

## MY ASL LEARNING JOURNEY

This is kind of long and my point in sharing this is to find out what others have experienced with their ASL learning journey. Plus I would like to find one or two people who would like to join my for shared ASL exercises.

### ME

I am a 76-year-old ASL learner – a golden oldie, senior citizen. Why am I learning ASL? I don't have a solid reason such as a deaf friend or family member. I enjoy learning, especially languages. And as a senior it's good to keep one's mind sharp. I am a dog trainer by profession (kind of retired) who teaches dog training in online courses.

I started to learn ASL in the mid-80s but got side-tracked by life (as always happens). I started to learn ASL about six times since then with not much forward progress. About six months ago, I started again and just kept going!

### LIFEPRINT.COM

I love learning from Dr. Bill Vicars free course! He is deaf and is a renowned PHD in Deaf Studies. I am currently on Lesson 20 of his ASL course (there are 45 lessons). His course is the curriculum for courses at many schools and colleges. I really enjoy how he presents vocabulary and question practices with each lesson's vocabulary. I know over 400 signs currently! (expressive learning) His lessons have quizzes – about 50 questions per quiz – half are recognition of individual signs on video, the other half recognition of signed questions or statements on video (receptive learning).

I realized that I am not very good at recognizing what's being said in ASL conversation. In other words, my receptive learning is far behind my expressive learning.

I watch a lot of TikTok and Reels videos by (usually) deaf signers or family of deaf people. Because they caption their videos or verbalize while signing, I don't get a chance to read their signs on my own. Also I noticed that I could recognize signs I know but, most of the time, could not put sentences together. I saw a video from a regular TikTok poster who is deaf (but verbalizes while she signs). In this particular video she explained that she's not signing in ASL in her videos and why. She said that because she wants to verbalize while signing (for her followers), she has to sign with English grammar/syntax and not with ASL grammar/syntax. Ah ha! Lightbulb moment for me – that's why I had been confused.

Dr. Bill does not teach proper ASL grammar explicitly but his sentence and question structure is correct. He models the correct structure and we learners just pick it up along the way. I wasn't consciously aware that I had learned that "on the sly". 😊

### CONVERSATIONS

I tried hard to find people to have casual ASL conversations with to build my receptive skills. I posted many times on this group that I would love to chat with others using webcam meeting software. I didn't get anyone who was able to set a time to meet. I may be a senior but I'm still working. I work from home at a variety of computer gigs. I don't hang out on the internet so could not do a "catch me on the fly" type of meet-up. I posted in my FB feed about my need for ASL conversation. I received an answer from a well-known professional in my field who has signed since she was 13 years old. We had a GREAT conversation! I learned that I can read what someone is signing, enough to get by. Yay! But oddly, that one conversation satisfied me as to the state of my abilities. It also created a real thirst for learning grammar and proper facial expressions. I no longer felt the urgency for conversations – heh, I can only talk about my dogs just so much. 😊

Another person on my feed suggested that I get a tutor from italki.com. She said her husband had great success in learning a language prior to their travel to another country. I tried it and I LOVE it. There was a very small number of ASL tutors on their site and only three or so of them were native deaf signers.

I chose one who is deaf – I chose him because he described his teaching ASL as bringing a picture of what you want the deaf person to see when you sign. I chose half-hour sessions for two reasons: One was the cost, the other was how hard it is for me to focus for a full hour. A half-hour lesson is \$9. I can afford that once a week.

Holy guacamole! Did I ever learn a TON in that first lesson. He had me sign a sentence that he wrote in English for me in the chat window. *Bring me water from the refrigerator.* My brain started searching for “bring”. I didn’t have that in my vocabulary. I contemplated what I could use – came up with “come with”. I created a signed sentence – COME ME WITH WATER FROM REF. My tutor jumped right in to point out that was an English sentence. He told me to think about the order of these words bring, water, refrigerator. To paint the picture for the deaf person, you would put REF first because that is what the deaf person will see first, then WATER because he’ll see that next. The finally BRING because that’s what he would do upon seeing the water. REF WATER BRING.

Boy, was I hooked after that! 😊

#### THE GRAMMAR QUEST

I read whatever articles I could find about ASL sentence structure, facial expressions, mouth morphemes, etc. I posted in this group asking for suggestions on the best grammar textbooks. No answers. I read what I could about textbooks, but there’s not much out there. I finally chose a textbook and purchased just the Study Guide for that textbook.

From there I was totally hooked on the exercises for learning to create sentences and had to buy the textbook for the full explanations. The Study Guide is a set of exercises that two people can do together. They are designed for practice in classes. The grammar pieces are broken down into small bites – you learn and practice one thing at a time. For example, the first lesson is how to set up the people, their pronouns, their locations in space so you can then sign a simple sentence about them.

An exercise might be ten of these setups. There is a second list of ten for the other student. You take turns in a class with Student A working a set-up from his list, then Student B from hers, and so on. I have been doing these exercises by myself. Boy! After 20 repetitions, you do have a good habit built of introducing the people you are talking about! So much so, that I started adding in facial expressions as I was practicing these sentences.

I am so blown away – I am really learning from these two books! Just as I do with dog training, break things down into small bits, work many solid repetitions, bring in other concepts gradually.

#### BOTTOM LINE

I would like to practice these exercises with one or two other people in meeting software so we can talk in English by writing in the chat window, yet sign our practice exercises to each other with our webcams.

No one is teaching anyone. We are both learners practicing ASL lesson exercises. You would not need to have the book or the study guide. With ClickMeeting I can put it on the screen for you.

#### Requirements:

- Have the drive to practice creating ASL structured sentences with good grammar.
- Ability to join a meeting – either ClickMeeting (my preference) or Zoom (if we have to).
- Ability to make (and keep) an appointment.

It's hard to express the boost in confidence I have from learning to create good sentences, use past tense, etc. These practices are making me truly ready to hold a conversation.

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