

The DVD

Before we begin you should meet Donna, our model. She was born hearing from Deaf parents. Donna became deaf at age three. She attended regular public school until age 10, and Deaf school thereafter.

Donna now lives in Northern California. She signs very clearly, but maybe not exactly how the Deaf people in your neighborhood sign. Like any language, Sign has regional differences in vocabulary and accents. In addition, there are subtle differences from person to person. As well, many signs have one handed versions. Everyone has a different style so we need to be flexible.

While there are regional and personal variations of signs, Donna's style is a good starting point. Copy Donna's signs as precisely as possible. Others will likely understand if you sign like Donna. Your challenge will be to understand other people's deviations of Donna's signs. To understand a deviation, one must first understand the norm. Consider Donna the norm for now, and slowly shift to match your environment.

The first step in learning any new language is acquiring vocabulary. That's what the DVD is for. It has five sections.

1. Alphabet
2. Numbers
3. Vocabulary
4. Messages
5. Singing Faces

The alphabet and numbers are self explanatory. The vocabulary video demonstrates each sign of the book in the same order as the book. Donna performs the signs at a comfortable pace so you can see them clearly. Duplicate her actions. This is how we learn language. We copy others.

Our goal in using the vocabulary segment is twofold:

1. **Produce the signs.** Begin with the sound on so you can hear what each sign means. Your DVD remote should have a button that replays whatever Donna's doing at the moment. Use it freely. Take a good look. Be as precise as possible when copying her signs.
2. **Know what each sign means.** Turn the volume off when you feel comfortable producing the signs. With the sound off you have electronic flashcards, a valuable tool. The purpose here is to remember the meaning of each sign. Hit the pause button if you need time to think. The sound off is your goal.

Each sign is given a one word English equivalent, which may not convey the full meaning. The full meanings are found below the illustrations in the book which can also work as flashcards. Place a blank paper over the printed page and move it up or down to name synonyms for signs or signs for synonyms.

The message video has Donna expressing short messages using the vocabulary of the book. By viewing all the messages you'll see most of the signs contained in the book numerous times. Each message is followed by an English translation.

Donna expresses each message in real time, as if in natural conversation. She might be happy, angry, sleepy or sad, or quizzically nervous because she was bad. Whatever her demeanor, she signs as if to a person who fully knows and understands Sign. She makes no allowance for you, the beginner.

There are two voice overs to help you as Donna goes along her way. The first is the Sign voice over. It states each sign in passing with an English equivalent, and ignores any meaning on the face and body. As such, the Sign voice over doesn't always convey the full meaning of the message. Indeed, the Sign voice over sometimes contradicts the meaning of the message.

The second voice over reads the English translation that follows each message. The English translation takes into account the full meaning of each message, including the facial, body and

emotional expressions. The translations are English perspectives on the messages' full meaning.

While the English voice overs are true translations, they're oftentimes subjective. The context surrounding each message is largely implied because they're all short messages. We're not privy to the conversations' history, or their context. To that extent, any translation is subjective.

An area of high subjectivity is time. We'll see that ASL doesn't conjugate the verb. Whether a verb refers to the past, present or future depends on the surrounding conversation, which is unknown to us. The translations of the messages are often arbitrary with respect to time. See page 67 for more on this.

The messages and their translations show the differences between ASL and English. Feel the differences. There are rules of ASL usage that occupy big books, but we needn't concern ourselves with all of these. We'll keep it simple. That's how we learned our first language.

That said, notice three things about ASL.

- It doesn't use the verb "to be." This includes am, is, are or were.
- ASL doesn't use the articles, "the, a and an."
- ASL is a very context sensitive language, meaning that items already in the conversation don't need to be reintroduced. For this reason the Sign versions of these messages often seem abbreviated, lacking meaning. In fact, they have meaning within the context of the conversation that we are not privy to.

One last thing. The sign *point* has many meanings, one of which is a pronoun. If it's clearly a pronoun, it'll be voiced as such. It'll be voiced as "point" if it's something else. What else can it be? You be the judge.

Our goal in using the message segment is twofold:

1. **Produce each message.** Look at the big picture. The raised eyebrow, the body shift, the glance sideways, the look of wonderment. Notice the forcefulness, direction and speed of the signs. There's a lot to notice. Make use of the replay function. Take a good look. Copy as much as possible. It all has meaning.
2. **Understand the full meaning of each message.** Turn the sound off. Translate each message into proper English. It needn't be the one given, for these are merely subjective translations. Use the pause button if you need time to think. These are flashcards. The sound off is your goal.

The script for the messages is at the rear of the book. It's included in the book, but not intended to be read while viewing the DVD. The DVD stands on its own. Indeed, the script is interesting to read without the DVD. It gives you time to stop and think about how these two languages are different. Each message speaks volumes about their differences. The messages are in no particular order. Poke around.

The last video on the DVD is "Singing Faces." There's no voice over because the faces say it all. They express happiness, sadness, disappointment, anger, surprise and much more; all without vocabulary. They're interesting, but don't just watch. Do as Donna does. These faces communicate. Make them your faces.