**Startasl.com Review**

Our Verdict – Time-consuming to use and navigate, but a useful mix of signing vocabulary, and conversational videos.

Star Rating – 2/5

For:

* Useful tips on fingerspelling and how it’s used.
* Opportunity for 1 to 1 signing practice over Skype.
* An ASL community for meet-ups and practice partners.

Against:

* Too many adverts for premium membership.
* Course materials are disorganized and hard to navigate.
* Some niche rather than every day signing examples.

Startasl provides a 3 level American Sign Language course and additional resources for anyone with hearing loss or looking to engage with the deaf community. The courses have been designed to progress your signing from beginner level, and moving through advanced signs and grammar before finishing with storytelling. Users have the option to access all the course units online for free or pay for additional benefits. Additional features include group discounts and curriculum guidance aimed at teachers, and student resources including a blog. Group discounts and additional curriculum guides are available for teachers, and students also have the opportunity to access 1 to 1 tutoring, and exclusive events. When we tried out the free lesson option, we found that appearances can often be deceptive. If you are trying this out for free, the layout, structure, and heavy advertising content may put you off investing in a paid program.

**What membership options are there?**

The Free option – Complete text and video content for ASL 1, 2, and 3 units with accompanying workbook and access to common areas of the website.

Offline – For $69.00 you will have access to an offline course along with e-book versions of their ‘Don’t Just Sign Communicate’ guides, and an ASL and deaf community guidebook. You will also receive videos of all the vocab and conversation lessons to watch on your chosen device.

Silver Level - $24.95 a month, $149 for six months, or $199 for the whole year. This premium option includes the complete course units, along with grading and progress tracking, virtual practice events, and written feedback from instructors.

Gold Level - $49.95 a month, $299 for six months, or $499 a year. In addition to everything included in the free and silver options you’ll receive video feedback on your signing assignments, and a whole host of bonus flashcards, worksheets, and study resources.

There are also options and potential savings for teachers looking to enrol multiple students on to these courses.

**Is the learning platform easy to navigate?**

As a free user not at all. It was time-consuming and frustrating. You have a workbook open or downloaded, a home page listing links to all the units, a homepage for each unit, which then initially leads you off to another place for the vocabulary videos for that unit. You get the picture, it’s just too much in too many different places, which makes it hard to concentrate on when you’re trying to practice your signs and follow the exercises. ASL Deafined scored much better for course content and organization, and it was also off-putting to read this site state that their premium options have easier to follow, more organized content. This is something that should apply to resources at all levels.

**Who are the courses aimed at?**

This 3 unit ASL course is designed to be a flexible self-learning program aimed at anyone wanting to jump straight into signing and take their learning beyond key phrases. You can download the course as a home learner/home school student, or if you are a teacher take advantage of group purchase options and curriculum resources.

**How is the course taught?**

This time around we found an ASL alphabet all in one video, which although we could slow it down, wasn’t as good as the ASL Deafined method of breaking it down into manageable chunks.

Each course level has a workbook to follow, an introduction, and up to 14 additional units with a mix of vocabulary, conversational signing, and fun retention activities. Some units will be familiar to anyone who has learned a foreign language, with topics such as greeting people, school, and hobbies, while other units will focus on American Sign Language grammar to help you achieve accurate signs.

Although some of the language is a little formal and needs explaining, overall one of the strengths of this site is its explanation of grammar topics. Temporal Aspect and Classifiers may mean little to a beginner, but from reading the content they have produced it’s easy to see how both play their part in signing conversations.

**What was the video quality like?**

We found that Start ASL used a group of 9 regular signers so you can quickly get used to them and their style. The vocabulary videos were quite clear with just the right level of zoom to see the hand shapes and facial expressions of the signers, but the signed conversations between two people were harder to follow. These were zoomed out more, with the signers almost facing each other – which is how it would be in normal life but doesn’t quite work if you’re a student trying to follow the conversation.

One big benefit over other websites like ASL Deafined though is the ability to alter speed settings on the videos beyond a simple ‘slow motion’ option. We found it easy to slow the speed down when needed.

**Are there added extras available to signers?**

Yes, and this is a plus point of this platform. You are never alone unless you want to be. Some options come at a cost, such as 1 to 1 virtual tutoring, or the video & written feedback that comes with paid memberships. Everyone has access to the blogs and articles on the website, and we found a full calendar of Start ASL practice sessions and links to non-affiliated events.

**Should you pay for a course?**

We always like to try out free options if available to get a feel for the site and teaching methods, and in this case, it would put us off paying for a premium membership. The content is hard to navigate, and some of the useful insights are hidden in among ‘membership advertising’, so there is little to suggest whether the offline, gold, or silver options are any better.

There are however useful articles to read below the exercise for each free unit, the opportunity to receive virtual tutoring if needed. Mixing the free self-paced learning with zoom practice sessions, tutoring, and deaf community events seems like the less risky option to help you make the most of your American Sign Language studies.

**Does A Premium Paid Membership Improve The User Experience?**

In some ways yes. We gained access to a GOLD membership and found a cleaner look and less overwhelming course homepage. Signing videos were quicker to access as pop-ups, and hints such as breaking signs up in to syllables helped when reading other content. There was also an insightful Intro video which would have been prime content to show potential learners, or those accessing free content to help them make a decision on paid content.

On the down side, some of the clickable links in resources didn’t work, and there is content that needs breaking down even more to be suitable for students, especially beginners. Then there were sentences like this “Every unit that does not have a conversation section has a conversation practice section with the same conversation as the one in the conversation section in the previous unit. User experience improved somewhat, but is it as it should be? No.