

Mime As Sign

Sign is a visual language that incorporates aspects of acting. Our face, posture and eye gaze convey a great deal of meaning. It's not only hand sign language, it's full body language.

For example, if you relate a conversation between two people, you could sign *he said – she said*, but it's more animated and interesting if you role play each person, and sign as if you are him and her. Shift your body slightly to indicate who you're representing. Including your body in the message makes things more clear and interesting than *he said – she said*.

One aspect of acting used in Sign is mime. For example, we can shake our heads in lieu of signing *not* to negate any statement. We all know what the shaking head means, and it's done without vocabulary. That's what mime is, communication without vocabulary.

It's much easier to mime yourself than others because you know yourself. Over time, you'll be able to mime others by recognizing their qualities within yourself. Once you've tapped into this you can let it flow through your body more easily. A raised eyebrow, a sneer, a shoulder steeply angled can have a great deal of meaning. It's pure animation, stemming from our inner spirit, adding life, charm and excitement to the conversation. Let it flow.

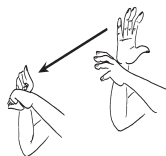
We can mime animals. Be the dog as it wriggles with excitement, smiling broadly at its returning master. Be the cat as it cleans itself contentedly from head to foot. Be the mouse as it cowers at the approaching cat. It's all fair game.

We can also mime nonliving things. We can mime the ocean, be it glass smooth, torrentially steep waved or anything in between. We can mime the weather on any given day. There's a furious storm on the DVD. We can mime the malfunction of our car engine or the rhythmic vibrations of a guitar string. We can mime the light bursting its way through the dark. We're limited only by our imagination.

Normally, a mime is first introduced by way of a sign. People will think you're crazy if you bark for no apparent reason. You must first explain yourself. The signed introduction may be short and cursory, just enough to give meaning to the mime. The story may also first be told in full, followed by the mime. Whether the story or the mime is emphasized depends on the storyteller and the story itself.

Be aware that mime is not Sign, and Sign is not mime. Mime is something unto itself, understood by people of all languages. More than anything, mime is art. It's an expression of the human spirit. Sign merely taps into this art form to add energy and sparkle to communication.

In addition to mime as acting, there are established signs that derive their meaning via mime. Be aware that these are not mime. They are actual signs, but their mime qualities make them easy to remember.



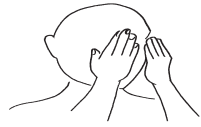
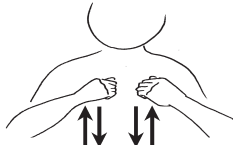
TAKE, SEIZE, CAPTURE, CATCH, GRAB

This is the natural act of grabbing something with both fists. As a mime, this sign is fluid. Sign it with one or two hands. Grabbing can be done in a number of different ways. Maybe **grab** it here and **put** it there. Feel free to **take** something with your thumb and index finger.



PRESENT, PROVIDE, OFFER, BESTOW

GIVE uses one hand, palm up, holding something and moving toward the receiver of the item, which may be the signer. Anyone can **give** something to anyone else with this sign by moving it in the appropriate direction.

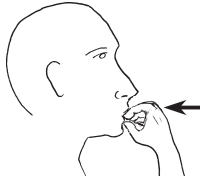


WASH, CLEANSE

BATHE, BATH

WASH FACE

The first sign is the official sign for *wash*, the second sign the official sign for *bath*. The third sign is a mime, indicating where the washing is taking place. It could be anywhere, on or off the body. The *washing* may be done with open palms, closed fists or any other way things are normally washed. How would you *wash dishes*?



**EAT, CONSUME, DINE, MUNCH,
SUP, SNACK, NOSH, FOOD, MEAL**

Notice that *eat, consume, dine, munch, sup* and *nosh* are all verbs. *Food* and *meal* are both nouns, and *snack* could be either. The verbs have only one motion, the action of putting something into the mouth. The nouns have two motions. Also, the nouns tend to have smaller movements than the verbs. This is a general rule for signs that could be either nouns or verbs. We'll call them noun/verb pairs, and we'll see more of them throughout the book.

There are other ways to eat. Use alternating hands in a rhythmic fashion to indicate a *feast that went on and on*. Bring the hand up to and past the mouth, in one fell swoop on the dominant side, to indicate something being **DEVoured**. One could eat with a spoon or fork in a number of different ways. Some people use chopsticks. Some people eat so fast and furious their cheeks bulge. Tell it like it is.

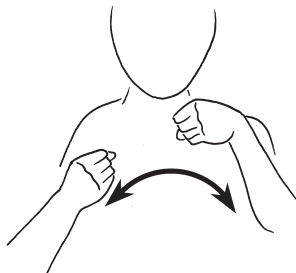


DRINK (*n/v*)

The (*n/v*) means that **drink** can be a noun or a verb. Remember, the verb **drink** has one motion, the act of drinking from a glass, and the noun **drink** has two motions.



DRUNK, INEBRIATED

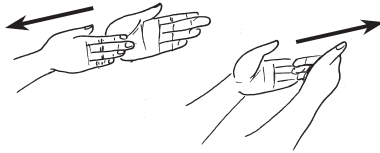


CAR, AUTOMOBILE



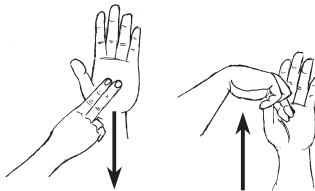
DRIVE

The hands, holding a steering wheel, move forward once. **Drive** is a verb with only one movement. **Car** is a noun that repeats the motion of turning the steering wheel back and forth.



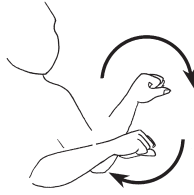
PAINTBRUSH, PAINT (n/v)

This is a cross between mime and a shape. The dominant flat hand is a shape that represents a paintbrush. The action is the mime.



PAINTBRUSH, PAINT (n/v)

Brushes come in various sizes. What about a 1/16 inch brush?



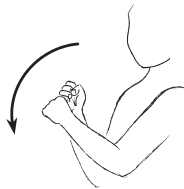
BICYCLE (*n/v*)

The fists are classifiers that represent the feet on the pedals. We'll discuss classifiers later. The mime is the action of pedaling. The noun *bicycle* is smaller, and the verb *bicycle* is done longer to show duration.

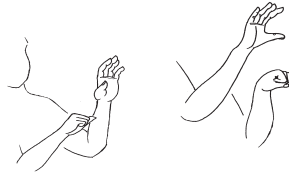


FISH, FISHING ROD

There are many ways to *fish*, and many ways to express it in Sign. *Reeling in a fish* would also work. Maybe you're a fly fisherman. This sign represents fishing and fishing rod, but not the fish itself.



BAT (*n/v*), **BASEBALL**



CLIMB, SCALE

Imagine you're climbing a ladder or a rock wall, and move your hands accordingly.

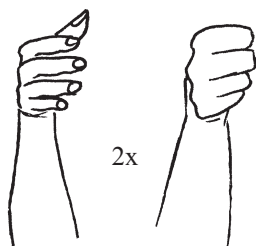


TELEPHONE (n/v), PHONE (n/v), CALL (n/v)

This sign can be directional to indicate who's calling whom. If I call you, I move the sign from my ear toward you. If you call me, I move the sign from my ear to my chest. There's no need to sign the pronouns *you* or *me*.



COMB (n/v), BRUSH (n/v)



MILK (*n/v*)

Pretend you're milking a cow.

We also have the noun/verbs **HAMMER, VACUUM, GOLF CLUB / GOLF, SWIM, MOWER / MOW, PLAYING CARDS / DEAL, PEN / WRITE, RAZOR / SHAVE, GUN / SHOOT, SHOVEL / DIG, AX / CHOP, KICK, EXERCISE, PUSH, PULL, CATCH, THROW**, and the verbs **MINCE, SEW, PARE, MASH**, to name a few more.

With a slight alteration one sign can represent a noun or a verb, meaning there are less signs to learn. The beauty is how large a vocabulary these noun/verbs represent, and more importantly, how easy they are to remember, because of their mime qualities.

By the way, don't mention mime signs to any ASL linguists. They'll shake their heads. They have long wordy names for these things, and mime is not one of them. Regardless, your purpose is to begin communicating in Sign with a limited vocabulary. You need to be resourceful and clever. If you're not sure of a sign, try miming it. Who knows? You might get your point across, and that's the point.