

Deaf Culture Question of the Week –October 27 - 31

How many sentences can be produced using only one ASL verb sign?

- a) No sentences, because sentences require a noun and a verb
- b) 6 sentences
- c) 12 sentences
- d) 27 sentences
- e) 36 sentences

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: “e” at least 36 sentences.

If you understand the grammar principle of Subject/Object Incorporating Verbs, sometimes called Directional Verbs, then you can skip the explanation and go directly to the examples below.

The explanation for this ASL grammar principle gets a little complicated but hopefully readers of Deaf Culture Question of the Week will bear with me as I explain how one sign can create at least 36 different complete thought sentences.

Some verbs in ASL because they use two hands, spatial relationships and movement in their production can indicate “who does what to whom” all in one sign. Complete thoughts (sentences) can be communicated with one verb sign. These signs are called “Subject/Object Incorporating Verbs”.

S/O Incorporating Verbs can show who (the subject), what-do (the action) and to whom (the object) simultaneously in their production. ASL verbs like **/to-meet/**, **/to-help/**, **/to-show/**, **/to-give-to/** and many others are S/O Incorporating Verbs.

How do they work? Because they use two hands one hand in the sign formation can indicate the subject and the other hand can indicate the object of the action. The movement and direction the hands move indicates the action (verb).

For example, the sentence "I meet you". in ASL is communicated using two hands. The signer's dominant hand with the "index-finger handshape" is placed near to the signer's chest and the signer's non-dominant hand with the "index-finger handshape" is placed out in space in front of the signer. The signer's dominant hand moves toward and touches the signer's non-dominant hand. "I meet you."

If you know the positions in space for the pronouns, I/me, you, he/she then you will recognize that all of the below complete thought sentences can be expressed with one sign in ASL. Naturally these sentences would occur in a context where some information is already known between the two communicators, for example, when the meeting occurred or will occur and who is being referenced.

Head nodding for affirmative sentences, head shaking for negative sentences and yes/no question expression (non-manual signals) also contribute to making these sentences. When these S/O Incorporating Verbs are combined with appropriate non-manual signals a large number of sentences can be expressed.

All of the sentences written below can be expressed in ASL with the one sign **/to-meet/**. When used in context between two ASL communicators these one sign sentences express complete thoughts (sentences) yet use only one sign. Pretty cool!

Simple declarative sentences using one sign to-meet with affirmative head nod.

I meet you.

You meet me.

We meet. (both hands move together)

I meet her.

She meets me.

She and I meet. (both hands move together)

You meet her.

She meets you.

You two meet. (both hands move together)

He meets her.

She meets him.

Those two meet. (both hands move together)

Simple negative sentences using one sign **/to-meet/** with negative head shake to make the sentence a negative.

I didn't meet you.

You didn't meet me.

We didn't meet. (both hands move together)

I didn't meet her.

She didn't meet me.

She and I didn't meet. (both hands move together)

You didn't meet her.

She didn't meet you.

You two didn't meet. (both hands move together)

He didn't meet her.

She didn't meet him.

Those two didn't meet. (both hands move together)

Simple yes/no questions using one sign **/to-meet/** with yes/no question expression.

Did I meet you.

Did you meet me.

Did we meet. (both hands move together)

Did I meet her.

Did she meet me.

Did she and I meet. (both hands move together)

Did you meet her.

Did she meet you.

Did you two meet. (both hands move together)

Did he meet her.

Did she meet him.

Did those two meet. (both hands move together)

Can you sign all of the above 36 sentences using only one sign **/to-meet/**?