

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – April 12-16, 2010

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You are explaining several related facts leading to a conclusion. This could be in the context of a classroom lecture, a disciplinary meeting with a student, or simply relating a story of several things that happened to you that led to a certain result. Which of the following ASL sentence structures would commonly be used to introduce the conclusion, result, moral of the story etc?

- a) Rhetorical Question
- b) Yes/No Question
- c) Topic/Comment
- d) Relative clause structure

Go to the bottom of this message for the answer.

Answer: “a” Rhetorical Question structure is used in ASL to make statements and introduce topics in discourse. This structure uses a question sign like WHAT, WHY, HOW, WHO etc. but not to ask a question but rather to make a statement. The question is used in a rhetorical way. The signer answers his or her own question. For example, LEAVE PARTY EARLY WHY? FEEL SICK ME.

Specific grammatical signals accompany Rhetorical Questions structures to indicate that this structure is being used. The first part of the rhetorical question uses raised eyebrows and head tilted slightly back with the wh-question sign occurring at the end of the question part of the expression. After a slight pause, the signer shifts head and body back to a neutral signing position and the answer to the question is supplied by the signer. In the case above of explaining several related facts leading to a conclusion, result or the moral of a story, the first part of the structure may be expressed as follows: MEAN WHAT? <followed here by what it means>. In English this would be interpreted depending on the context in which it is being expressed: “And this means...” or “And the moral of this story is...” or “And in conclusion...”.