



SeaSigns™ Frequently Asked Questions Diver Edition

Where did American Sign Language come from?

Thomas Gallaudet hired Laurent Clerc, a deaf Frenchman, as the first teacher of the first permanent deaf school in the United States in 1817. Even today, there is statistically about 43% of the signs in both languages are similar, while ASL has little in common with British Sign Language.

Is there a Universal Sign Language?

No. There are 114 deaf sign languages in the world used by varying numbers of people.

How widely used is American Sign Language?

It is third most widely used of any language in the US. It is also used in a variety of foreign countries.

Why don't you use the signs used by the certifying agencies?

We do use the signs for up, down, and out of air upon which agencies and American Sign Language books seem to more or less agree. For other signs we chose American Sign Language signs so that the signs would be understood by the largest number of people. If you check the manuals of the different certifying agencies you will find different agencies may

1. Use different signs for the same word.
2. Make the same sign somewhat differently.
3. Have signs which are not used by any other agency.

Are you saying we should not use the signs our agency taught us?

No, not at all! If you and your buddy were taught signs by the same certifying agency, by all means use the signs you learned. Just remember to communicate to you buddy before the dive what signs you will be using. You may have occasion to dive with divers who were trained differently then you were. If you are both trained in the American Sign Language signs chosen by SeaSigns you can communicate under the water even if you were not trained by the same organization or do not even speak the same language on the surface!

Why does sign for a particular word SeaSigns uses does not agree with the sign shown in my sign language dictionary?

Like English ASL is a living language which is changing through time and has regional variations. The various sign language dictionaries of different sizes written at a variety of different times for a variety of purposes reflect this. In larger dictionaries you may find several signs for the same word. Even dictionaries which appear to use the same sign for the same word may describe how to make the sign differently, if they describe how to make it at all.

How did you choose the words you chose?

We choose words that could be used in the most ways in the widest variety of underwater circumstances.

Why did you choose the signs you chose?

SeaSigns chose the signs that met the following criteria:

1. Were easy to make underwater and in full gear
2. Were easy to read underwater and in full gear
3. Were easy to remember how to make
4. Could be made with one hand, if such a sign is available.

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Who approved the signs you used?

All signs were approved by a nationally certified sign language interpreter, who is also a certified scuba diver.

Which hand do I sign with?

SeaSigns show the right hand generally making a one handed sign. All videos and illustrations of persons signing in SeaSigns materials show how a right handed person would make a sign -- from the point of view of the person reading the sign. The model's right hand is on the reader's left. Occasionally, if there is a good reason, SeaSigns will change the hand making the sign. SeaSigns makes "shell" with the left hand. We found that our right hands got mixed up with the regulator hose when we tried to sign it right handed!

How do I remember how to make a sign which uses both hands that do different actions?

If both hands are used, usually the right hand will be the hand doing the action and the left hand will be the hand to which the action is done.

May I sign left handed?

SeaSigns suggests that you sign right handed as we show you unless it is difficult for you to sign with the right hand. In that case, you will have to reverse all SeaSigns instructions. Be aware that divers, unlike people who use ASL everyday, occasionally may not recognize the sign made with the opposite hand.

Note regarding specific signs:

Shark - Please do NOT to use the commonly used sign with the flat hand with the thumb side placed on the middle of the forehead. The sign is easy to make incorrectly. Even if the sign is made correctly it can be easily mistaken for an obscene sign. My nephew was taking his open water test in Hawaii and the instructor did to inform him of the sign he would use for shark. The instructor tried to point out a shark to my nephew during the dive by using this common sign. My nephew surfaced from the dive in a very agitated state. He felt he must have done something very wrong that his instructor would call him a bastard!

What other series are planned?

SeaSigns is currently working on vocabularies for technical diving, marine organism identification, and underwater photography with leaders in each field.

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