

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – March 16 – 20, 2009

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An ASL Question this week....

You are sitting with friends describing an incident that involved a person your friends don't know. You need to include in your description of this person that she is short. This person's height is around 4 feet 7 inches. Which of the following is correct in ASL?

- a. You stand up and with a B handshape palm down you show the height of the person at about 4 feet 7 inches from the floor to your hand.
- b. You sign the numbers 4 and 7 near your chest with palm facing inward and moving your hand in short upward movement while making the 4 and the 7.
- c. You remain seated and indicate with a B handshape palm down the relative height of the person in relation to yourself (your own height). Your eyes gaze toward your hand, palm facing down held in space to show you are comparing the person to yourself and your height.
- d. You remain seated and you reach up with a B handshape palm down showing the person's height at about 4 feet 7 inches from the floor to your hand.

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: "c" - You remain seated and indicate with a B handshape palm down the relative height of the person in relation to yourself (your own height). Your eyes look toward your hand held in space to show you are comparing the person to yourself and your height.

When you are signing you are using the space from slightly above your head to your waist and extending out in front and to the sides basically to arms length. Very few signs are made below your waist or above your head. When signing also you generally do not stand up or sit down to demonstrate those activities or to indicate height as in this example. You remain standing or sitting and create the reality of what you are expressing in the three-dimensional space described in this paragraph.

When describing another person's height in relation to your own height you do not show "the actual height from floor to the top of the person's head". You indicate through signing with a B handshape the relative height of the person in relation to yourself. So in this example, the person is "shorter" than you and your B handshape will be held at about your shoulder level. Your eyes would look to your hand to indicate that you are comparing the person to your own height. You are saying in essence. "The person is about this tall in relation to me." Because you remain seated, the distance from your hand to the floor may only be about 3 feet but this is not important because you are not indicating an actual height from the floor. You are showing how tall the person is in relationship to yourself. If you stood up at this point (which you shouldn't) but if you did, your hand would be in exactly the same point in space in relationship to yourself. Your hand would not move at all. You would be indicating the person's height in relationship to yourself. Can you picture that?

If it was the case that the person was taller than you, then you would still remain seated and your B handshape palm down would be placed above your head but still only as high as the person would be in relation to yourself. In other words you are not trying to reach your hand way up in the air to show the person's actual height. And again, if you stood up to indicate this same relationship, your hand would remain exactly where you placed it in relation to yourself. When you stood up the person would still only be "this much taller than you are".