



British Sign Language (BSL) - An Introduction

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Introduction

Language can be defined as a system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other: any one of the systems of human language that are used and understood by a particular group of people. Source: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/language

BSL is a language, just like English, French, Arabic. It was given this status in England in 2003. It is about to become an official language of England, right now in 2022.



British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of over 87,000 Deaf people in the UK for whom English may be a second or third language.

There are actually around 150,000 people who can use BSL.

Source: <https://bda.org.uk/help-resources/>

There are different sign languages used in different countries. E.g., ASL is American Sign Language, Gambia has its own sign language.

BSL is used all over Britain including Northern Ireland. However, there are many regional differences, so a sign in London, could be different to a sign in York. This could be compared to regional differences in spoken English such as accents or different words/phrases used in different parts of Britain.



Signs do use hands; in particular handshapes, that use particular movements, in a particular place.

However, facial expression is also very important when using BSL as is the shape your mouth makes when you speak some of the words (lip patterns).

Teach yourself how to sign

If you would like to watch BSL videos, YouTube has many. BUT, be careful that they are BSL and not ASL (American Sign Language). Also, they may not be produced by someone not properly qualified in BSL.

There are official recognised qualifications that you can take in BSL. Level 1 being the most basic, Level 6 being the most advanced.

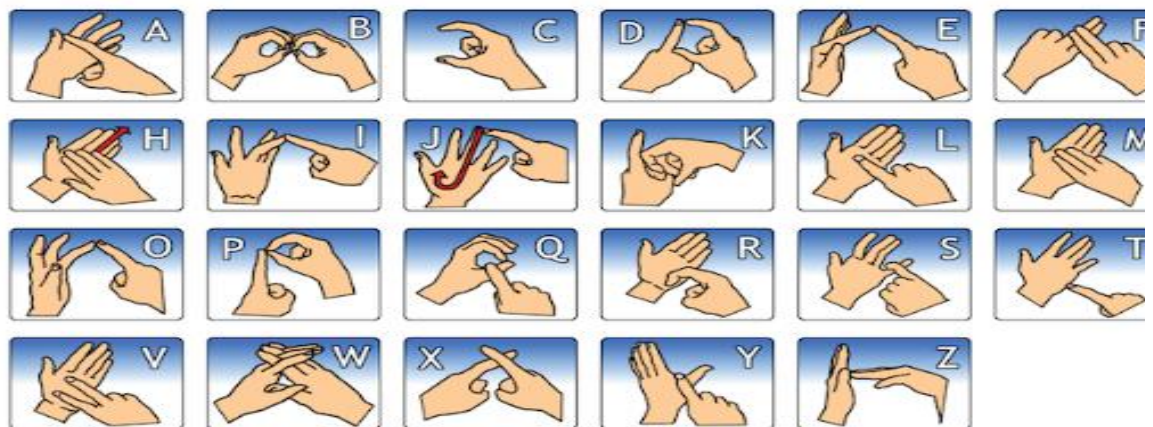
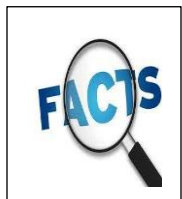
Deaf people really appreciate it when someone learns their language, so however little or much you do learn is beneficial.

There are two recognised examining bodies – links

[Institute of British Sign Language | Promoting Quality in British Sign Language \(ibsl.org.uk\)](http://www.ipsl.org.uk)

[British Sign Language \(BSL\) awarding body: Signature](http://www.bsl.org.uk)

There is a BSL alphabet. With this you can finger spell words. This is an important aspect of BSL. However, so are individual signs for elements such as nouns (things), verbs (doing words) etc.



There is a left handed version available here:

<https://www.british-sign.co.uk/left-handed-signing/>

BSL does not use a sign for every English word. Also, the signs go together in a different order than spoken English. e.g. In English we might ask 'What is your name?'. In BSL we would sign YOU-NAME-WHAT.



www.redbridgeserc.org



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Videos

If you would like to see a short video (about 10 minutes) of the BSL alphabet, please look on this YouTube link. There are lots of interesting SEND videos on this channel, all created by the experts working within SEaTSS.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYvQ3ULh0WWJAYVzcV7xZoQ/playlists>

BSL or Makaton

There is a form of communication that uses BSL signs, as well as having signs for English words, and is produced in English word order. This is called Sign Supported English (SSE). This is not true BSL, but many deaf people do use it but some really don't like it.

Makaton is a communication system that uses signs but is not a language. It is a very useful way for some non-verbal people to communicate. Some of the signs are the same as BSL, but not all of them.

Website links

Here are some links for finding some BSL signs. There are apps for these as well.



<https://www.spreadthesign.com/en.gb/search/>



<https://www.signbsl.com/>

S.E.a.T.S.S are a very large **Specialist Advisory Team based in East London.**

You have a **YouTube** Channel with over 70 videos on:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/RedbridgeSEATSS/playlists>

Please subscribe to see our latest videos as they are updated.

We also have a large **FREE resource website**

www.redbridgeserc.org

We run training across the UK and abroad- if you would like us to come and deliver training for you, please contact us at seatsstraining@redbridge.gov.uk

