


# Deaf Culture

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**Key**

 = BSL video

 = Text (which can be viewed separately in a .pdf file and downloaded)

 = Comprehension Exercise

Formats	Texts
	<b>1. Introduction</b>
  	<b>2. British Sign Language and English</b>
	<b>3. British Sign Language and early Deaf education</b>
	<b>4. Deaf community</b>
	<b>5. British Sign Language and English structures</b>
 	<b>6. Active and passive sentences</b>

Exercises	
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Basic SVO sentence order in English</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Auxillary verb (one)</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Auxillary verb (two)</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Active and passive sentences</b>

Vocabulary
<b>Statistics relating to BSL</b>
<b>Comparing BSL structure (topic-comment) with English structure (SVO)</b>
<b>Brief history of BSL and early Deaf education</b>
<b>Deaf culture</b>

## 1. Introduction

- \* There are approximately 9 million people in the UK who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
- \* Deaf people in the UK use British Sign Language (BSL).
- \* BSL is a rich combination of hand gestures, facial expressions and body language.
- \* BSL is a natural language which has emerged from Deaf people's communication over centuries.
- \* It is not a representation of English on the hands or English with hand signs but a full language with its own vocabulary and grammar.
- \* Official statistics show that in 2016 there are 151,000 people who use BSL in the UK, and 87,000 of these are Deaf.
- \* BSL was recognised as an official language by the British government 18 March 2003.
- \* Sign languages differ across the world with each country having its own sign language.
- \* Because of Britain's colonial history, sign language in Australia (Auslan), New Zealand (NZ Sign Language), Malta (Maltese Sign Language) and in some parts of South Africa, India, and Canada are closely related to British Sign Language.

### 1.1 Comprehension exercise

Type: True or False

Questions

1. BSL is a representation of English on the hands. **(False)**
2. Auslan is the name given to Austrian Sign Language **(False)**
3. BSL is an official language in Britain. **(True)**
4. Sign languages are all the same across the world. **(False)**
5. Indian Sign Language is closely related to British Sign Language **(True)**

## 2. British Sign Language (BSL) and English

When students start learning sign language they sometimes think that BSL follows the same grammatical and sentence structure as English. This is not true. BSL sign order is different from English word order and BSL grammar is different from English grammar.

BSL follows a Topic Comment structure. This means that the topic is stated first and is followed by a comment about that topic. So for example, when asking someone's name, you sign:

NAME / YOUR / WHAT ?  
(What is your name?)

Or when asking a question, for example, if you want to know why someone did not come to your party yesterday, you sign:

PARTY / YESTERDAY / YOU NOT COME / WHY?  
(Why didn't you come to my party yesterday?)

Although BSL and English have different structures, they overlap in two areas:

finger spelling and some mouth patterns.

**Finger spelling** is the representation of the letters of English using a two-handed alphabet. It is used to spell English words when signing, when there is no sign equivalent for a word. It is also used for emphasis (to make something stand out), clarification, or when teaching or learning a sign language.

**Mouth patterns** are used with finger spelling to make the mouth pattern of the word that is being spelt, to make it clearer, for example, when finger spelling your name, you spell the letters and mouth your name at the same time. Some BSL signs consist only of one letter and adding the mouth pattern for the English word they represent clarifies the sign, for example the sign MOTHER is the letter M done with the mouth pattern for the word mother.

### 2.1 Comprehension exercise

Type: True or False  
Questions

1. BSL has the same grammatical structure as English. **(False)**
2. BSL follows a topic-comment structure. **(True)**
3. Some signs consist of only one letter and a corresponding mouth pattern. **(True)**
4. BSL and English overlap in two areas - fingerspelling and verbs. **(False)**
5. All English words have sign equivalents. **(False)**

### 3. British Sign Language (BSL) and early Deaf education

The first account of people using sign language in Britain dates from a wedding register in 1576 which describes how the deaf groom, Thomas Tyllsie, used signing instead of words to make his wedding vows.

Two writers recognised that signing was unrelated to English. John Bulwer's book *Chirologia* (1644) describes signs and gestures in use at the time and George Dalgarno's book *Didascalocophus or the Deaf and Dumb man's tutor* (1680) describes sign language and the two-handed manual alphabet.

Signing was also recognised as the means of communication with deaf people in court. In a case in 1786 where a deaf man was a witness, his sister served as the interpreter.

The first school for deaf children (Braidwood's Academy for the Deaf and Dumb) was opened by Thomas Braidwood in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1760. It was a school for deaf children from wealthy families. The school taught speech but also used BSL. It started with just one pupil but had twenty by 1780.

Braidwood's Academy moved to Hackney, London in 1784. Joseph Watson, who was Braidwood's nephew, worked at the school and later became headmaster of the London Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb which was established in Bermondsey in 1792. The new school was for deaf children from all social backgrounds.

#### 3.1 Comprehension exercise

Type: True or False  
Questions

1. The first account of people using sign language is a wedding register entry. **(True)**
2. Bulwer and Dalgarno believed that sign language was related to English. **(False)**
3. The first British deaf school opened in Scotland. **(True)**
4. The Braidwood school only used BSL to teach pupils. **(False)**
5. The Bermondsey school was for deaf pupils from wealthy families. **(False)**

## 4. Deaf Community

Many signing Deaf people do not see their deafness as something that needs to be cured. They do not consider themselves as disabled but members of a linguistic and cultural minority - the 'Deaf community'. They have a common experience of life and share beliefs, attitudes, norms and values. They have their own history and traditions.

The Deaf community also includes family members of Deaf people, sign language interpreters and people who work or socialise with Deaf people. A person is a member of the Deaf community if he or she self-identifies as a member of the Deaf community and if Deaf people accept that person as a member. Very often this acceptance is strongly linked to competence in sign language.

Deaf people around the world have their own local, national and international organisations. These include social, religious, educational, art or sports organisations. Deaf people regularly meet each other through these organisations to socialise and share information.

In Britain, the interests and rights of Deaf people are represented by the British Deaf association. They believe in equality, access and freedom of choice for Deaf people. You can find information and advice on their website: <http://www.bda.org.uk/>

### 4.1 Comprehension exercise

Type: True or False

Questions

1. Many Deaf people do not consider themselves as disabled. **(True)**
2. The Deaf community is a linguistic and cultural minority. **(True)**
3. The Deaf community does not include hearing people. **(False)**
4. The Deaf community uses many organisations to socialise and share information. **(True)**
5. The British Deaf Association gives advice to Deaf people. **(True)**

## Grammar and punctuation

### 5. British Sign Language and English structures

#### BSL

BSL usually follows a topic-comment structure.

For example, the question in English

‘What is your name?’ becomes:

‘YOUR NAME / WHAT?’

When describing BSL, if you want to say that BSL includes mouth patterns, you would sign

‘BSL MOUTH PATTERNS HAVE’

– the **topic** is BSL.

If you are talking about mouth patterns and want to say that they are included in BSL, you would sign

‘MOUTH PATTERNS BSL HAVE’

– the **topic** is mouth patterns.

#### English

The basic structure is subject – verb – object (SVO):

**subject:** who or what the sentence is about

– this can be more than one word (Paul, the teacher, all Deaf people, sign language)

**verb:** what the subject does or is

**object:** a person or thing that is affected by the action of the verb

– this can be more than one word

Subject	Verb	Object
Deaf people	use	sign language
BSL	is	a language

The auxiliary verb must be in the right number (**singular or plural**).

BSL **is** used in Britain. The auxiliary verb **to be** is **singular** because **BSL is singular**.

BSL qualifications **are** awarded by Signature. The auxiliary verb **to be** is **plural** because **BSL qualifications is plural**.



Verb	singular present	plural present	singular past	plural past
<b>to be</b>	<b>am</b> <b>is</b>	<b>are</b> <b>are</b>	<b>was</b> <b>was</b>	<b>were</b> <b>were</b>

### 5.1 Basic SVO sentence order in English

Type: Drag and Drop

Instructions: Match the subjects and objects with the verbs to make sentences that make sense.\*

Subject	Verb	Object
Deaf people	<b>use</b>	sign language
BSL	<b>became</b>	an official language in 2003
Thomas Braidwood	<b>opened</b>	the first deaf school in Scotland
Auslan	<b>is</b>	related to BSL
The Braidwood school	<b>used</b>	BSL in lessons
Some hearing people	<b>belong</b>	to the Deaf community
BSL and English	<b>follows</b>	in two areas
Acceptance in the Deaf community	<b>depends</b>	on competence in sign language
The BDA	<b>believes</b>	in equality and access for Deaf people
Sign languages	<b>differ</b>	across the world

\* Note: The correct answers are presented in the table (and in all following tables/lists) but when presented on-line these answers will be 'scrambled'.

## 5.2 Auxillary verb - exercise (one)

Type: Single choice check box

Instructions: Choose the correct auxiliary forms (singular or plural) for these sentences:

1. Sign language is / are used by Deaf people. **(is)**
2. BSL qualifications is / are awarded by Signature. **(are)**
3. BSL was / were recognised as an official language in 2003. **(was)**
4. Hearing people is / are accepted into the Deaf community if they can sign well. **(are)**
5. The first British deaf school was / were opened in 1760. **(was)**

## 5.3 Auxillary verb - exercise (two)

Type: Single choice check box

Instructions: Choose the correct auxiliary forms (present or past) for these sentences:

1. BSL **is / was** recognised as an official language in 2003. **(was)**
2. The first British deaf school **is / was** opened by Thomas Braidwood in 1760. **(was)**
3. Deaf pupils **are / were** taught in BSL and speech in the Braidwood school. **(were)**
4. The rights and interests of Deaf people **are / were** represented by the BDA. **(are)**
5. Official statistics show that BSL **is / was** used by 151,000 people in the UK. **(is)**

## 6. Active and Passive sentences

Look at the two sentences below:

*Deaf people **use** sign language.*

*Sign language **is used** by Deaf people.*

The first sentence is in the **active** voice. The subject of the sentence (Deaf people) does the action.

The second sentence is in the **passive** voice. The subject of the sentence (sign language) does **not** do the action.

To make a sentence into the passive voice, we use **to be** in front of the verb. In this case, **to be** does not have its literal meanings but is used as an auxiliary verb. This means that it 'helps' with the meaning of the verb. The auxiliary verb is followed by the **past participle** of the verb - the past form of the verb.

Passive sentences can be in the present or past tense.

The sentence **Sign language is used by Deaf people** is in the present tense because the auxiliary verb **to be** is in the present tense.

The sentence **Sign language was used in Braidwood's school** is in the past tense because the auxiliary verb **to be** is in the past tense.

Remember that some verbs are irregular in the past simple tense and do not have an **ed** form. You need to learn the past participle forms for all irregular verbs because sometimes they match the past simple form but at other times they are different:

Verb	Past Simple	(to be) + past participle
to teach	taught	is / are taught was / were taught
to write	wrote	is / are written was / were written

## 6.1 Active or passive sentences - exercise

Type: Single choice

Instructions: Are the sentences Active or Passive?

1. Thomas Tyllsie used signing instead of words to make his wedding vows. **(Active)**
2. Signing was recognised as the means of communication with deaf people in court. **(Passive)**
3. The first deaf school was opened by Thomas Braidwood. **(Passive)**
4. The school used BSL and speech to teach the pupils. **(Active)**
5. The pupils were taught in BSL and speech. **(Passive)**
6. The deaf school moved to London. **(Active)**
7. Watson produced wordless textbooks for deaf children. **(Active)**
8. Thomas Braidwood was helped by Joseph Watson. **(Passive)**
9. The Bermondsey school was for deaf children from all social backgrounds. **(Active)**
10. Watson became headmaster of the Bermondsey school. **(Active)**