THE OFFICIAL ASL WRITING TEXTBOOK

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- Ideas can be, and are often, lost in translation.

- What are we losing when we translate our thoughts in ASL before writing them on paper in English?

- It is an unanswerable question, but an important one.

- This textbook puts forward a complete and practical written system that enables us to put ASL directly on the page.

- Why are the signed languages of our world, used and beloved by so many, missing written systems?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- An opportunity to develop a corpus

    - Literature

    - Academic papers

    - All kinds of text

- A way to document every aspect of the language

- Fulfill the missing link between the first language and their second written language

- New ASL signers will be able to remember new signs and understand ASL syntax at ease

FUNDAMENTALS OF ASL WRITING

- Written ASL begins with the writer's point of the view

- ASL writing is not a notational writing system

The functions of two modal languages

Sign Language: American	Vocal Language: English
Digibet	Alphabet
Digit	Letter
Spacabulary (spatial)	Vocabulary (vocal)
Graph/Word	Word

Manual ASL	Written ASL
handshape	digit
palm orientation	locative orientation & diacritic
movement	movement line & endpoint
location	locative mark
non-manual signals	non-manual signal mark
	indicator mark*

* The **indicator** mark is a grammatical element that identifies pronouns, time, verbs, and pauses, as well as role shifts and spatial reference.

CHAPTER ONE: DIGIBET
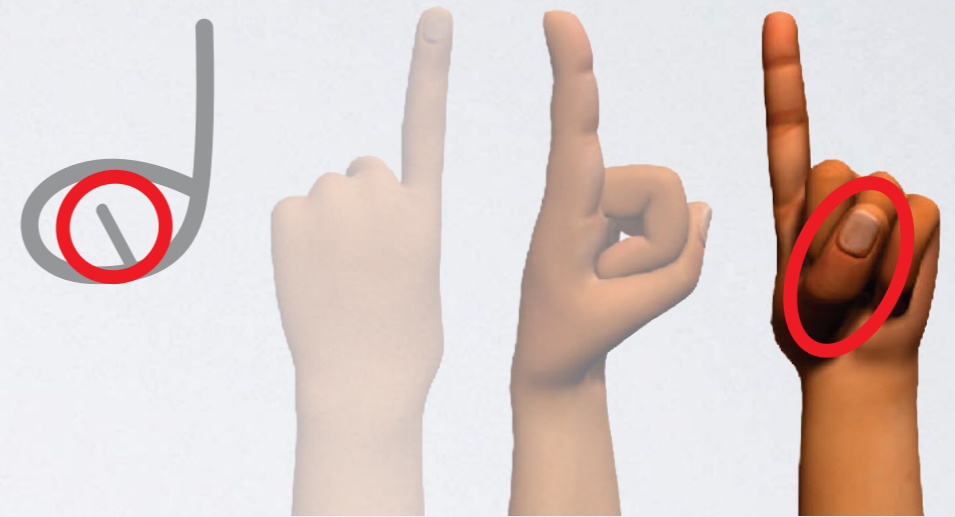
Left-handed

Right-handed

DOMINANT DIGIT: LEFT OR RIGHT

- As the writer, it is up to you which dominant digit you prefer to use.

- Consistency with your choice of dominant digit throughout the text is vital, which will allow for accurate interpretation when it is read.

- Also, this will help the reader to be able to truly visualize the writer signing, making reading a text in ASL akin to a 3-D experience.

THUMB MARK

- The thumb mark helps establish whether a digit is left or right.

- The thumb marks on the two digits shown in the example are in different positions, clearly illustrating whether the signer/writer is a left-handed or right-handed.

Left-handed
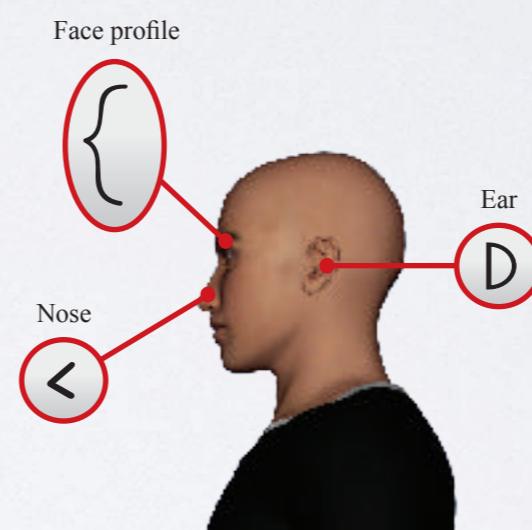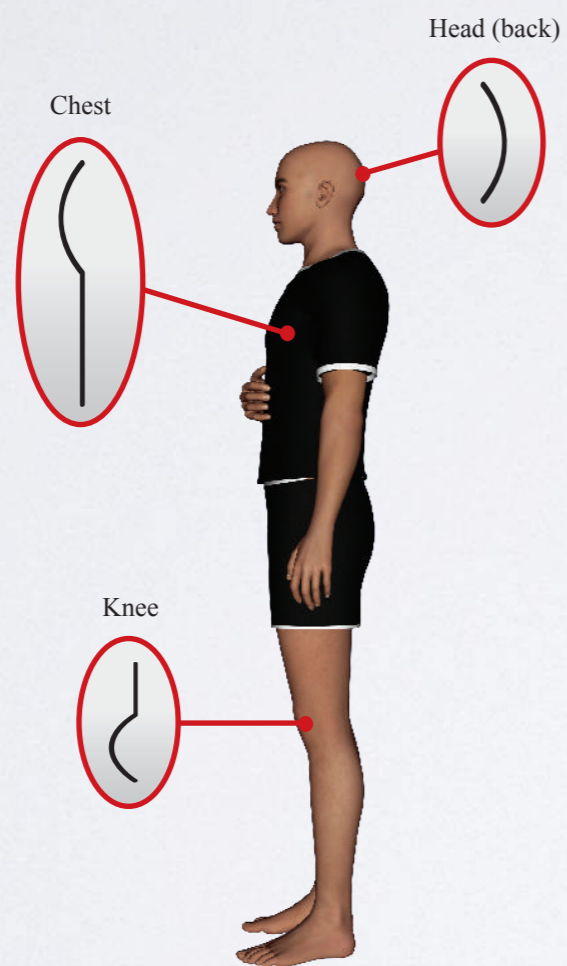
Right-handed

SANS THUMB MARK

A digit without a thumb mark indicates a thumb extending straight outward.

FRONT LOCATIVE MARKS
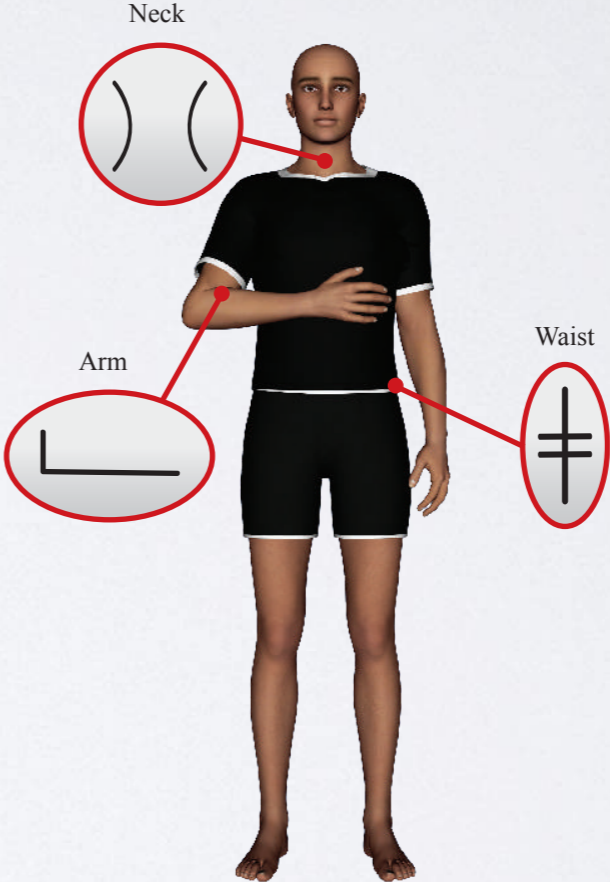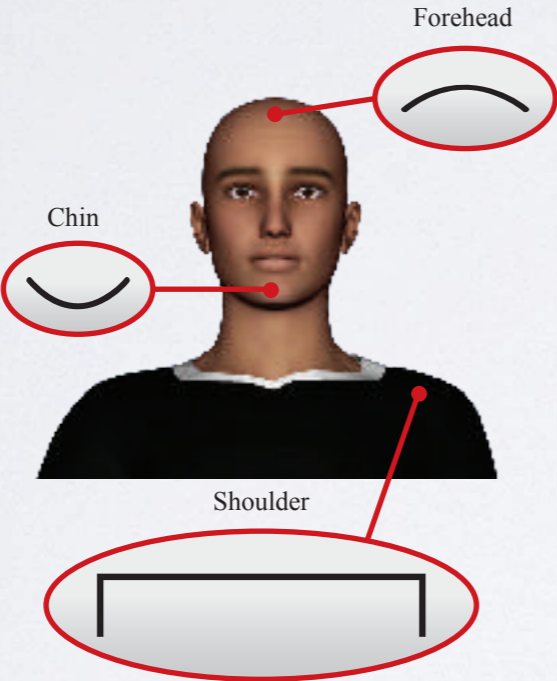
SIDE LOCATIVE MARKS

CHAPTER TWO: DIACRITIC MARKS

In most written languages, a diacritic mark above or below a letter or symbol indicates a difference in pronunciation. In written ASL, a diacritic mark represents the movement of the digit, or the hand.
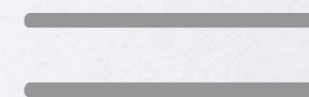
Hinge	Ring	Flutter	Rattle	Bar (or edge)

Open	Pull	Half square	Double bars

HINGE DIACRITIC

The **hinge diacritic** is written as a half-arc symbol, which represents two functions:

1. a sideways or back-and-forth digit motion. The specific motion depends on the context of the word in a sentence. The signs WHERE, which has a sideways motion, and MUST, which has a back-and-forth motion, both use the hinge diacritic. This diacritic is placed at the bottom of a digit, and

2. a halfway closure where one or two fingers almost touch the thumb tip. Signs that use this shape include EARTH (dominant hand). This diacritic is placed at the top, or finger tip region, of the digit.

WHERE

NOD

FORCE

MUST

EARTH
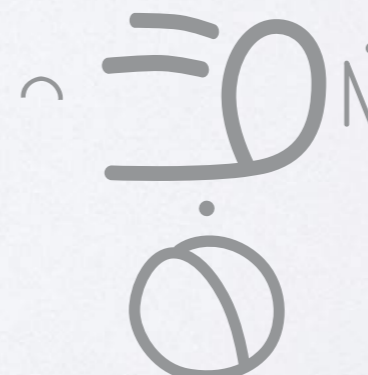
NOTHING

RING DIACRITIC

MIX SOCIALIZE

ANIMAL HEAD CEILING FAN

The **ring diacritic** is a circular symbol that represents three basic functions:

1. a rotating wrist-digit motion. Signs that use this movement include CEILING FAN and WHEEL. The ring diacritic is placed below, or in the wrist region, of a digit,

2. a closure of two or three fingers touching the thumb tip. Signs that use this shape include an animal head with two ears or the handshape D. This is placed at the top, or finger tip region, of the digit, and

3. a rotation of two digits simultaneously. This is seen in the signs SOCIALIZE and MIX.

FLUTTER DIACRITIC

The **flutter diacritic** indicates the wiggling of two or more fingers simultaneously, but not together. This diacritic is placed at the top of the digit, where the fingers are. It is not necessary to write the open diacritic with the flutter diacritic as it serves the same function to indicate split fingers.
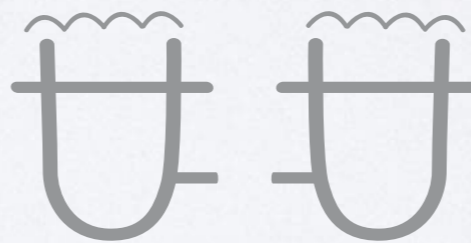

EITHER

COLOR
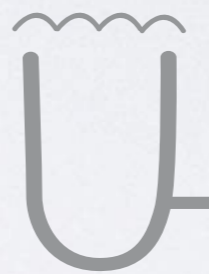
FINGERSPELLING

TYPING

FLIRTING

PULL DIACRITIC

The **pull diacritic** is used to represent a pull direction of fingers away from the palm. The signs are MONEY, HAIR PIN, CAT and handshape N. This diacritic is placed at the finger and thumb tip region of the digit.

Handshape N

CAT

MONEY

HAIR PIN

RATTLE DIACRITIC

The **rattle diacritic** indicates the shaking of one or more fingers, or the whole hand. The rattle diacritic is placed anywhere around the digit depending on where the motion is most visible.
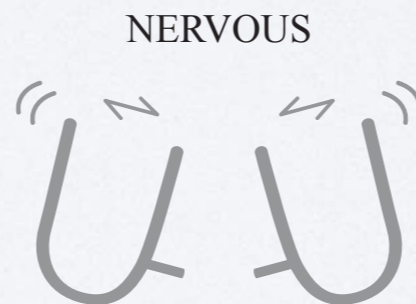
OPEN DIACRITIC

The **open diacritic**, as placed at the top of the digit, indicates fingers split. The signs are handshape V, CLAW, handshape F and CLIMB.

Handshape V   CLAW   Handshape F   CLIMB

BAR (OR EDGE) DIACRITIC

The **bar diacritic** represents two functions:

1. indicates one or more bent fingers at the upper finger joint. The signs are SHOULD, POTATO (dominant hand), BALL and STARE. This diacritic is placed across the upper part of the digit.

2. shows the orientation of the hand, or digit, in a sign. See HALLWAY and PLANNING.

CAMERA

BALL

SHOULD

POTATO

HALLWAY

PLANNING

DOUBLE BARS DIACRITIC

The **double bars diacritic**, as placed across the upper part of the digit, indicates one or more bent fingers at the lower finger joint. The signs are EXPECT, FUNNY, AIRPORT and MOSQUITO.

EXPECT	FUNNY	AIRPORT	MOSQUITO

ENDPOINTS

• Single movements are called uninflected motion and they tend to indicate a verb.

• Double movements, or repetitive motions are often used for nouns.

• Three or more movements, or continuous motions, are usually with action verbs.
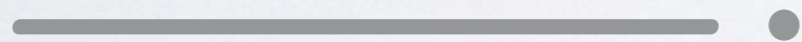
One motion, usually a verb
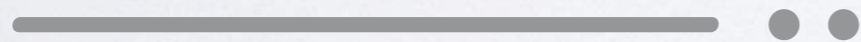
Two motions, usually a noun
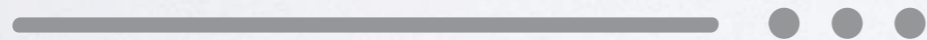
Three motions or more, usually a reptitive action

ONE MOTION

STOP   ON TIME   FAST

TWO MOTIONS

SCHOOL   DEAF SCHOOL   EVERYDAY

THREE OR MORE MOTIONS

PACE BACK & FORTH

WORK FAST

STUDY HARD
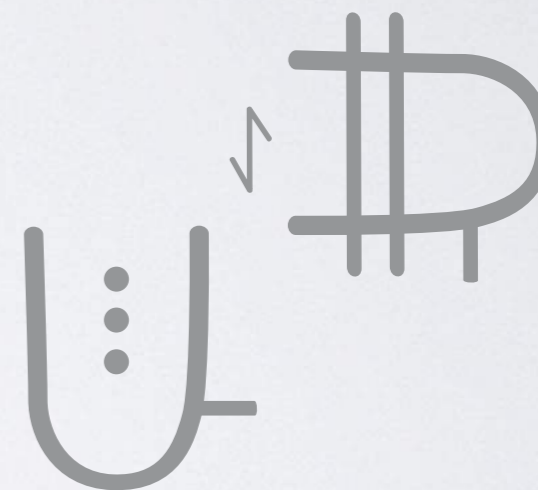
DIACRITIC MARKS WITH ENDPOINTS

Diacritic marks are used in written ASL to indicate wrist and digit motion. Endpoints can be added to diacritic marks to represent repeated motions.

BALTIMORE   PORTLAND   NECESSARY, NEED

MORE EXAMPLES

START CAR

START CAR
(attempting)

START CAR
(struggling)

CHAPTER THREE: MOVEMENT LINE AND MORPHS

The movement line indicates the directions of signs. The line acts as a track and the endpoint shows where the motion is going.
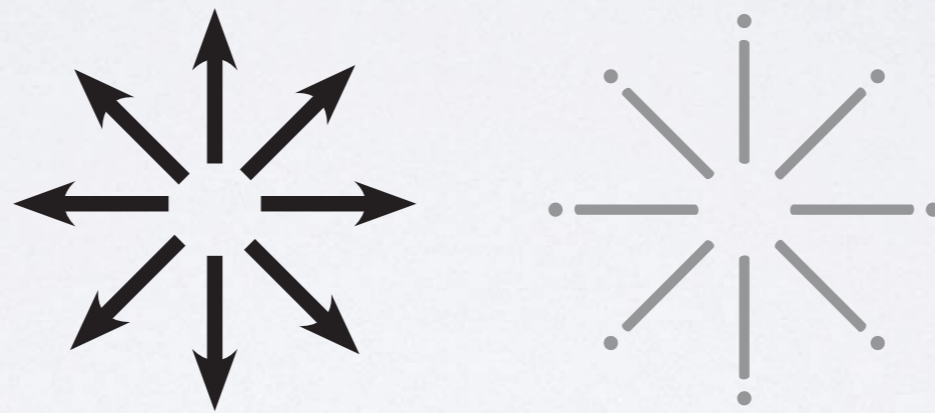
Directional

Patterned

Random

For up-down and left-right movements, use any front locative mark and line with a dot at the end.
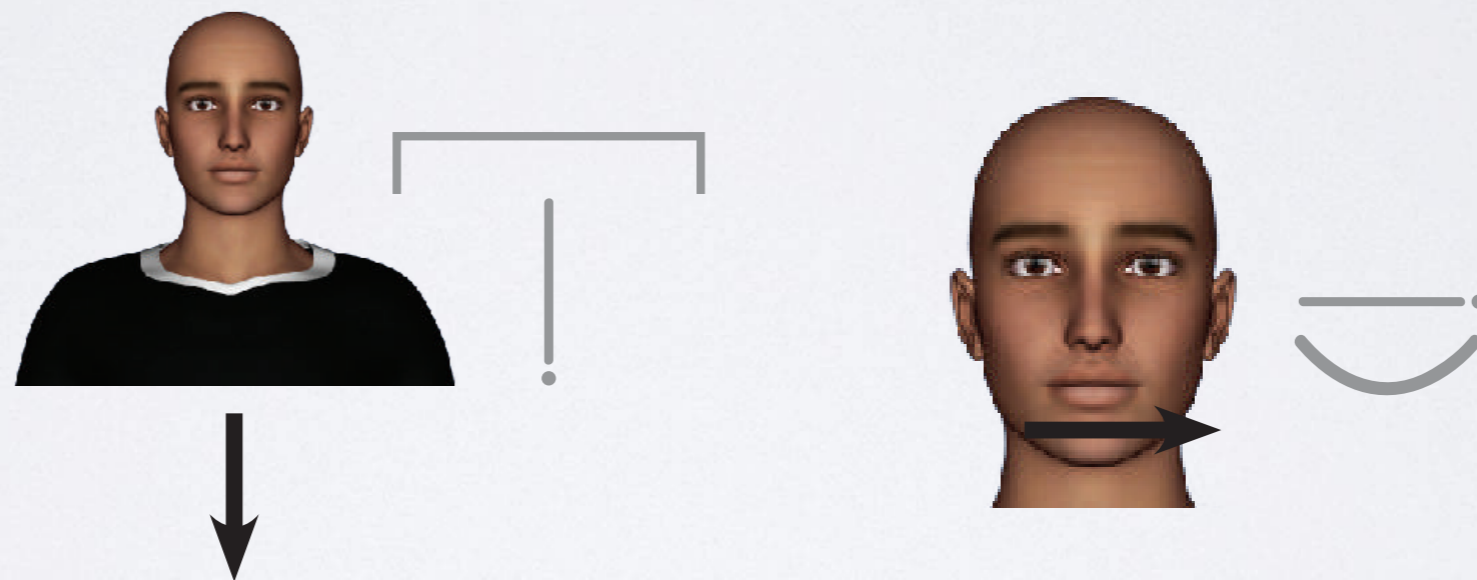
For forward-backward movements, use any side locative and line with a dot at the end.
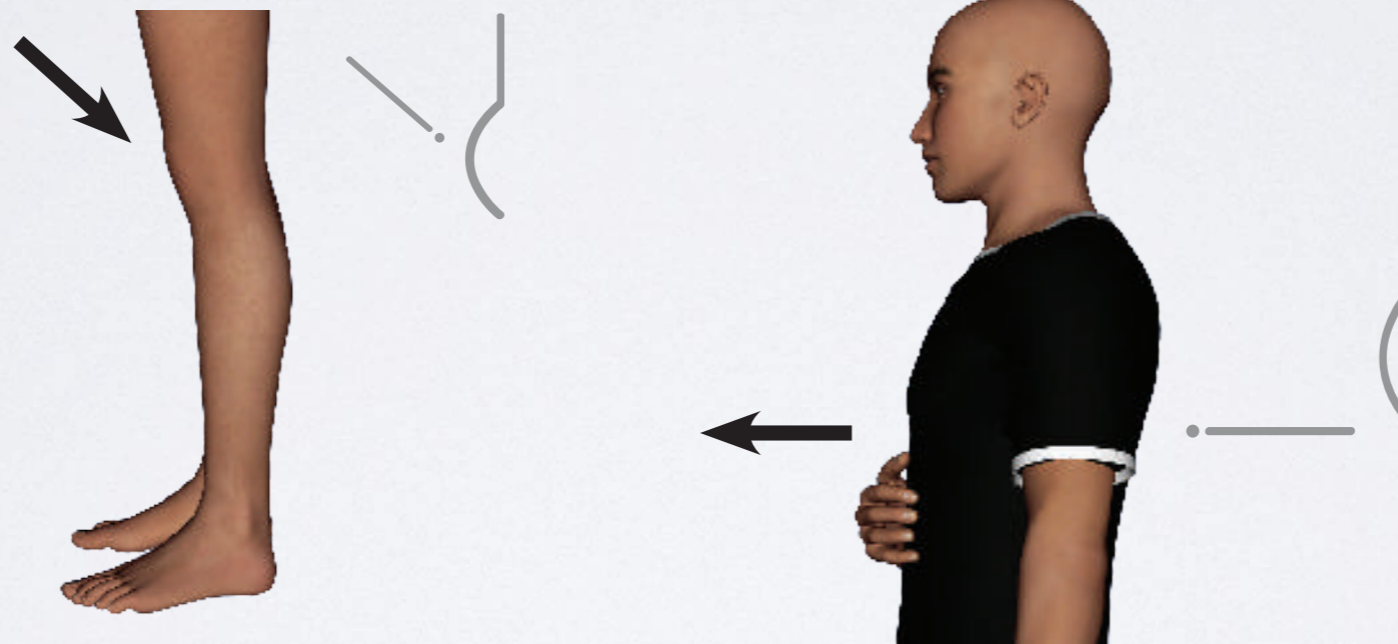
EXAMPLES

NORTH   SOUTH   EAST   WEST   Fremont, CA   Staunton, VA

A balloon propelled by escaping
air before falling to the ground.

An annoying fly zipping around.

OTHER MOTIONS

The dot between two lines indicates a meeting point of two digits.

MEET

WITH
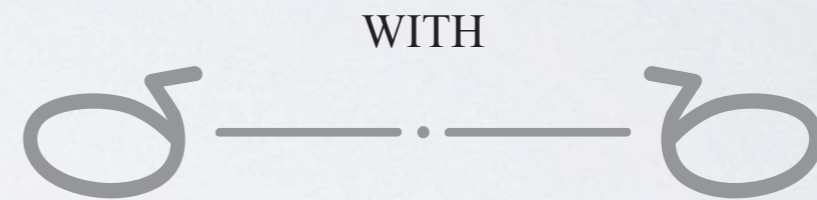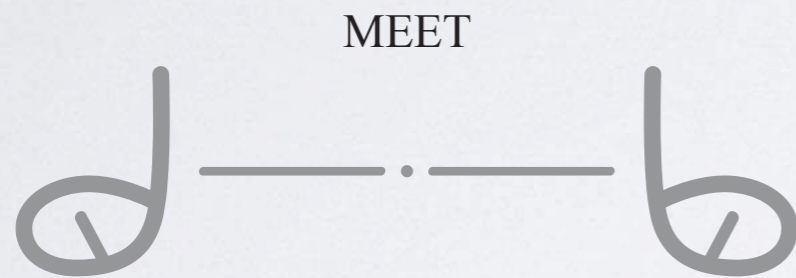
A dash on the line indicates the split of two digits,
moving away from each other.

SEPARATE

OPPOSITE
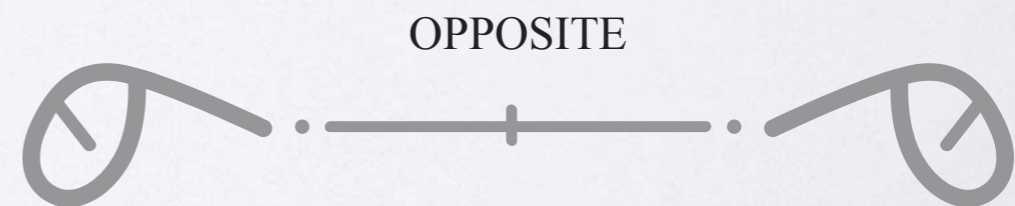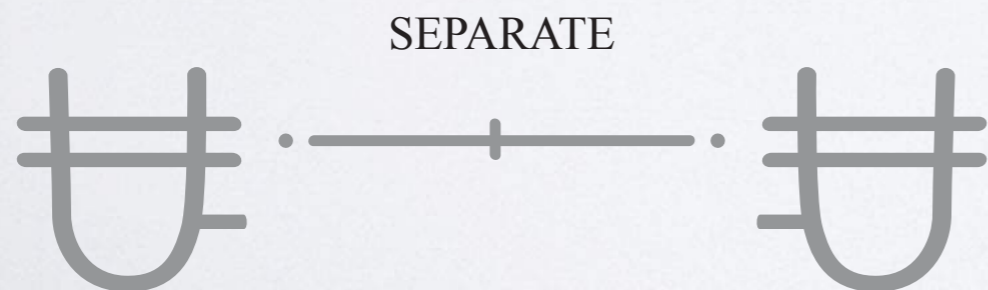
ALTERNATING MARK
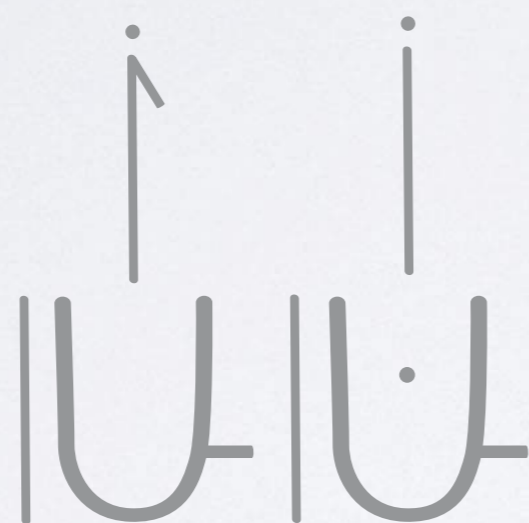
RACE   MOTIVATION   STAR   MAYBE
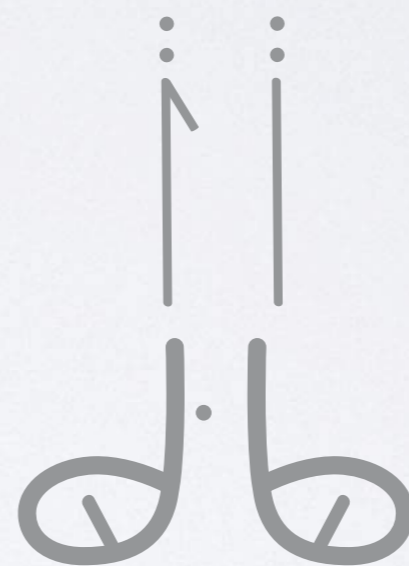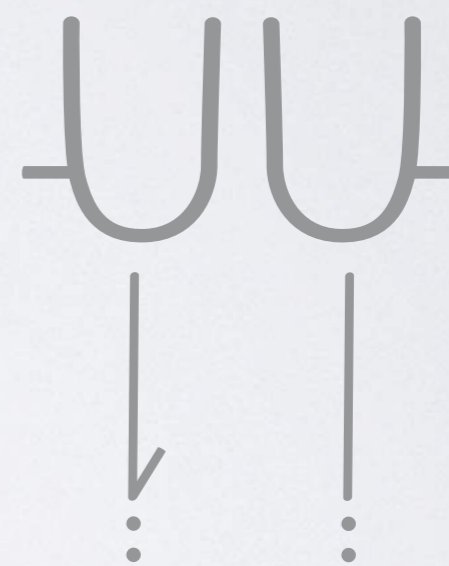
PALM ORIENTATION AND MOVEMENT LINE COMBINATION

Exchanging bowls

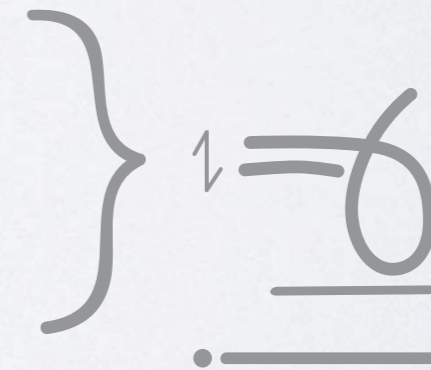Two persons walking by each other
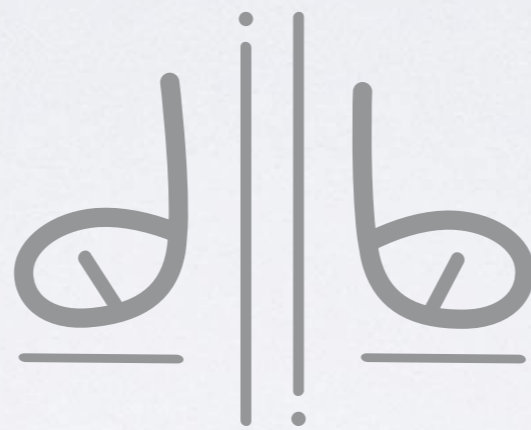
Two birds flying by each other

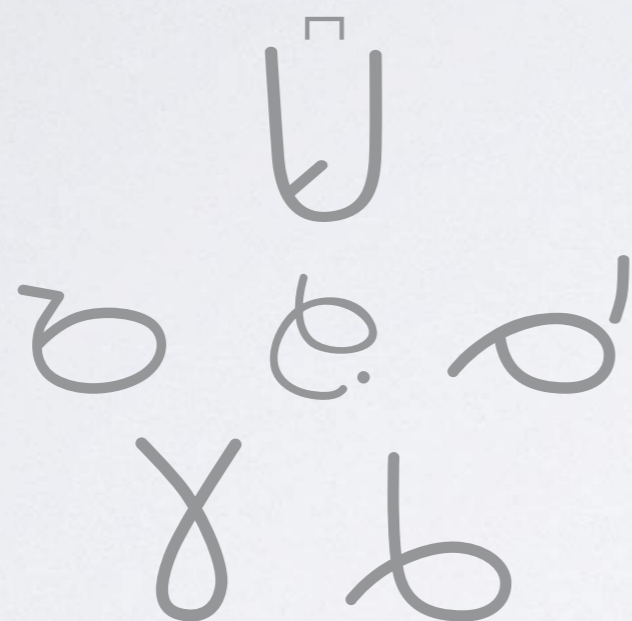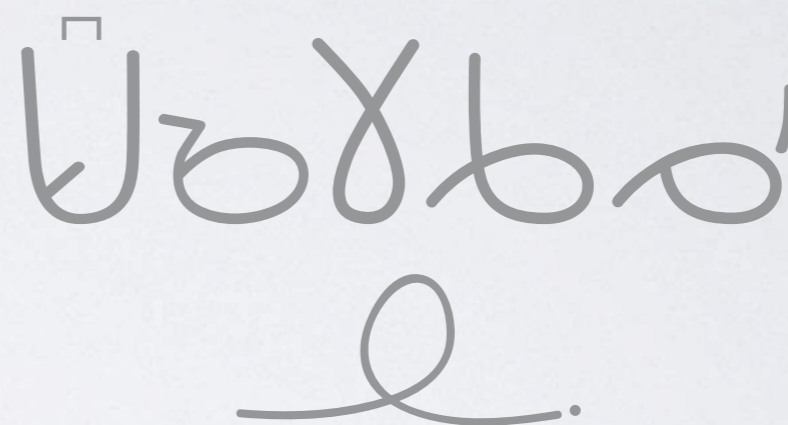A car moving forward

A car moving backward

A car coming to you

MOTION MORPHS

EARLY

EARLY

A person thinking of food

NUMEROUS

STATIONARY MORPHS

Stationary morphs do not move in space. They are anchored in one spot. A stationary morph is written with a dot underneath the movement line.

A light flashes once

A light flashes three times
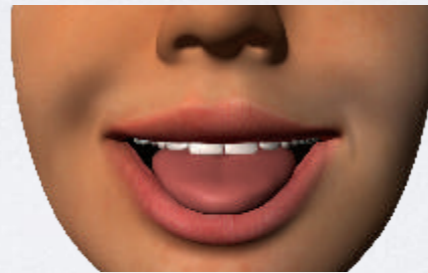
CHAPTER FOUR: NON-MANUAL SIGNALS

Flat

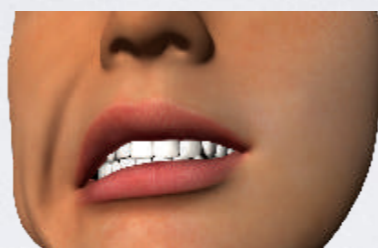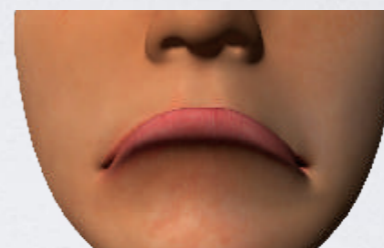Small mouth

Tongue out

Puffed cheek, small mouth

Puffed cheek

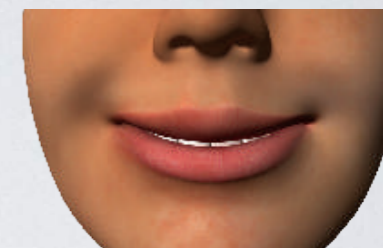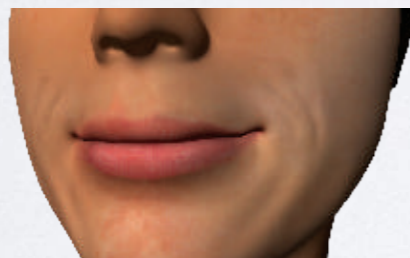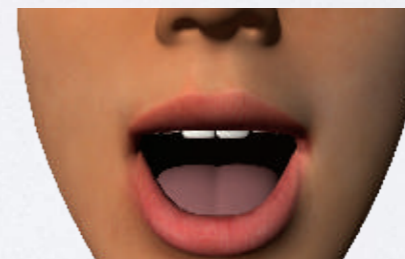Clenched teeth

Clenched teeth, lips out

Pulled cheek

Frown

Smile

Pensive

Pursed lips

Open

EYEBROW MARKS

The WH-question, the lowered eyebrows, is indicated by a "frown" expression.

The yes-no, topical and rhetorical question, the raised eyebrows, is indicated by a "surprise" expression.

The WH-question, the lowered eyebrows, is indicated by a "frown" expression.

NOSE MARKS

The nose crinkle is common in ASL usage to indicate an affirmative (yes) answer or dislike. The nose marker on the left is plain and one on the right has a crinkle lines across it.

WH-QUESTIONS

WHO   WHAT   WHEN   WHERE

WHY   HOW   WHICH   "FOR-FOR?"

COMPOUND MARKS

OH, REALLY?
(surprised with excitement)

WHAT, REALLY?
(surprised with doubt)

"NO WAY"
(upset)

"YEAH"
(affirm)

CHAPTER FIVE: RESERVED MARKS

Pronoun Marks

I	IT, SHE, HE	THEY	YOU (singular)	YOU (plural)	WE

POSSESSIVE PRONOUN MARKS

VERB MARKS

GO TO

COME FROM

YOU   GO TO   SCHOOL   TOMORROW

YOU   COME FROM   AUSTIN,TX

PAUSE MARKS

PAUSE (end of sentence)

DELAYED PAUSE #1

DELAYED PAUSE #2

PERSON/PEOPLE MARKS

ONE PERSON   TWO PERSONS   PEOPLE
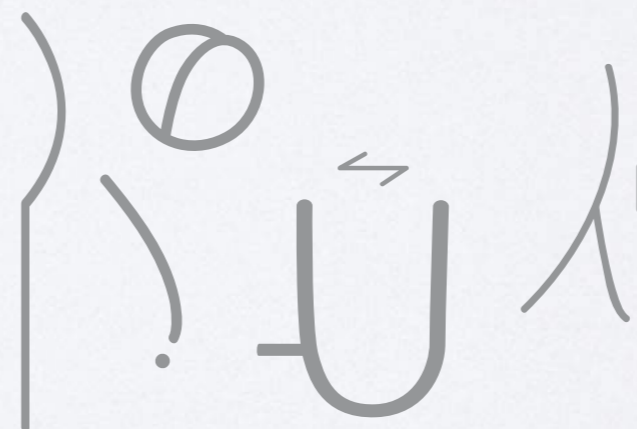
WRITER   TWO POETS   DEAF PEOPLE

TIME INDICATOR MARKS

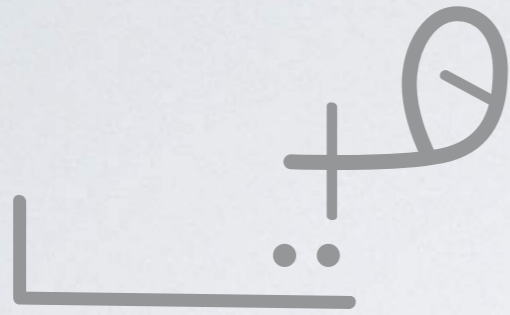MORNING MID-MORNING NOON AFTERNOON

NIGHT ALL NIGHT ALL DAY LONG ALL DAY/NIGHT

TIME   PAST   PRESENT   FUTURE
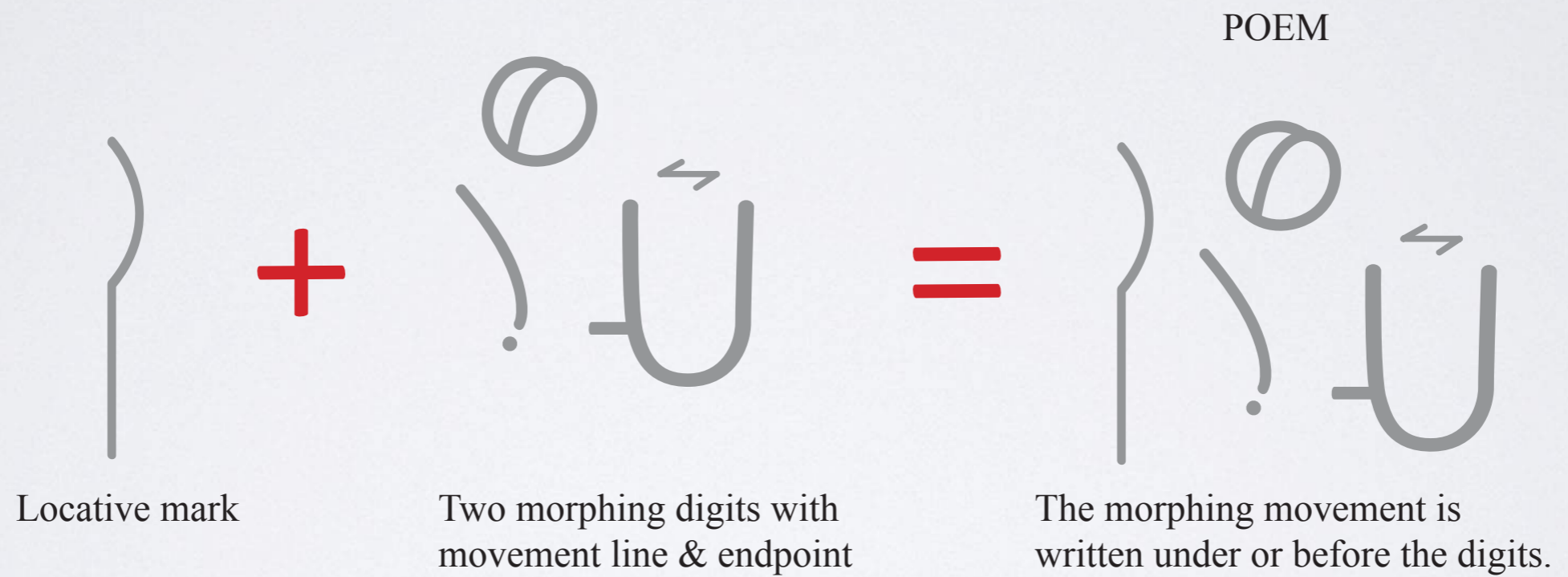
YESTERDAY   TWO DAYS AGO   TOMORROW   TWO DAYS LATER

CHAPTER SIX: COMPOSITION

POEM

Locative mark

Two morphing digits with
movement line & endpoint

The morphing movement is
written under or before the digits.

ELLA   ASL   POET

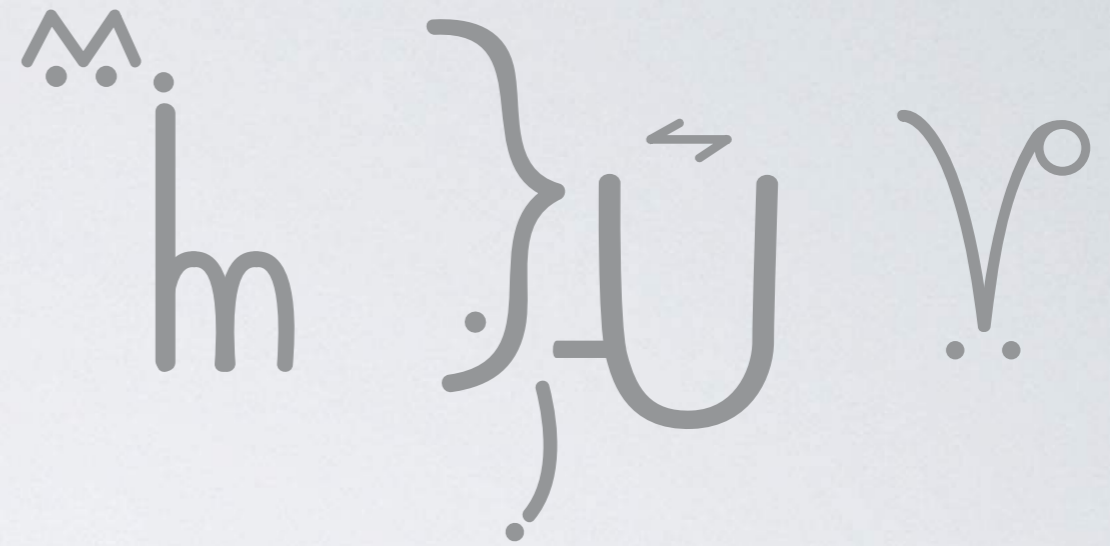THIS   BOOK   TITLE   WHAT?
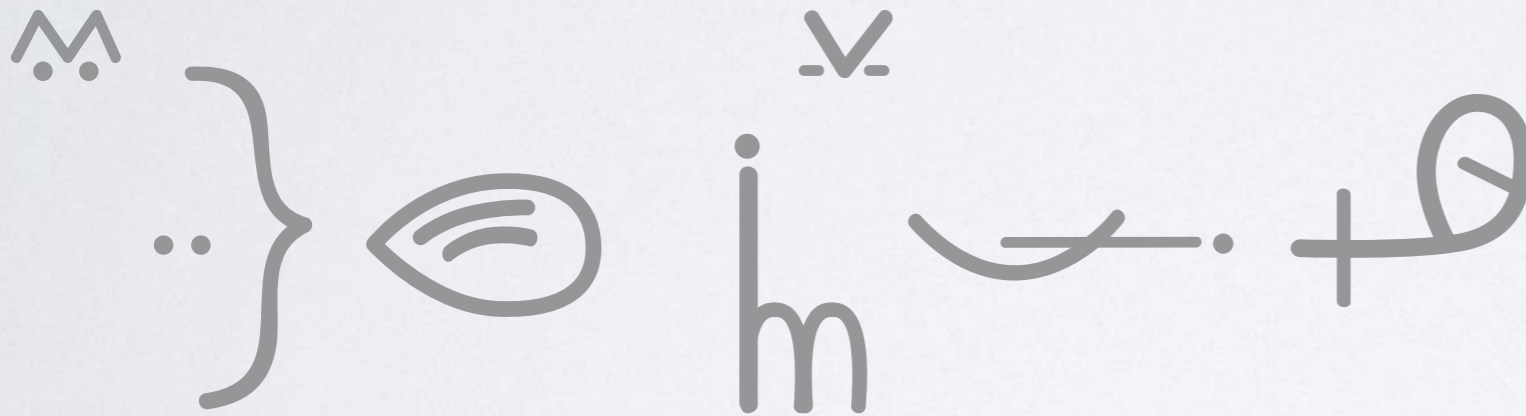
WOMAN   WHO?

The WHO NMS mark is placed at the end
of the sentence. This informs the reader
that this sentence is a WH question.

FOOD   DRY

Note that the raised eyebrows mark is
placed at the beginning and the frown
eyebrows mark is written before CHIN.

DEAF   TWO PERSONS   MEET
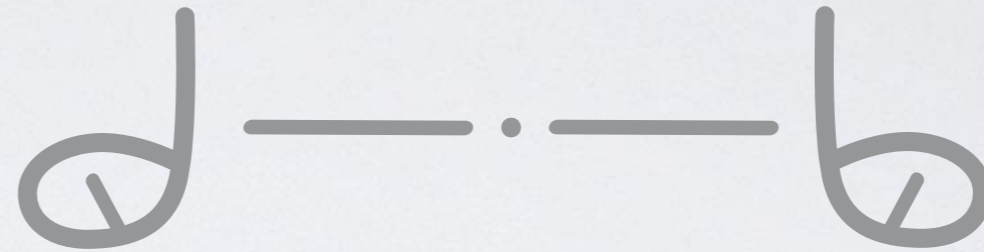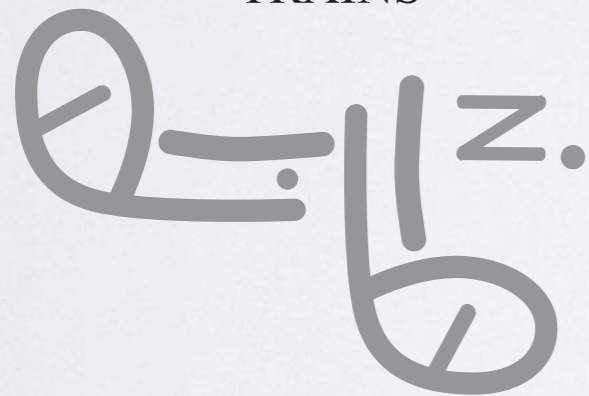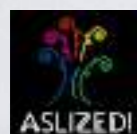
TRAINS   STOP...   THEN GO

Three pause marks
indicate a long pause.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To get a complete information on ASL writing, purchase
"The Official ASL Writing Textbook" at http://aslized.org/store

http://aslized.org/writing

http://facebook.com/ASLized

http://instagram.com/ASLized

http://youtube.com/aslizedvideos

Email: contact@aslized.org

The Official
American Sign Language
Writing Textbook

Written by Robert Arnold Augustus,
Elsie Ritchie and Suzanne Stecker