

# Here's why you should learn sign language

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Did you know that sign language is now recognised as South Africa's twelfth official language? President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the South African Sign Language Bill into law on 19 July 2023.



A press release from the Presidency states: “The recognition of South African Sign Language (SASL) as the 12th official language is an important step towards the realisation of the rights of persons who are Deaf or hard of hearing.”

As you are probably aware, September is Deaf Awareness Month and the Language School at Wits Plus is pleased to share more information.

## **The aim of Deaf awareness month**

The World Federation of the Deaf first observed the International Day of the Deaf in 1958 and it has been observed every year since then.

The aim of Deaf awareness month is to encourage people to learn sign language, and to learn about Deaf culture.

In September every year, the focus is on awareness of the social exclusion that Deaf people may face and to encourage the inclusion of Deaf people in society. The month also raises awareness of sign language, which helps Deaf people communicate and makes society more accessible to everyone.

## **South African Sign Language**

South African Sign Language (SASL) is the first language of Deaf children who are born to Deaf parents. Have a look at the timeline of the [development of SASL](#), all the way back from 1863.

SASL plays several roles in the Deaf community. Deaf people use this language to interact with each other and to pass on

cultural knowledge and is therefore a defining aspect of belonging to Deaf culture.



It's worth noting that while it is a first language for the Deaf community, many hearing people also communicate through sign language with children, friends and family and colleagues who are Deaf.

### Interacting with a Deaf person

Here are some [dos and don'ts](#) when interacting with a Deaf person:

- Do face the Deaf person directly and maintain eye contact when speaking to them.
- Don't turn around, move away, or look elsewhere while speaking to a Deaf

person.

- Do speak clearly and make sure that your mouth movement is natural.
- Don't speak if they are not looking at you or just speak at them as if they can hear you.

### SASL courses available at the Language School

The Language School at Wits Plus offers a number of SASL courses, from level 1 to level 3.

The course facilitators are first language proficient and have also been trained to teach both hearing and non-hearing students. SASL courses are offered part-time and run over 10 weeks.

View more [information](#) about the courses and upcoming intakes.

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