

# Is mouthing part of American Sign Language?

## A plan to find out

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### Abstract

Mouthing is the production of visual [syllables](#) while signing. It occurs when signers say or mouth a word in a spoken language at the same time as producing the sign for it. In American Sign Language (ASL), the role that mouthing plays is controversial. Some researchers view it as part of the languages, but others do not. We propose an experiment to find out.

### Introduction

American Sign Language is a fully-formed independent natural language different from English and other signed languages of the world. One feature of many signed languages is mouthing. It occurs when signers form a word from a spoken language on their lips at the same time as producing the sign for it. In American Sign Language, the role that mouthing plays is controversial. Some researchers view it as part of the languages, but others do not and state that it is only an influence from English. We want to understand whether the Deaf community (not researchers) consider mouthing to be part of ASL.

### Methods

We will use A/B testing. In an online survey, test participants will view two versions of a sign, one with mouthing and one without mouthing and choose the one they prefer. For the two versions of the sign, we will use animations created by a sign language avatar instead of using recorded videos of humans. This will give greater consistency in the presentations. The draft page for a single question shows two videos and a graphic icon that represents the concept displayed in the sign. We have applied for IRB approval for this study.

### Results

We hope to finish the field-testing during winter quarter and conduct the study in the spring.

### Discussion

In the past we have noticed that Deaf participants preferred mouthing, which runs counter to much of the linguistics literature on ASL. We hope we will see convincing results from this study.

### Literature Cited

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