

## FAQ for American Sign Language Learning Outcomes

### How do the Essential and Non-Essential Learning Outcomes take performance-level variation into account?

- There is flexibility in meeting the Learning Outcomes based on time and intensity of programs.
- The set of Non-Essential Learning Outcomes in each course encourages learners to use language at the next higher level some of the time. By the end of the next course, students should be able to demonstrate that they can meet these same expectations, now Essential Learning Outcomes, most of the time.
- Basing courses on familiar topics and contexts, as well as incorporating a lot of repetition and practice with linguistic content and culturally appropriate ways of interacting into instruction, will enable students in beginning courses (Novice range) to meet a few of the Learning Outcomes in the Intermediate range.
- Students in the Intermediate range, by definition, can also perform a few tasks in the Advanced range, again with lots of repetition and practice. For example, it is quite common for programs to introduce students to description and narration in the past as early as Beginning Course II, yet this is an Advanced competency. Students can perform such a task in guided, controlled situations in familiar contexts with familiar topics.
- Because of the exponential rather than arithmetic manner in which language competence develops, students in the Intermediate range will not be able to sustain description and narration in the past across a broad range of contexts and topics. Hence, they are not yet proficient.

### Useful Resources

- [The Standards for Learning American Sign Language](#)
- [American Teachers' Sign Language Teachers Association](#)
- [ASLPI Proficiency Levels](#)
- The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [Performance Descriptors](#)
- The ACTFL [Proficiency Guidelines](#) (Click on the link on the right side of the page.)
- The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do [Benchmarks](#) (Access free at bottom of the page.)

### How do the Learning Outcomes differ by Mode?

- The Learning Outcomes are differentiated based on the Modes.
- Students can usually understand (Interpretive Mode) more than they can produce on their own (Presentational Mode).
- With frequent opportunities to interact with others, students become adept in sharing information and opinions, as well as in negotiating meaning (Interpersonal Mode).
- In consultation with the ASLPI Proficiency Levels, the Performance Descriptors and the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Benchmarks, therefore, the Learning Outcomes in the Presentational Mode were adjusted down to reflect how language develops.

### Useful Resources

- The [Executive Summary](#) of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, p. 5, Communication

- [ASLPI Proficiency Levels](#)
- The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [Performance Descriptors](#)
- The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do [Benchmarks](#) (Access free at bottom of the page.)

### **How is culture addressed in the Learning Outcomes?**

- Culture is interwoven into each of the Modes of Communication. Through ASL, students examine the relationship among products, practices, and perspectives to demonstrate an understanding of American Deaf culture. Students also enhance their understanding by making cultural comparisons and developing cultural insights. Communicating about what people believe, what they do, and what they use or make enables learners to understand authentic cultural contexts which define acceptable language and behavior. For example, one might be quite adept at signs, fingerspelling, and non-manuals, but fail to obtain and sustain someone's attention by tapping the person's arm first or making adequate eye contact throughout the communication.
- Integration across the modes leads to inextricable linkages between language and culture. Language always occurs in a cultural context.
- Students need many guided opportunities to practice language in order to perform in culturally appropriate ways. They learn the extent and limits so as not to overgeneralize. As with language learning, this is a gradual process.
- It is beyond the scope of the Learning Outcomes to list out specific products, practices, and perspectives of American Deaf culture. These will be predicated on the topics, themes, and contexts addressed in a given program. The Alignment Guides and the Standards for Learning American Sign Language provide many suggested ways to integrate language and culture.

### Useful resources

- [The Standards for Learning American Sign Language](#) have examples on how to integrate language and culture across the Modes.
- Pages 12-15 of [Ohio's New Learning Standards: World Languages Grades 9-12](#) have additional suggestions on how to integrate language and culture.

### **How can all institutions use the same Learning Outcomes when the purpose of programs may differ?**

- It is true that some programs aim to prepare students to become professional interpreters, while others help students develop communicative and cultural competence to interact appropriately with the Deaf community.
- The functions, text types, and level of detail specified in the Learning Outcomes serve as performance benchmarks along the way, regardless of program focus. Students may progress more rapidly through some of the Modes or hone in on specific contexts based on program purpose. For example, in the Interpretive Mode, students preparing to be interpreters might watch short video clips of interpreters working in hospital contexts or giving signed interpretations of short artistic performances. While the same video clips could be used with students in any ASL program, students in interpreter programs may be expected to demonstrate comprehension of more details sooner and incorporate a greater range of

specific vocabulary (e.g., words and expressions related to healthcare) into the Interpersonal and Presentational Modes.

### **How do the Learning Outcomes help programs identify specific grammar, structures, and vocabulary?**

- It is beyond the scope of this project to list specific grammar, structures, or vocabulary. That said, in order to perform the functions of the Learning Outcomes, students will certainly need to know and be able to use linguistic and cultural content. Specific content will be predicated on the contexts, tasks, and topics chosen by individual programs as suggested in the Alignment Guides.
- It is the instructor's responsibility to draw students' attention to linguistic features of the target language and to have them practice using structures, grammar, and vocabulary in meaningful ways. For example, in meeting the Learning Outcome "State what people, places, and things are like with a few/some details," students, by the end of the first beginning course, might tell what each other's friends and/or relatives are like. To do so, they would need:
  - Verbs, such as to be, to live, to like, to go, and to want;
  - Grammar, such as Contrastive Structure, Listing and Ordering Technique, and Spatialization/Referencing; and
  - Vocabulary, such as hearing status and school attended (residential, oral, mainstream); physical characteristics (e.g., tall, short, blond, blue-eyed, pretty, athletic); personality traits (e.g., funny, intelligent, serious); relatives and pets (e.g., nuclear family members, dog, cat); and leisure time-activities (e.g., walk, play soccer, watch sports, read, go to the movies).
  - The resultant language sample might be: "My friend is Silvia Johnson. She's deaf and went to the Ohio School for the Deaf. She's tall and athletic. Silvia has blond hair and blue eyes. She is serious. Silvia lives in Columbus with her husband and two sons. She has a cat. She likes to play soccer and watch The Columbus Crew."
- The ability to perform the functions outlined in the Learning Outcomes grows more sophisticated as students add more structures, grammar, and vocabulary to their linguistic repertoires. That said, even beginning students can give a simple reason why someone should do or say something, offer a simple apology or excuse, make a simple request, or predict the outcome of a familiar situation. For example, beginners might sign:
  - B1: I need to go to the library. Do you want to go with me?
  - B2: When?
  - B1: 2:00 this afternoon.
  - B2: Sorry, I'm working/I have to work.
  - B1: Let's go tomorrow. You need a break/rest.
  - B2: Ok. See you then.
- Rubrics help instructors measure if students know and can use grammar, structures, and vocabulary to express meaning in a culturally appropriate manner.
- Most children intuitively know the syntax of their first language by the time they enter first grade. Students continue to acquire vocabulary and hone spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation skills throughout their studies and into adulthood. Similar to second language abilities, first language functioning becomes more sophisticated as students are exposed to a greater variety of texts and practice applying extracted "ways with words" in

their own communications. Consequently, it is unrealistic to assume that students will use their mother tongue perfectly and control all the nuances of their native language as they enter our courses. The beauty of learning another language, however, is captured in Goethe's famous quote: "Who does not know another language does not know his own." The attention to form and function in our courses enables students to take another look at how their own language works. Studies consistently point to the cognitive and academic benefits of second language learning.

#### Useful Resources

- [https://ims.ode.state.oh.us/ODE/IMS/Lessons/Web\\_Content/CFL\\_LP\\_S01\\_BA\\_L10\\_I02\\_01.pdf](https://ims.ode.state.oh.us/ODE/IMS/Lessons/Web_Content/CFL_LP_S01_BA_L10_I02_01.pdf) (Note: The rubric still pertains the standards, benchmarks, and indicators reflect an earlier version of Ohio's state standards.)
- <http://www.rcampus.com/rubricshowc.cfm?sp=yes&code=DBW83A&>
- The Collaborative Articulation and Assessment Project at The Ohio State University developed [rubrics](#) geared to the third course of instruction. These could be easily modified for beginning courses by using the text type and level of detail in the Learning Outcomes.
- The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota also has a variety of [sample rubrics](#).

#### **How do the Learning Outcomes take textbooks and authentic materials into account?**

- The Learning Outcomes are textbook and materials neutral.
- No one resource suffices to ensure that students can meet the expectations set forth in the Learning Outcomes. Instructors will need to supplement a course textbook with a variety of authentic materials if not already included (print or digital texts and media, such as menus, brochures, short articles, short conversations, infomercials, or movie clips).
- It is the task, not the text that needs to be level appropriate. Through guided instruction (pre-, during, and post-viewing activities), even beginning language learners can demonstrate understanding of the main idea and a few details.
- Programs are encouraged to make language learning relevant and interesting to students by incorporating a variety of current and personalized materials into instruction. For example, at the elementary level, if your textbook chapter focuses on food, you might wish to find restaurant reviews, grocery store ads, and/or recipes to make the information relevant. In addition, you might ask students to share what their favorite meals consist of or have them take a survey of students in class to learn what their classmates' favorite or least favorite foods are and, as a class, make a chart to interpret and discuss findings. At the intermediate level, if your program focuses on media and activities require students to understand the main ideas or themes from live or recorded material on topics of personal interest, you might ask them to view signed television programs, such as interviews and talk shows or respond to online signed vlogs.

#### Useful Definitions:

- **Authentic materials:** Language samples taken from live or digital texts and media created by native speakers for native speakers that instructors use for instructional purposes. These might include ads, advice, vlogs, travel information, weather reports, movie trailers, or short literary texts. Using a variety of authentic materials ensures exposure to many of the signing

styles and systems employed in the American Deaf community, including SEE, SE, SPE, and Cued Speech.

- **Semi-scripted materials:** Live or digital texts and media created by native or very proficient speakers for language learners that relate to specific topics or themes under study. Creators familiarize themselves with the vocabulary, structures, grammar, and cultural points under study and combine in ways likely to be found in the target culture.
- **Textbook materials:** Live or digital texts and media created by textbook authors to introduce and practice specific vocabulary, structures, grammar, and cultural points. Creators carefully sequence content and consciously recycle previously taught elements into subsequent chapters.

### **How do the Learning Outcomes address topics and techniques?**

- It is beyond the scope of the Learning Outcomes to list out specific topics or teaching techniques that must be incorporated into courses. For example, the knowledge and use of fingerspelling could be taught during the Beginning ASL Course I or Beginning ASL Course II as decided by individual programs.
- The Alignment Guides provide many familiar topics, themes, and contexts likely to be addressed in beginning and intermediate ASL language courses. Individual programs may modify these suggestions as needed. The abbreviation “e.g.” means “for example;” “including” is abbreviated “i.e.”.
- Students respond to language that is meaningful and personalized. If instructors dissuade students by saying, “We’ll get to that topic in another chapter,” rather than seizing teachable moments, they miss serendipitous opportunities to connect language to students.
- Even in Beginning ASL Course I, while not an anticipated outcome, students may, on occasion, be able to create with language, especially if they have a repertoire of highly practiced language on which to draw. In fact, on particular topics or in particular contexts, novice learners may be at the high end of the performance range and can create with language half of the time. If you, as an instructor, are in the habit of making small talk with students based on their interests and current happenings, this is very likely to occur. For example,
  - I: “What did you do this weekend?”
  - S: “I went to the movies.”
  - I: “What did you see?”
  - S: “(name of film)”
- Learning outcomes do not address *how* instructors should teach to help students meet expectations. Instructors will need many diverse strategies to differentiate instruction based on students’ learning styles and preferences.

### Useful Resources

- General discussion on differentiation at the college level, University of Virginia [videos](#)
- Specific [examples](#) of how to differentiate in the foreign language classroom

### **How do the Learning Outcomes facilitate placement decisions?**

- As is the case with other modern languages, the Learning Outcomes assume that the vast majority of students in Course I will be true beginners. There may be students with heritage background or those who have had prior instruction in ASL.

- When students self-place, they often sign up for beginning courses despite having studied the language for two or more years in high school or for one or more semesters in college.
- If students can demonstrate that they can meet course learning outcomes either through some sort of placement test or grade in that course, they should be placed into the next higher course.
- Institutions might choose to use the Learning Outcomes to create placement tests to ensure that students start the language sequence in the most appropriate course, given their language background.