

Volume 1: Principles,  
Background, and Application

# Simplified Signs

A Manual Sign-Communication  
System for Special Populations



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# Key word Signing: A Method to Communicate with Adults Who Have Speech Impairments

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Webinar for Kentucky Librarians

# What is Keyword Signing?

Key word sign is the use of signs and natural gestures to support communication and the language development of children and/or adults with communication difficulties.

Signs are used for the words in the message that hold the most important information versus signing every single word. For example, if someone said, “Dry your hands” the key words that would be signed would be ‘dry’ and ‘hands’.



# Main Features of Key Word Sign

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Using sign and speech together.

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Signing the key words but saying the whole sentence.

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Using visual strategies such as body language and facial expression.

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Using symbols where appropriate.

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Some use of finger spelling.

# Why is key word sign important?

Speech is the most efficient and effective way people communicate. However, the use of sign and gestures can be an important way for individuals to develop communication particularly to:

- Help a person's understanding.
- Help a person communicate effectively if their speech is slow to develop.
- Supplement/support the speech attempts of a person which may not be articulated clearly
- Be used as an alternative for someone who has no speech.
- Key word sign used in isolation may not sufficiently meet the communication needs of an individual. Other strategies such as the use of pictures or photos may also need to be used to facilitate an individual's communication.



## Receptive vs. Expressive Language

Receptive language is the ability to understand words and language. It involves

- Gaining information and meaning from routine,
- Visual information within the environment,
- Sounds and words concepts such as size, shape, colours and time,
- Grammar and written information



# Expressive Language

- Expressive language is the use of words, sentences, gestures and writing to convey meaning and messages to others.
- Expressive language skills include being able to:
  - label objects in the environment,
  - describe actions and events,
  - put words together in sentences,
  - use grammar correctly
  - retell a story,
  - answer questions and
  - write a short story.

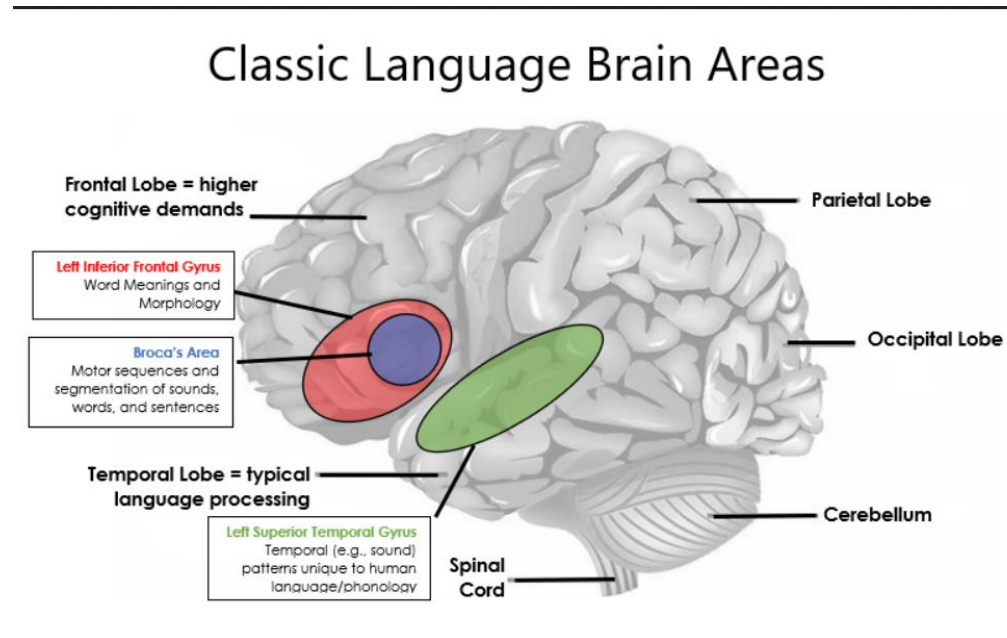


# Brief History of Simplified Sign

- Research on this project began in the late 1980s
- Originally thought to be most beneficial to children with autism and motor difficulties
- In 1998, development of the Simplified Sign system began after one of the researchers wanted to help her grandfather who had suffered a stroke communicate

# Speaking is Hard Work

Brain



Muscles

There are about 100 muscles needed to speak, however, to produce speech sounds, there are hundreds of thousands of combinations of these muscles that are required to produce and control speech



# Causes of Adult Speech Impairment


- Stroke
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Degenerative Disorders
- Dementia
- Aphasia is primarily a language disorder that results from damage to areas of the brain responsible for various language functions. This damage can affect both the production of language and its understanding as well as impairing the ability to read (dyslexia) or write (dysgraphia).



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# What Simplified Signs Is Not

A replacement for a communication system someone may already have (ASL, augmentative devices, etc.) unless they are not working for them.

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# Signing Can Promote Spoken Language

- In a number of instances, gains in signing skills have been accompanied by considerable progress in learning to speak (Grove & Walker, 1990; Launonen & Grove, 2003; Millar, Light, & Schlosser, 2006)
- One possible reason why signing may help to promote spoken language development is that using signs may “exercise” areas of the brain critical for language. Brain regions involved in the fine motor control of the hands are closely related to those regions involved in the production of the coordinated movements responsible for speech (that is, the movements of the lips, tongue, larynx, and jaw).



# Simplified Signs-More than a Collection of Signs and Gestures

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- Signs were selected, modified and/or created according to a number of guidelines
  - Considerable visual resemblance or connection between signs and what they stand for
  - This resemblance makes signs easier to learn and remember
  - Signs are easily formed.
  - This may be a good resource for those traveling to other countries

# Teaching Simplified Signs

- 4 general ways
  - General exposure
  - Incidental Approach
  - Games and group sessions
  - Explicit instruction or specific training session
- Many non-speaking children and adults reside at home and need to interact frequently with family members. If parents, siblings, and other family members learn to sign, then the main user will have many more opportunities to learn signs and these signs likely will generalize to new situations



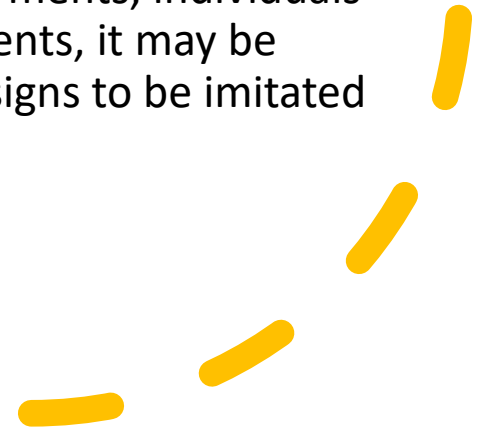


# Teaching Simplified Signs

- The authors encourage everyone using Simplified Signs to use them in conjunction with speech, a process known as simultaneous communication. Using both signs and spoken words helps to enhance and reinforce communication.
- It is important to produce signs accurately and consistently so that the main user has a better chance of learning them.
- Although you may learn signs relatively quickly, it is important to understand that it may take much longer for the main users to learn them (Grove et al., 2019). This learning process may take a substantial amount of time because it requires users to learn how to associate symbols (signs) with objects, activities, or concepts, then store and later retrieve those same symbols (signs).

# Teaching Simplified Signs

- Many persons who will benefit from the Simplified Sign System have motor difficulties that will directly affect their ability to form particular signs. Caregivers should expect that signs produced by individuals in the early stages of intervention may produce signs that look somewhat like the signs that are made. Make sure to reward the sign learner as they move through the process of learning a sign by giving them encouragement and lots of positive feedback.
- Facial expression is a powerful tool in helping to clarify or support the meaning of a signed communication.
- For very young children, persons with visual impairments, individuals with autism, or older persons with memory impairments, it may be important to provide a longer presentation time for signs to be imitated correctly and learned.





# Developing a Teaching Plan

- Start with an assessment of the principal learners interests, needs, desires, and current successes and challenges in communication.
- Select the first signs to be taught – should emphasize situations where a sign is needed
- As the use of signs progresses and as his or her communication needs grow, other concepts can be added to the learner’s sign vocabulary.
- In addition to teaching signs that meet a communication need, teach signs for objects, actions, or persons that are highly important or interesting to the main user.



“Progress during this period will most likely be slow and gradual and may be contingent upon the sign learner’s degree of fine motor control. To better assess a person’s progress, it is helpful to prepare a communication plan, maintain a record of signs learned and progress made in communicating with signs, and document any secondary effects that may result from the introduction of signs.”

*Simplified Signs*  
*Volume 1*

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# Developing a Communication Plan

- *Preparing a communication plan.* Decide which signs should be taught, when they should be taught, how they will be taught, who will teach them, and where the signs will be used outside of the teaching/learning situations (this should be in as many places as conveniently possible).
- *Maintaining a record.* Keep records of which signs are taught, when they are understood by the main user, when they are produced or made by him or her for the first time, how often they are employed, and the errors made when forming them.
- *Documenting secondary effects.* Keep an eye out for changes in the main user's behavior that may be an indirect result of learning Simplified Signs.



Let's Learn  
Some Signs!


# Questions for You

- *You are working with a 75-year-old woman who suffered a stroke and has lost her ability to speak. There were no other effects of the stroke (no paralysis of the arms or legs). Before the stroke, she was very social and loved to cook and bake.*
- *Question 1 To aid in this woman's communication, who would be the people in her life that you would like to help learn Simplified Signs?*
- *Question 2 What signs would you teach this woman as well as her friends, family, and caregivers?*



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## SL 101: Simplified Signs for Adults with Spoken Language Concerns

Course Description: Signing can be a vital means of communication for individuals with impairments or communication issues as an adult. Simplified Signs is not the same as American Sign Language, it is a system of manual sign communication for populations who have had limited success mastering spoken or full sign language. Throughout this course, we will review the reasons individuals could benefit from simplified signs, ways to implement simplified signs, and the opportunity to practice using simplified signs. Please note there are several reflection points throughout the course including a final reflection scenario that will be reviewed by the course facilitator. This assignment must be reviewed and completed satisfactorily prior to the course being complete and accessing a certificate of completion. Thanks to a generous donation from the family of John Bonvillian, this course is free for a limited time.

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