated deaf schools had suffered from the similar drawbacks of segregated hearing schools, often lacking resources needed to teach students and buildings suffering from structural damage, but the unique aspect that emerged out of these schools is their own variant of ASL, known as Black American/Black Sign Variation. One of the few benefits of this segregation was that they were not subject to the implementation of oral communication that had become the main method of teaching for the white deaf

schools, and so were able to use manual communication without much interference.

In 1954, the Supreme Court had ruled educational segregation was illegal, and so the students and staff of these black deaf schools had integrated white schools. For much of the initial integration for these institutions, both white and black signers struggled to understand one another due to the divide between the two languages.

A Pioneer of Deaf Education and American Sign Language

Laurent Clerc (1785–1869) was a French Deaf educator who played a fundamental role in the establishment of Deaf education in the United States. As the first Deaf teacher in America and a co-founder of the American School for the Deaf, Clerc helped introduce French Sign Language to the United States and contributed significantly to the development of American Sign Language (ASL). His work transformed educational opportunities for Deaf individuals and helped establish a solid foundation for Deaf culture in America.

Clerc was born on December 26, 1785, in La Balme-les-Grottes, France. At about one year of age, he fell from a chair into a fireplace, suffering a severe facial injury. Although his family believed the accident caused his deafness, historians suggest he may have already been deaf or that the accident was unrelated to his hearing loss. Regardless of its cause, Clerc grew up in a time when educational opportunities for Deaf children were extremely limited.

At the age of twelve, Clerc enrolled at the National Institute for Deaf-Mutes in Paris, the school founded through the educational work of Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée and later directed by Abbé Roch-Ambroise Sicard. There, Clerc received a formal education using French Sign Language and demonstrated exceptional academic ability. After completing his studies, he remained at the institute as a teacher, becoming one of its most respected Deaf instructors. His success demonstrated that Deaf individuals could excel as educators and scholars when provided with accessible education.

In 1815, American minister Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet traveled to Europe to learn effective methods for educating Deaf children. After studying briefly in England, Gallaudet continued to Paris, where he observed the teaching methods used at the National Institute for Deaf-Mutes. There he met Laurent Clerc, whose teaching impressed him. Recognizing Clerc's expertise and experience, Gallaudet invited him to return to the United States to help establish a school for Deaf students.

During their voyage across the Atlantic in 1816, Clerc and Gallaudet taught one another their respective languages. Clerc taught Gallaudet French Sign Language, while Gallaudet taught Clerc English. This exchange of language and culture laid the groundwork for their future collaboration and the eventual development of American Sign Language.

On April 15, 1817, Gallaudet and Clerc opened the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, the first permanent school for Deaf students in the United States. Students from across the country arrived with their own village sign languages and home signs. These signing systems blended with French Sign Language introduced by Clerc, eventually evolving into modern American Sign Language (ASL). As one of the school's principal teachers, Clerc educated generations of Deaf students, many of whom later became teachers themselves and established additional schools throughout the United States.



Figure 5.1: Old Hartford" building. American School for the Deaf c. 1890s

Laurent Clerc taught at the American School for the Deaf for more than 50 years before retiring. His influence extended far beyond the classroom. By demonstrating that Deaf individuals could serve as successful educators, professionals, and community leaders, Clerc helped change public attitudes toward deafness and inspired future generations of Deaf Americans. Today, he is remembered as one of the founders of Deaf education in the United States and one of the most influential figures in the history of ASL.

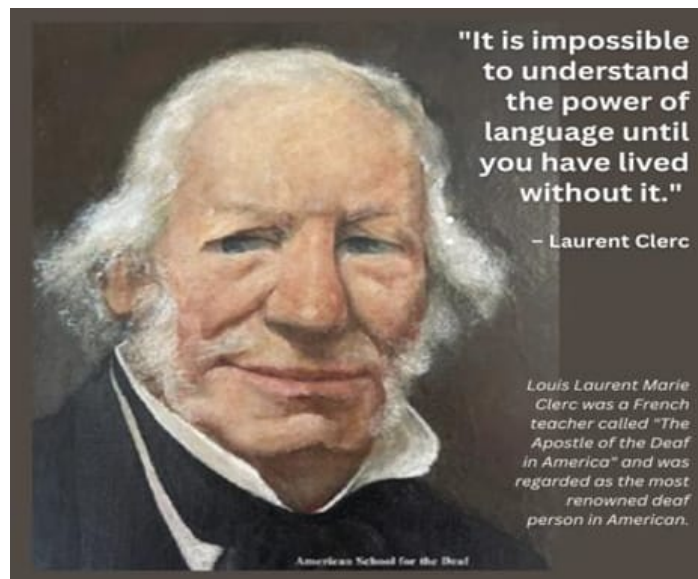


Figure 5.2: Breaking Barriers: The Legacy of Laurent Clerc Gallaudet University Archives.

Essay #5

Essay Prompt: The American School for the Deaf and Laurent Clerc:

- Expanding Educational Opportunities and Advancing Deaf Education
- Write a 500-700-word essay examining the historical significance of the American School for the Deaf (ASD) and Laurent Clerc's contributions to Deaf education and the development of American Sign Language (ASL).

In your essay, address the following:

- Explain the founding of the American School for the Deaf and its importance as the first permanent school for deaf students in the United States.
- Describe the educational methods used at the school and how access to formal education transformed opportunities for Deaf individuals.
- Discuss the role of Laurent Clerc as a pioneer of Deaf education, including his journey from France to the United States and his influence on teaching methods and language development.
- Analyze how Clerc's work contributed to the growth and recognition of ASL as a visual language and an essential part of Deaf culture.
- Explain how graduates of the American School for the Deaf helped expand educational opportunities by becoming teachers, advocates, and leaders within Deaf communities.
- Reflect on why the history of ASD and Laurent Clerc remains important in understanding Deaf education, language rights, and cultural identity today.

Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of the historical events, key individuals, and broader impact of Deaf education. Use specific examples from course materials and include proper citations for all sources used.

Requirements:

- Length: 500–700 words
- Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs. Include an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.
- Provide citations and a reference list using the required citation format

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6: Notable Americans Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Andrew Foster: Expanding Deaf Education Beyond the United States

Andrew Foster (1925–1987) was a pioneering figure in Deaf education and recognized as the first African American to graduate from Gallaudet University, earning a bachelor's degree in 1954. His accomplishments were especially significant because he overcame both racial and educational barriers during a period when opportunities for Black Deaf individuals were extremely limited. Foster's success demonstrated the importance of access to higher education and inspired future generations of Deaf students, educators, and advocates.

Although Foster's education began in the United States, his life's work focused on improving educational opportunities for Deaf individuals internationally, particularly throughout continental Africa. After completing his studies, Foster dedicated himself to establishing schools for Deaf children in areas where formal Deaf education was often unavailable. In 1957, he founded the first school for the Deaf in West Africa in Accra, Ghana. This school became the foundation for expanding Deaf education throughout the region and provided Deaf students with access to language, literacy, vocational skills, and community connections.

Foster's approach to Deaf education reflected the belief that Deaf children deserved access to education through natural visual language. He promoted the use of sign language as a tool for communication, learning, and identity development. Through his work, he helped establish more than 30 schools for Deaf students across Africa, including programs in Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and other countries. These schools created opportunities for thousands of Deaf individuals who previously had limited access to formal education.

Foster's contributions also connect to broader themes in Deaf history, including the importance of Deaf leadership and representation. As an African American Deaf educator working internationally, he challenged the assumption that Deaf individuals were unable to become leaders, teachers, and advocates. His work demonstrated that Deaf people could create educational systems that recognized their language, culture, and abilities rather than viewing deafness only through a medical or deficit-based perspective.

Andrew Foster's legacy continues to influence Deaf education worldwide. His dedication expanded the reach of Deaf education beyond national boundaries and helped establish a foundation for Deaf communities throughout Africa. His life illustrates the power of education, language access, and advocacy in creating greater opportunities for Deaf individuals. Today, Foster was not only a pioneer in Deaf education but also as a global leader who transformed the lives of Deaf students across generations.

After the success of his first school in Accra, he would continue to create schools throughout Africa, not just in Ghana, but in Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, and several other countries, with a total of 32 schools in 13 nations that he worked in, all of which adopted his methods and expanded upon them throughout the rest of the continent. All the schools he founded had eventually become part of Gallaudet University's outreach programs, with students from the school in Africa being later accepted to attend Gallaudet University.



Figure 6.1: Foster with his two most successful proteges: Both became national deaf leaders in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively. (right) Foster teaching students at the Kendall School in 1953.

William “Dummy” Hoy: A Deaf Athlete Who Changed Baseball Communication

William Ellsworth “Dummy” Hoy (1862–1961) was one of the most influential Deaf athletes in early American sports history. Born in Houcktown, Ohio, Hoy became Deaf at the age of three after contracting meningitis. Despite facing communication barriers and discrimination, he developed exceptional athletic skills and became one of the first Deaf professional baseball players in the United States. Hoy played in Major League Baseball from 1888 to 1902, primarily as an outfielder, and was known for his speed, defensive ability, and strong throwing arm.

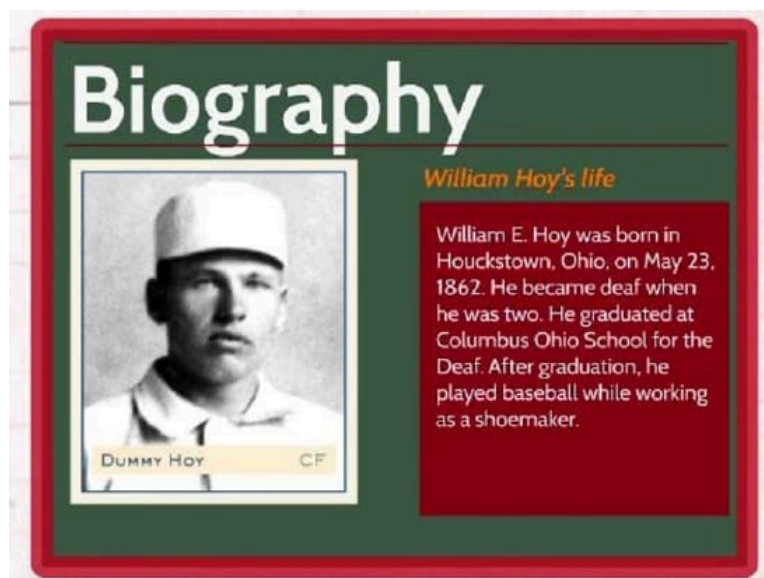


Figure 6.2: William “Dummy” Hoy maureenmccoy@maureenmccoy_2020

Hoy’s impact extended beyond his accomplishments on the baseball field. He is widely credited with influencing the use of hand signals by baseball umpires. Because Hoy could not hear verbal calls from umpires, he relied on visual communication during games. His need for clear signals helped encourage the broader adoption of hand gestures for strikes, balls, and safe/out calls, which became an essential part of modern baseball. Although other Deaf players before Hoy also used signs and visual communication while playing, Hoy’s national recognition helped popularize these practices throughout professional baseball.

Hoy's career challenged stereotypes about Deaf individuals and demonstrated that Deaf people could successfully compete and excel in professional settings. His achievements also highlighted the importance of visual communication, a principle central to Deaf culture and American Sign Language. Hoy continued to inspire athletes and advocates until his death in 1961 at the age of 99. His legacy remains an important example of how Deaf individuals have contributed to American history, sports, and communication.

Neila Zabel Willhite: A Deaf Pioneer in Aviation

Neila Zabel Willhite (1892–1991) was a groundbreaking Deaf aviator who became the first Deaf woman to earn a pilot's license. She was born on November 22, 1892, in Rapid City, South Dakota. Willhite became Deaf during childhood after contracting measles; however, historical sources differ regarding whether her hearing loss occurred at age two or age four. Despite communication barriers and the limited opportunities available to women and Deaf individuals during the early twentieth century, Willhite pursued her passion for aviation and demonstrated that Deaf people could succeed in highly skilled professions.

In 1928, Willhite earned her pilot's license, making her the first Deaf woman in the United States to achieve this accomplishment. She became an important figure in early aviation and helped expand opportunities for women pilots. Willhite was also one of the founding members of the International Organization of Women Pilots, also known as the Ninety-Nines, an organization established in 1929 to support and advance women in aviation.

Throughout her aviation career, Willhite worked as a commercial pilot, including flying airmail routes until her retirement in 1944. She also participated in barnstorming events, performing aerial demonstrations as part of traveling flying circuses. Her achievements challenged stereotypes about Deaf individuals and women, showing that determination, skill, and access to opportunity could overcome social barriers. Willhite's legacy remains an important example of Deaf leadership, independence, and achievement in American history.

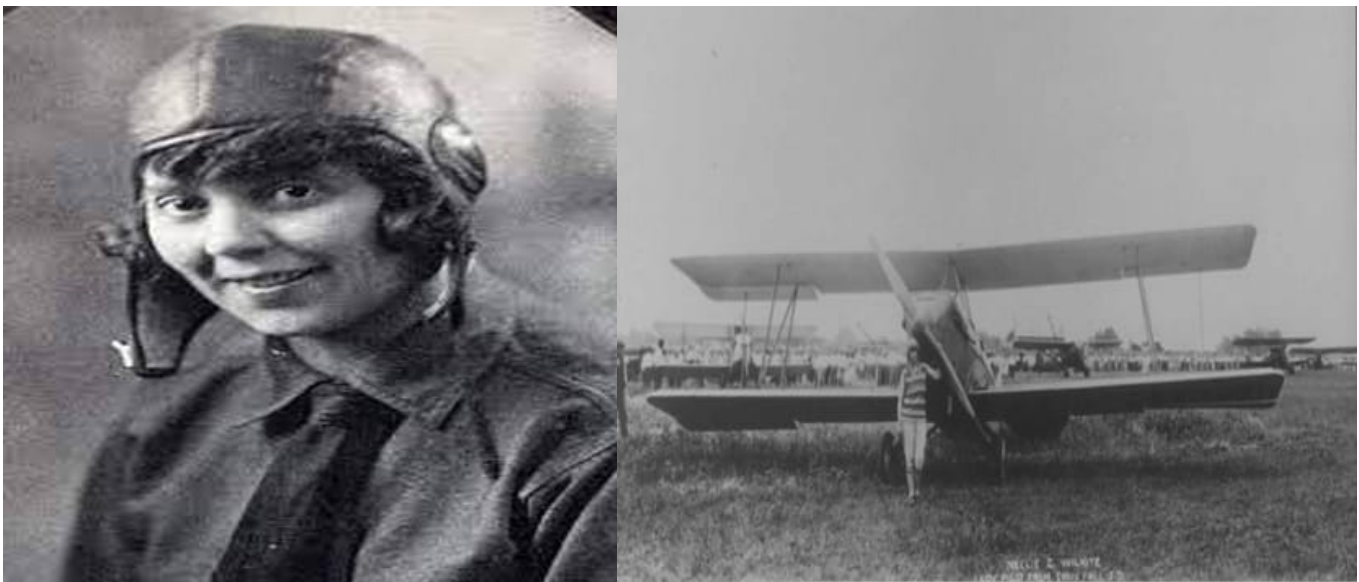


Figure 6.3: (left) Nellie Zabel Willhite was the first deaf woman to earn a pilot's license and the first deaf person and the first deaf person to work as a commercial pilot. (right) Nellie Willhite posed with her biplane

ESSAY #6

Essay Prompt: Deaf Pioneers and Their Impact on Deaf Culture Essay - DEAF PIONEERS

Write a 500–700-word essay examining the contributions of one Deaf pioneer from the following individuals:

- **Andrew Foster** – Deaf educator and advocate who expanded Deaf education internationally, especially throughout Africa.
- **William “Dummy” Hoy** – Deaf professional baseball player who helped increase awareness of visual communication and

the importance of accessible communication in sports.

- **Neila Zabel Willhite** – Deaf aviation pioneer who became the first Deaf woman to earn a pilot's license and challenged expectations about Deaf individuals and women in aviation.

In Your Essay, Address the Following:

- Identify the individual you selected and explain why you chose this person.
- Describe their background, accomplishments, and challenges they faced as a Deaf individual.
- Explain how their work or achievements contributed to greater opportunities for Deaf people.
- Analyze how this individual helped promote Deaf culture, Deaf identity, language access, or representation.
- Compare how their contributions connect to the broader Deaf community and the continued fight for recognition, accessibility, and inclusion.
- Reflect on why learning about Deaf pioneers is important in understanding Deaf history and the role Deaf individuals have played in shaping society.

Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of how Deaf individuals have influenced education, communication, sports, aviation, and social awareness. Use specific examples from course materials and include proper citations for all sources used.

Requirements:

- Length: 500–700 words
- Include an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Include citations and a reference list using the required citation format.

7: Deaf Representation, Advocacy, and the Impact of Modern Deaf Leaders

Marlee Matlin: Breaking Barriers in Film, Television, and Deaf Representation

Marlee Matlin is one of the most recognized Deaf actors and advocates in American entertainment history. Born on August 24, 1965, in Morton Grove, Illinois, Matlin became Deaf at 18 months old due to illness. She began acting at a young age and gained international recognition through her breakthrough role as Sarah Norman in the film adaptation of *Children of a Lesser God* (1986). Her performance earned her the Academy Award for Best Actress, making her the first Deaf performer to win an Academy Award. She also received the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama, becoming the first Deaf person to receive both honors.

After this historic achievement, Matlin continued to have a successful career in film and television. She starred in the drama series *Reasonable Doubts* (1991–1993), earning two Golden Globe nominations for Best Actress in a Television Series – Drama. She also appeared in other major productions, including *The West Wing*, *The L Word*, and *CODA*, helping increase Deaf representation in mainstream media.

Beyond acting, Matlin is a strong advocate for Deaf rights, accessibility, and authentic representation of Deaf people in entertainment. She has worked to increase opportunities for Deaf actors, promote the use of American Sign Language, and challenge Hollywood's limited portrayals of Deaf individuals. Matlin's career demonstrates the importance of representation, and the impact Deaf professionals can have in shaping public understanding of Deaf culture and identity.



Figure 7.1: (left) Academy Awards in Los Angeles, March 30, 1987. Ron Galella Collection via Getty Images, Best Actress in a Leading Role (59th Academy Awards). (right) *I'll Scream Later* By Marlee Matlin

Troy Kotsur: Expanding Deaf Representation in Theater and Film

Troy Kotsur is a groundbreaking Deaf actor whose career has expanded opportunities and visibility for Deaf performers in entertainment. Born on July 24, 1968, in Mesa, Arizona, Kotsur developed an interest in acting and storytelling at an early age. He began his professional career in theater, working with the National Theatre of the Deaf in the late 1980s. His experiences in Deaf theater helped establish his foundation as a performer and advocate for authentic Deaf representation on stage and screen.

Kotsur later became involved with Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, where he directed and performed in numerous productions

beginning in the 1990s. Deaf West Theatre is known for combining American Sign Language with spoken theater, creating productions that highlight Deaf culture while making performances accessible to both Deaf and hearing audiences.

Kotsur expanded his television career through roles such as his appearance on *Sue Thomas: F.B. Eye*, where he initially worked as an ASL consultant before becoming a performer. He also made history in the *Star Wars* universe by becoming the first Deaf actor to appear in a *Star Wars* project. For *The Mandalorian*, he helped create a sign-based constructed language for the Tusken Raiders, where he would be offered the role of one of the Tusken Raiders, demonstrating the importance of linguistic creativity and Deaf perspectives in storytelling.

In 2021, Kotsur starred as Frank Rossi, a Deaf father, in the award-winning film *CODA*. His performance earned him the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, making him the first Deaf male actor and the second Deaf performer overall to win an acting Oscar. Kotsur's achievement represents a significant milestone in Deaf representation and highlights the importance of including Deaf actors in roles that reflect authentic Deaf experiences. His career continues to inspire future generations of Deaf performers and advocates.



Figure 7.2: (left) Troy Kotsur, Sue Thomas F.B. Eye Wiki. Fandom. (left) Mike Coppola/Getty Images

Nyle DiMarco: Deaf Representation, Advocacy, and Media Leadership

Nyle DiMarco is a prominent Deaf actor, model, producer, and activist who has used his public platform to promote Deaf culture, American Sign Language (ASL), and accessibility. Born May 8, 1989, in Queens, New York, DiMarco grew up in Frederick, Maryland, and attended the Maryland School for the Deaf. He later graduated from Gallaudet University in 2013, becoming part of a long tradition of Deaf leaders and advocates educated at the world's only liberal arts university for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

DiMarco began his entertainment career in 2013 when he starred in the independent ASL film *In the Can*. He later gained recognition for his recurring role as Garrett Banducci on the television series *Switched at Birth* (2014–2015), a program known for incorporating Deaf characters and ASL into mainstream television. In 2015, DiMarco became the first Deaf winner of *America's Next Top Model* and the second male winner in the show's history. The following year, he and professional dancer Peta Murgatroyd won *Dancing with the Stars*, further increasing visibility for Deaf performers in popular media.

Beyond entertainment, DiMarco is also recognized for his activism and commitment to Deaf education and language rights. He founded the Nyle DiMarco Foundation, which focuses on improving access to ASL resources and supporting Deaf children and their families. He also produced and directed the documentary *Deaf President Now!* which examines the historic 1988 student-led protest at Gallaudet University demanding a Deaf president. The documentary received two Primetime Emmy Award nominations, highlighting the importance of Deaf history and representation in media.

Nyle DiMarco's career demonstrates how Deaf individuals can shape entertainment, education, and advocacy. Through his work, he continues to challenge stereotypes, increase awareness of Deaf culture, and promote the recognition of ASL as a vital language and part of Deaf identity.

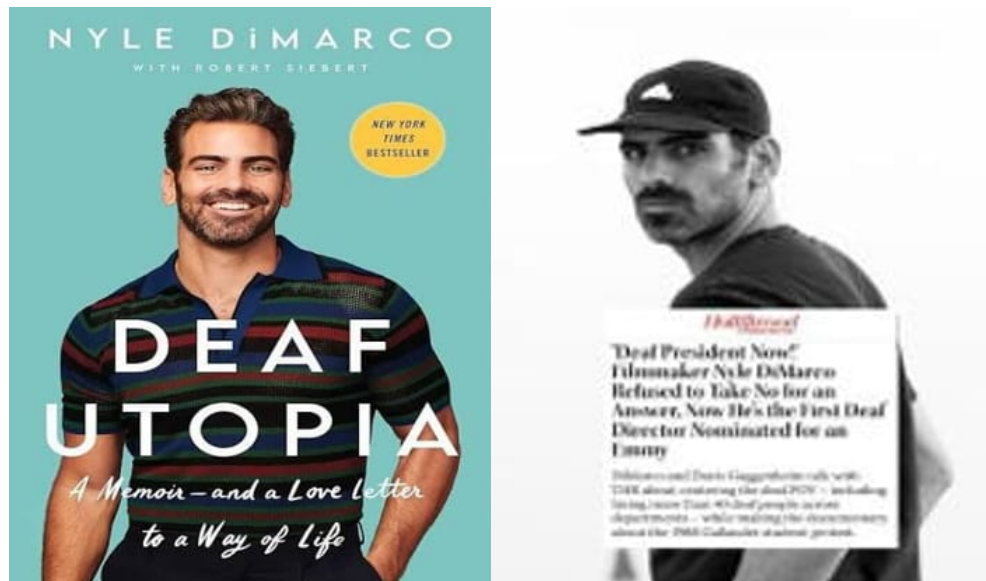


Figure 7.3: (left) Deaf Utopia: A Memoir and a Love Letter to a Way of Life by [Nyle DiMarco](#) (Author). Cr photo by: William Morrow. (right) I'm not just making films but I'm bringing my Deaf people with me! A little Deaf Empire in by Hollywood

ESSAY #7

Essay Prompt: Deaf Representation, Advocacy, and the Impact of Modern Deaf Leaders

Write a **500–700-word essay** examining the contributions of **one modern Deaf leader and ad-vocate** from the following individuals:

- **Marlee Matlin** – Deaf actress and activist who broke barriers in Hollywood and became the first Deaf person to win an Academy Award for acting.
- **Troy Kotsur** – Deaf actor and performer who became the first Deaf male actor to win an Academy Award and expanded authentic Deaf representation in film and theater.
- **Nyle DiMarco** – Deaf actor, model, producer, and activist who uses media to promote Deaf culture, American Sign Language (ASL), and accessibility.
- **In your essay, address the following:**
 - Identify the individual you selected and explain **why you chose this person**.
 - Describe their background, accomplishments, and contributions to entertainment, media, or Deaf advocacy.
 - Explain how this individual has helped promote **Deaf culture, Deaf identity, ASL, ac-cessibility, and representation**.
 - Discuss how their work has influenced public understanding of Deaf people and chal-lenged stereotypes about Deaf individuals.
 - Compare the contributions of your chosen individual with the earlier Deaf pioneers stud-ied in this course (Andrew Foster, William “Dummy” Hoy, and Neila Zabel Willhite).
 - Explain similarities and differences between past and present Deaf leaders, including how their work expanded opportunities for Deaf people in education, sports, aviation, enter-tainment, and society.
 - Reflect on why Deaf representation and leadership continue to be important today.

Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of how Deaf individuals have shaped history, promoted cultural pride, and created greater opportunities for future generations. Use **specific ex-amples from course materials** and include **proper citations** for all sources used.

Requirements:

- Length: **500–700 words**
- Include an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.

- Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Include citations and a reference list using the required citation format.

8: Technology, Accessibility, and Communication in the Deaf Community

Deaf culture is a contentious issue for hearing people as a concept, but it is living life for the deaf and hard of hearing today. The formation of modern American deaf culture first started with the foundation of deaf schools. These places had given deaf people the structure that was previously denied by them for the first time. For many deaf people at the time, this was the first time they had seen another deaf person, much less actually met them. Couple this with the lack of or the minimum of hearing influence in deaf educational institutions, then deaf people can craft their own identity outside of hearing communities and hearing culture.

The Deaf community has played a significant role in the development and adoption of modern communication technologies, especially those that emphasize visual communication and social connection. Because Deaf individuals rely heavily on visual forms of communication, many technologies that support video, texting, and online communication have become valuable tools for maintaining relationships and building community. Devices such as video relay services, smartphones, and social media platforms have expanded access to communication through ASL and visual interaction. Historically, Deaf individuals were among the early adopters of technologies that allowed them to communicate more independently and overcome barriers created by voice-based communication systems. These innovations demonstrate how Deaf people have contributed to technological development while promoting accessibility and inclusion for broader society.

Teletypes, commonly known as TTY (teletypewriters) or TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf), revolutionized communication for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals by allowing typed conversations over telephone lines. Introduced in the 1960s, TTY technology provided greater independence by enabling Deaf users to communicate directly with one another and with hearing individuals who also had access to a TTY device or relay operator. Although smartphones, text messaging, Video Relay Service (VRS), and internet-based communication have largely replaced TTYs, they continue to serve as important communication tools in some rural areas and locations with limited internet access. TTY technology remains an important milestone in the history of accessible communication and laid the foundation for many of today's telecommunications services.

Video Relay Service (VRS) is a telecommunications service that allows Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with hearing individuals through a qualified sign language interpreter. Using a videophone, computer, tablet, or smartphone, the Deaf caller signs to the interpreter, who voices the message to the hearing person and signs the response back in real time. Compared with older TTY technology, VRS provides faster, more natural communication because it allows users to communicate directly in their primary language—ASL—rather than through typed text. Early VRS systems used existing telephone and broadband networks, making the technology easier to integrate into existing telecommunications infrastructure. Today, high-speed internet and mobile devices have made VRS widely available, significantly improving accessibility, independence, and equal communication opportunities for the Deaf community.

Video Relay Service (VRS), videophones, video conferencing platforms, and smartphone technology have transformed communication for many Deaf individuals by allowing conversations to take place in American Sign Language (ASL) through live video. These technologies provide greater independence by enabling Deaf users to communicate directly with hearing individuals through qualified ASL interpreters. The widespread use of smartphones and tablets has also influenced everyday signing, as many people communicate while holding a device in one hand. As a result, some signs and signing styles have adapted in informal settings to accommodate one-handed communication, illustrating that ASL, like all living languages, continues to evolve alongside advances in technology and changing communication needs.

Hearing aids and other assistive listening technologies are designed to amplify sound and improve access to spoken communication for many people who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, these devices do not restore normal hearing, and the benefits vary depending on an individual's type and degree of hearing loss. Within the Deaf community, perspectives on hearing aids are diverse. Some Deaf individuals choose to use hearing technology to access spoken language, while others primarily use American Sign Language (ASL) and view deafness as a cultural and linguistic identity rather than a disability. Respecting these different perspectives is an important part of understanding Deaf culture and recognizing that communication preferences are personal choices. Understanding these diverse perspectives is essential for respecting individual choices and recognizing Deaf culture as a linguistic and cultural community rather than solely a medical condition. The most controversial aspect of deaf culture is the development of cochlear implants. These implants are designed to directly wire into the auditory nerves and allow the person to hear. Many among the deaf view this with disdain, even more than hearing aids, describing it as a cultural genocide. As it is an entire community noted for its inability to hear, anything that disrupts that can threaten its existence.

Overall, deafness is viewed not as a curse, but as a way of life, as a mode of existence. In very much the same way that the hearing views their ability to hear as nothing more than a fact, the deaf view their inability to hear as a part of themselves. As such, the idea of getting cochlear implants is not seen as fixing a part of them that was broken, but as an unnecessary medical procedure performed to fix what was not broken. These hearing surgeries are not done to improve the livelihoods and quality of living for the deaf, but to placate the sensitive tendencies of the hearing. For the hearing, the best way to view it was as if plastic surgery procedures for everything from cheek fillers to leg lengthening deliberately destroyed a unique and isolated culture. Those that have the cochlear surgeries performed are either children who are too young to advocate for themselves or lack the authority to do so, or those who become deaf later in life and seek to regain their hearing ability.

Essay #8

Essay Prompt: Technology, Accessibility, and Communication in the Deaf Community

Write a 500–700-word essay examining how technological innovations have transformed communication for the Deaf community and improved accessibility for both Deaf and hearing individuals.

In your essay, address the following:

- Explain how advances in communication technology have changed the lives of Deaf individuals.
- Describe the purpose and impact of hearing aids and discuss why perspectives on hearing technology differ within the Deaf community.
- Explain the development and significance of Teletypes (TTY) and how they expanded communication opportunities before the widespread use of the internet.
- Describe how Video Relay Service (VRS) and modern video communication technologies have improved communication through American Sign Language (ASL).
- Discuss how smartphones, video conferencing, and other modern technologies continue to influence communication and accessibility.
- Analyze how these technologies have benefited both the Deaf and hearing communities, including improving communication, increasing accessibility, promoting inclusion, and expanding equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and emergency services.
- Reflect on how future technologies may continue to improve communication and accessibility for people of all hearing abilities.

Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between technology, accessibility, and Deaf culture. Use specific examples from the course materials to support your discussion and include proper citations for all sources used.

Requirements

- Length: 500–700 words
- Include an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.
- Use complete sentences, organized paragraphs, and appropriate academic writing. Support your ideas with examples from the course materials.
- Include in-text citations and a reference list using the required citation format.

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9: American Sign Language in a Global Context

American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary sign language used in the United States and much of English-speaking Canada. Although ASL has influenced Deaf communities in some other countries, sign languages are not universal. Each nation or region often has its own sign language, shaped by its unique history, educational systems, and Deaf culture. For example, the United States and the United Kingdom both primarily use English as their spoken language, yet they have different sign languages—American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL). These languages developed independently, have different grammatical structures and vocabularies, and are generally not mutually intelligible. Today, the internet and social media are increasing global interaction among Deaf communities, making it easier to learn about other sign languages and cultures while preserving each language's unique identity.

While the internet has increased communication among Deaf communities worldwide, the spread of American Sign Language (ASL) has also influenced the development and survival of other sign languages. Beginning in the nineteenth century, American missionaries and Deaf educators introduced ASL-based education systems to various regions, creating new opportunities for Deaf individuals but sometimes contributing to the decline of existing indigenous sign languages. For example, Filipino Sign Language and Jamaican Sign Language have been influenced by ASL through educational programs and historical connections. In some communities, these influences have created concerns about language loss and cultural identity. Like the experiences of Indigenous sign languages in North America, traditional sign languages may become less commonly used as younger generations adopt more widely recognized systems. Efforts by Deaf organizations and governments continue to support the preservation and revitalization of indigenous sign languages as important parts of Deaf history, culture, and identity.

The international influence of American Sign Language (ASL) demonstrates how sign languages continue to evolve through migration, education, and global communication. Although ASL originated in the United States through influences from French Sign Language (LSF) and early Deaf education, it has spread to many countries through missionary work, teacher training programs, and Deaf community connections. One example is the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), where Ivorian Sign Language (LSCI) developed with strong connections to French Sign Language but has also experienced significant influence from ASL through international Deaf education networks. In some regions, ASL has functioned as a common communication system among Deaf individuals from different countries, sometimes serving as a Deaf “lingua franca.” However, the increased use of ASL can also create challenges for preserving local sign languages and protecting Deaf cultural identities. The global history of ASL highlights both the power of shared communication and the importance of maintaining linguistic diversity within Deaf communities worldwide. Historically, the primary ways American Sign Language (ASL) spread internationally were through Deaf schools, educators, and missionaries who introduced ASL-based educational systems to Deaf communities around the world. These efforts created greater access to formal education and helped establish modern Deaf communities in many regions. However, the development of the internet and the widespread adoption of the World Wide Web have transformed how Deaf people communicate, share information, and build connections across national borders. Digital platforms, social media, video communication, and online ASL resources have allowed Deaf individuals to interact globally without depending solely on local institutions or in-person networks.

The internet has also reduced many communication barriers between Deaf and hearing communities. Through technologies such as video calls, captioning services, automatic speech recognition, and online translation tools, Deaf individuals can participate more easily in education, employment, social activities, and public discussions. These advancements allow many Deaf people to communicate with hearing individuals without always needing a shared sign language or an interpreter. At the same time, online Deaf communities have strengthened cultural identity by providing spaces where ASL users and other sign language communities can preserve language, share experiences, and advocate for accessibility. The internet represents a major turning point in Deaf history, connecting communities worldwide while continuing to shape the evolution of sign languages and Deaf culture.

As technology continues to transform communication within Deaf communities, accessibility tools such as closed captioning have become an important bridge between Deaf and hearing individuals. Closed captioning is the process of displaying written text that corresponds with the spoken audio, sound effects, and other important information presented in videos, television programs, and online media. Although captioning was not originally created specifically for Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, its development eventually became one of the most important accessibility tools for improving media access.

The early foundations of captioning can be traced to the silent film era, when filmmakers used written text between scenes to provide dialogue and context for audiences. These captions also made films easier to distribute internationally because written language could be translated for different audiences. When synchronized sound became common in film, captions became less common because audiences could rely on spoken dialogue and audio cues. For many years, captioning was viewed as

unnecessary or as an additional expense rather than an essential accessibility feature.

During the twentieth century, Deaf advocates pushed for greater access to television, film, and educational materials, leading to the development and expansion of closed captioning technology. Unlike open captions, which are always visible, closed captions can be turned on or off by the viewer, providing greater flexibility. Captioning allowed Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to access information that had previously depended primarily on sound. This advancement became especially important as television, streaming services, and online video platforms became central forms of communication and entertainment.

Although closed captioning was originally designed to support Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, its benefits have extended far beyond the Deaf community. Students learning to read, individuals learning English as an additional language, and viewers in noisy or quiet environments have all benefited from captioned media. Research has shown that captions can support literacy development, vocabulary growth, and language learning, making captioning a valuable educational tool.

The development of closed captioning reflects a broader pattern in Deaf history: technologies created to increase accessibility often benefit society. Like Video Relay Service (VRS), smartphones, and internet-based communication, captioning demonstrates how Deaf advocacy has influenced technological innovation. As digital media continues to expand, captioning remains an essential resource that promotes inclusion, equal access, and communication for both Deaf and hearing communities.

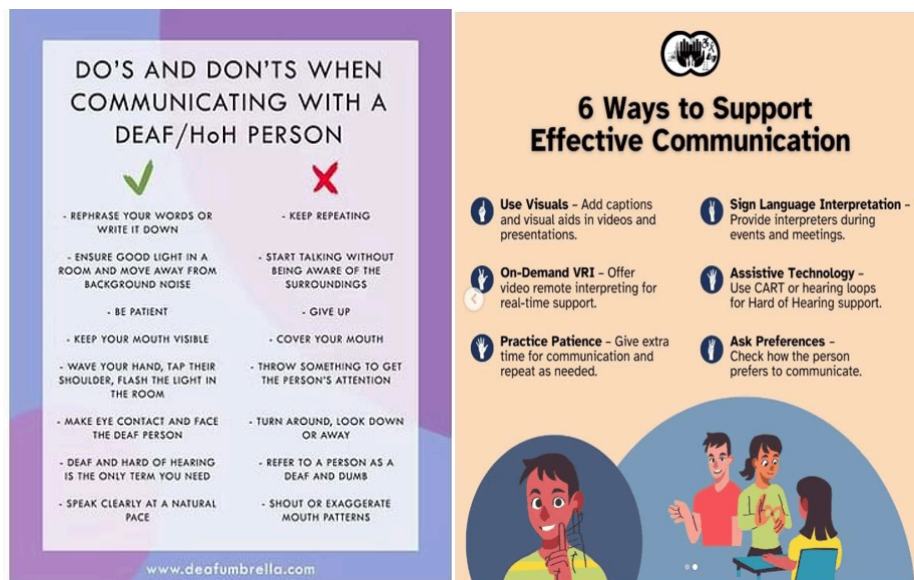


Figure 9.1: (left) Deaf Umbrella and (right) National Deaf Awareness

ESSAY #9

Essay Prompt: The Internet, ASL, and the Changing Landscape of Global Deaf Communication

Write a 500–700-word essay examining how the internet and modern communication technologies have transformed communication, accessibility, and cultural connections within Deaf communities worldwide.

In your essay, address the following:

- Explain how the internet has changed communication among Deaf individuals and expanded connections between Deaf communities across the world.
- Discuss how American Sign Language (ASL) has spread internationally through Deaf schools, educators, missionaries, and digital communication.
- Analyze the benefits and challenges of ASL's global influence, including its impact on the preservation of indigenous and regional sign languages.
- Explain the importance of digital communication tools such as video calls, social media, online ASL resources, and other

internet-based technologies in supporting Deaf culture and language.

- Describe the history and purpose of closed captioning and explain how it has improved accessibility for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.
- Discuss how captioning and other accessibility technologies have benefited the hearing community, including students, language learners, and individuals who rely on visual information.
- Reflect on how technology has influenced the relationship between Deaf and hearing communities and how future innovations may continue to improve communication access.

Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between technology, language, accessibility, and Deaf culture. Use specific examples from course materials and include proper citations for all sources used.

Requirements:

- Length: 500–700 words
- Include an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Use complete sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Include in-text citations and a reference list using the required citation format.

10: Final Essay - The History, Culture, and Impact of American Sign Language

Final Essay: Reflection on Deaf History, Culture, and Society

For the final assignment, you will write a **700–900-word** essay reflecting on one topic from this course that you found interesting, meaningful, or new to your understanding. Your essay should demonstrate your ability to connect what you learned about American Sign Language, Deaf history, Deaf culture, and the Deaf community to broader ideas about society, diversity, and cultural awareness.

In your essay, address the following questions:

- Identify one topic, event, person, or concept from the course that was interesting, surprising, or new for you to learn about. Explain why you selected this topic.
- Describe the important historical, cultural, or social information you learned about this topic.
- Explain how this topic has influenced the Deaf community, American Sign Language, or the experiences of Deaf individuals.
- Discuss how learning about Deaf history and culture can help society better understand and respect different communities.
- Explain how society can learn from past experiences, including challenges related to discrimination, accessibility, language rights, and inclusion.
- Reflect on why it is important to learn about the histories and cultures of people whose experiences may be different from our own.
- Discuss how knowledge of other cultures and histories can help create a more respectful, inclusive, and understanding society.

Your essay should go beyond summarizing information. Use this assignment as an opportunity to reflect on how learning about Deaf culture and history has influenced your perspective. Consider how the experiences of the Deaf community connect to larger issues such as equality, communication access, representation, and human rights.

Requirements

Length: 700–900 words

Include an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.

Use specific examples from the ASL 131 workbook, course materials, and class discussions. Include proper citations for information obtained from course materials or outside sources. Include a reference page using the required citation format.

Reflection Goal

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that learning a language also means learning about the people, history, and culture connected to that language. Understanding Deaf history allows us to recognize past challenges, appreciate the achievements of Deaf individuals, and consider how we can continue working toward a more accessible and inclusive society.

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5: *The American School for the Deaf- Expanding Educational Opportunities*

educational pioneer

4: *Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet - A Pioneer of Deaf Education in America*

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2: *Martha's Vineyard Sign Language- A Foundation in Deaf Community and Language Development*

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10: *Final Essay - The History, Culture, and Impact of American Sign 45 Language*

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7: *Deaf Representation, Advocacy, and the Impact of Modern Deaf Leaders*

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9: *American Sign Language in a Global Context*

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4: *Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet - A Pioneer of Deaf Education in America*

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8: *Technology, Accessibility, and Communication in the Deaf Community*

hearing community

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1: *The Beginning of American Sign Language in America*

history

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10: *Final Essay - The History, Culture, and Impact of American Sign 45 Language*
6: *Notable Americans Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

indigenous sign languages

3: *Plains Indian Hand Talk - Indigenous Sign Communication in North 16 America*

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2: *Martha's Vineyard Sign Language- A Foundation in Deaf Community and Language Development*
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TTY

*8: Technology, Accessibility, and
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V

Video Relay Service

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visual communication

*8: Technology, Accessibility, and
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