

New findings in fingerspelling recognition – what it means for you.

Diana Gorman Jamrozik, Columbia College Chicago
Rosalee Wolfe, DePaul University

Have you ever told your students to “use context” to help recognize fingerspelling? Have you received this advice yourself? Why is this good advice? *Is it good advice?* What does this advice do for us? Although there are plenty of anecdotes about using context to improve fingerspelling comprehension, there has never been a formal, controlled study to see if this advice really works. This presentation will report on our recent study that evaluates the effect of context on a person’s ability to comprehend fingerspelled words. In the study, twenty five ASL students viewed realistic animations of computerized fingerspelled words. Each student viewed words both with and without a context category. The results were surprising, in that the effectiveness of using context to comprehend fingerspelled words seems to depend on one’s signing level. These results show some parallels with research on novice readers of written English. Both qualitative and quantitative results of this study will be shared in this presentation. The findings have strong pedagogical implications, and new approaches for incorporating context into ASL and Interpreter Training courses will be offered.

Participants will be able to:

1. name past research efforts on fingerspelling and fingerspelled word recognition.
2. refer to studies that support the use of context by novice readers of English, and see parallels to the use of context by novice ASL users.
3. evaluate the qualitative and quantitative results of the current study in terms of their current professional development
4. discuss pedagogical implications of this research
5. take away pedagogical strategies for incorporating context in the teaching of fingerspelled word recognition for novice students of ASL and for beginning interpreters.