

Non-manual Markers in ASL / NMM's

Also see: Non-manual Signals

Non-manual markers consist of the various facial expressions, head tilting, shoulder raising, mouthing, and similar signals that we add to "signs" (such as are used in American Sign Language) to create or influence meaning.

The sign for non-manual markers is to fingerspell "NMM" but people often do the sign for "expressions" to mean NMM's.

An examples of a non-manual marker:

1. Bringing your cheek and your shoulder closer together while tightening the muscles in your cheek (as if you were smiling with half your face). This is often abbreviated as "c-s" meaning "cheek to shoulder." This non-manual marker is used with signs like, "RECENT" and "THERE" to mean, "very recent" and "right there (close)."

Speakers of English tend to inflect their voices to indicate they are asking a question. Signers of ASL also inflect their questions, but instead of using voice inflection we use non-manual markers.

For example:

YES/NO Question Expression:

When signing a question that can be answered "yes or no" you raise your eyebrows and tilt your head forward a bit.

"WH-Q" Question Expression:

When signing a question involving "who, what, when, where, how, how much, how many, which, or why" you use what is called a "wh" question facial expression. The "wh" facial expression "furrows" the eyebrows a bit and may tilt the head back a bit--while the body might lean forward a bit.

Here are some examples of "wh" question expression:



why



who



where