

Introduction to American Sign Language (ASL)

The redesigned ASL as a Second Language curriculum presents what students are expected to know, do, and understand in Grades 5 through 12. It provides a framework for teachers to engage students in learning experiences through which they can become proficient users of ASL, gaining new perspectives and engaging with Deaf communities.

Features of the ASL curriculum

Integration of components

The ASL curriculum represents an integrated approach to language acquisition. In this approach, the following components of language acquisition are viewed as interconnected rather than in isolation:

- ***Receptive and expressive communication skills and interacting*** — These essential competencies are the foundation of language acquisition. As they rarely exist in isolation in authentic communication contexts, they are integrated throughout the curriculum. Each element of the curriculum supports the simultaneous development of multiple competencies.
- ***Grammar*** — With a focus on the purposeful use of language to communicate meaning, the curriculum views grammatical instruction as playing a supportive role.
- ***Culture*** — Language is inextricably bound to culture. Culture is a vehicle for acquiring a deeper understanding of a given language, of others, and of ourselves. Authentic communication takes place in a cultural context, and language acquisition activities in the classroom must therefore be situated within such a context. As students explore ASL and the Deaf world, they simultaneously acquire both the language and an understanding of the many varieties of Deaf culture and the relationships between the two, contributing to their appreciation of other cultures as well as their own.
- ***Language-learning strategies*** — Language-learning strategies are seen as a vehicle for helping students succeed in their language acquisition journey and are integrated throughout the curriculum.

Flexible teaching and learning

The ASL curriculum allows for instructional flexibility. For example, the curriculum components can be combined in different ways to provide a diverse range of learning opportunities. Within each grade, there are multiple ways to combine Content, Curricular Competencies, and Big Ideas to create lessons, units, and learning experiences. The curriculum encourages the use of a range of approaches that support language instruction and acquisition.

Use of a wide variety of texts

The ASL curriculum encourages the use of a wide variety of text types. *Text* is a generic term referring to all forms of written, visual, and digital communication. Written and visual elements can also be combined (e.g., in dramatic presentations, graphic novels, films, web pages, advertisements). Teachers are encouraged to use a varied selection of grade-appropriate text types in their classrooms.

Design of the ASL curriculum

The ASL curriculum follows the same format as in all other areas of learning and is based on the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. Students learn through Content (Know), Curricular Competencies (Do), and Big Ideas (Understand).

- [Learn more about the curriculum model](#)

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas are generalizations and principles discovered through experiencing the Content and Curricular Competencies of the curriculum — the “Understand” component of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. Big Ideas represent the “aha!” and the “so what?” of the curriculum — the deeper learning.

From year to year, students discover new Big Ideas and also build on the Big Ideas from previous years. The example below illustrates how the curriculum grows with students and expands the scope and depth of learning as students progress through the grades.

Grade	5	7	9	11
Big Ideas	Communicating with intent helps us acquire a new language.	Communicating with intent helps us understand an increasing variety of messages.	Communicating with intent strengthens our understanding and acquisition of a new language.	Communicating with intent broadens our acquisition of a new language.

Curricular Competencies

Curricular Competencies are what students should be able to “Do” with their Content knowledge. Language acquisition is very process-driven, and “Doing” plays an important role. Through purposeful communication, learners develop competencies in Language Thinking, Communication, and Personal and Social Awareness, representing their ideas in ASL with confidence and fluency, and understanding the connections between language and culture.

Students also build on their Curricular Competencies from year to year. The example below illustrates how the curriculum grows with students and expands the scope and depth of learning.

Grade	5	7	9	11
Curricular Competencies	Recognize the relationship between common facial expressions and meaning	Recognize the relationship between common handshapes, and location of signs to make different meanings	Recognize the relationship between common handshapes, movement and location of signs to make different meanings	Recognize how choice of signs affects meaning

Content

Content is the knowledge students are expected to learn and apply through the Curricular Competencies. Content learning standards may support multiple Curricular Competencies.

Students build on their Content knowledge from year to year. Some Content learning standards appear over more than one year because they may take longer to fully acquire or they may support increasingly complex Curricular Competencies. When identical Content learning standards appear across multiple grades, elaborations further clarify how deeply the Content learning standard may be covered at each grade.

Elaborations

Elaborations have been provided (as hyperlinks) in many places throughout the curriculum. Elaborations offer additional clarification and support for teachers, including definitions, examples, and information regarding the depth and breadth to which topics should be covered at a given grade. Examples provided in the elaborations are not intended to be comprehensive lists of what must be covered in a given grade; they are simply examples. The examples below may be particularly useful to teachers who are new to teaching ASL.

Grade	8
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people
Elaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people: order used to describe people: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. gender 2. ethnicity/background 3. height 4. body type 5. eyes, hair, and other details such as clothing

Important considerations

Language of instruction

It is important that ASL be used as the language of instruction for the ASL curriculum. As ASL is a minority language in British Columbia, opportunities for students to use the language outside the classroom are likely to be limited. Research shows that increasing exposure to and use of the target language is essential to increasing proficiency. Therefore, both teachers and students are encouraged to use ASL at every opportunity.

Engaging with community

In language education, all aspects of learning are enriched when students engage with members of the target language community. Engaging with ASL communities, people, or experiences can be unique within local contexts. It may include, for example, inviting community members into the classroom (in person or virtually); making connections with other ASL classes and schools; attending festivals, films, concerts, plays, and other cultural and community events; frequenting stores, restaurants, and community centres where ASL is used; and interacting with the online ASL community through blogs and other forms of social media. Teachers are encouraged to provide a variety of these experiences for their students. Students, particularly in the upper grades, are also encouraged to seek and initiate engagement with Deaf communities, people, or experiences to help build their identity as ASL speakers and to foster opportunities to continue their acquisition of ASL after graduation.

First Peoples perspectives

The Ministry of Education is dedicated to ensuring that the cultures and contributions of First Peoples in British Columbia are reflected in all provincial curricula.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning have been affirmed within First Peoples societies to guide the teaching and learning of provincial curricula. Because these principles of learning represent an attempt to identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within particular First Peoples societies, it must be recognized that they do not capture the full reality of the approach used in any single First Peoples society.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning greatly influence the ASL curriculum and are woven throughout. They lend themselves well to second-language learning, as they promote experiential and reflexive learning, as well as self-advocacy and personal responsibility in learners. They help create classroom experiences based on the concepts of community, shared learning, and trust, all of which are vital to second-language acquisition.

To support accurate and respectful use of First Peoples content and perspectives in the classroom, teachers are encouraged to seek the advice and support of members of local First Peoples communities. As First Peoples communities are diverse in terms of language, culture, and available resources, each community will have its own unique protocol to gain support for integration of local knowledge and expertise. Permission for the use or translation of cultural materials or practices should be obtained through consultation with individuals, families, and other community members.

For more information, consult the Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Education website: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/welcome.htm