

# DEAF ~~101~~

# 2-5-8

## How Many People Know ASL?

Signed version available at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrorv-xu76u5ru5nca3bwHQ>

People have bandied about **various numbers of ASL users in the US**. At various times numbers have been cited as low as 100,000 and as high as 15 million. Some have suggested ASL is the third most commonly used language in the US.

Most people do not understand the reason for this disparity of numbers, nor do they understand the difficulty in pinpointing a number.

10  
987  
6432  
1

Most estimates have conflated the number of people who are deaf (and sometimes deaf or hard of hearing) to mean the number of ASL users. This is not correct. A significant number of deaf people do not use what is properly called "ASL" but may use some form of manual communication.

Nor is it correct to limit the number of users to only deaf people. There are plenty of hearing people who use ASL.

So what is **the right number**? No one really knows, but the number of (D)eaf people in the US seems to be about 500,000 and that is the important number to remember.

### Does the Census Bureau provide the number of people who use ASL?

The three questions used to capture languages spoken and English-speaking ability are not designed to identify those who use ASL. The design of the question is to gather the number of people speaking languages other than English at home, identify which languages are being spoken, and to get the number of people who have difficulty with English. With that in mind, those who use ASL are presumed to know English. Those who report using American Sign Languages, ASL, or some variation of those words are coded as being English speakers.

Mitchell, R. E., Young, T. A., Bachleda, B., & Karchmer, M. A. (2006). How many people use ASL in the United States? Why estimates need updating. *Sign Language Studies*, 6(3), 306-335.

Census – Language Use, Frequently Asked Questions <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/about/faqs.html#Q8>  
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