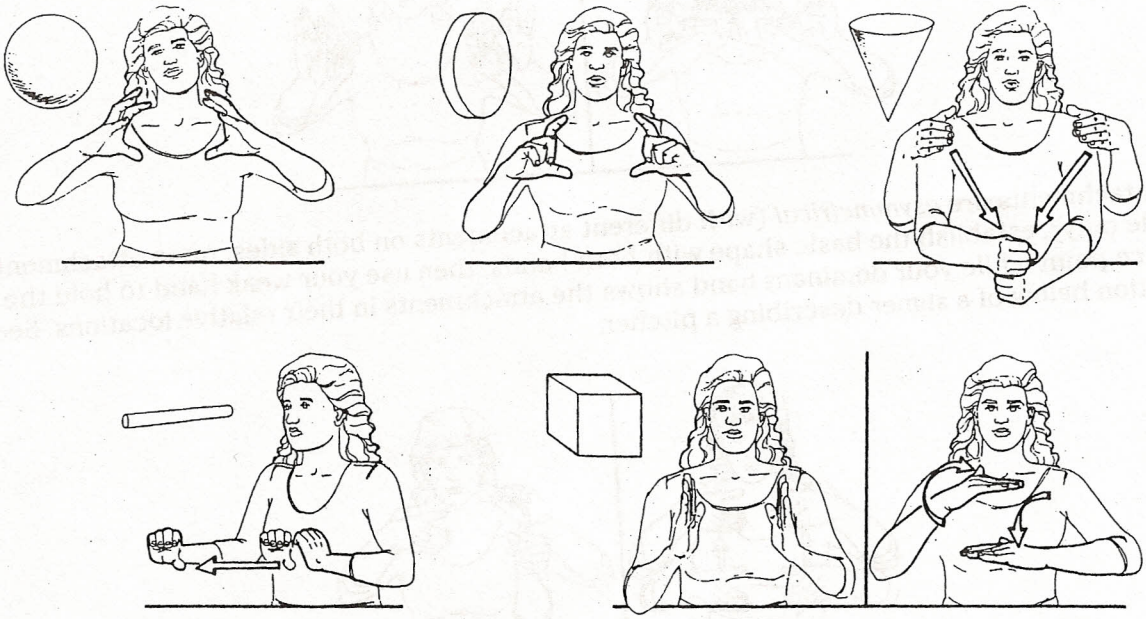
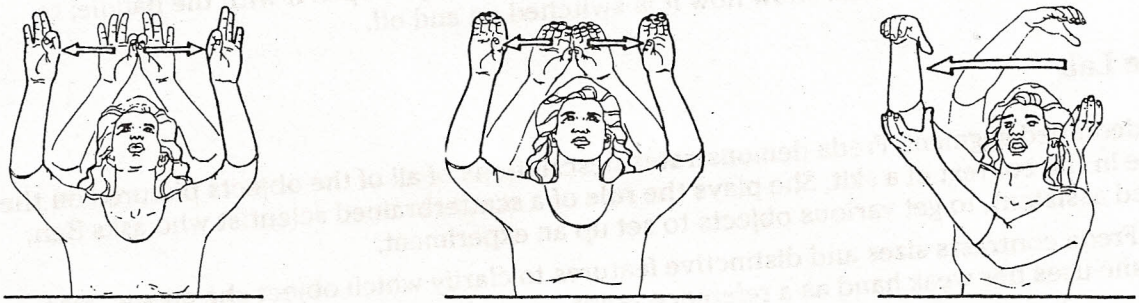
Using Classifiers to Describe Things

1) Descriptive classifiers (DCLs): These classifier handshapes categorize nouns by their physical characteristics. To describe an object, select a classifier handshape to describe its basic shape and size, i.e., sphere, cube, cylinder. See the illustrations of basic shapes with their corresponding DCLs.



Use non-manual behaviors, particularly the mouth, to emphasize the size of theobject if it is unusual, or if you are contrasting two similar objects of different sizes. For example:

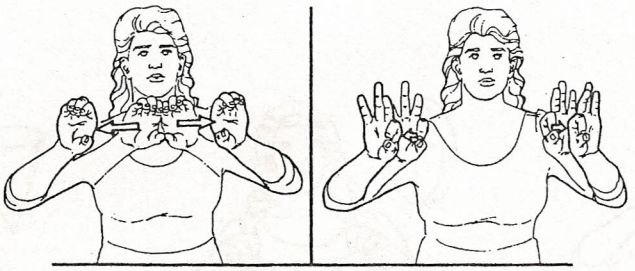


mouth "oo": relatively small mouth "mm": standard size mouth"cha": relatively large

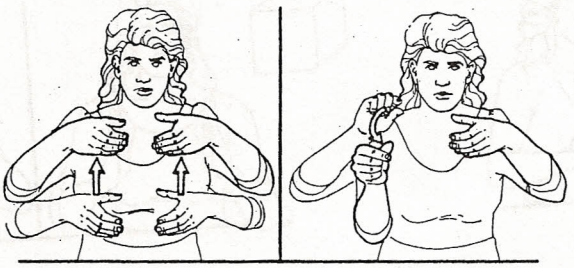
Notice also how the handshape of the DCL varies according to the size of the object.

DCLs are also used to describe *attachments and designs* on objects. How you describe attachments and designs depends on whether they are symmetrical or asymmetrical in relation to the basic shape of the object.

If the attachments are *symmetrical* (the attachments on both sides are similar in size and shape), describe the object by first establishing its basic shape, then using both hands simultaneously to show the attachments in their relative locations. See the illustration below of a signer describing a rolling pin.



If the attachments are *asymmetrical* (with different attachments on both sides, or an attachment on one side only), establish the basic shape with both hands, then use your weak hand to hold the reference point while your dominant hand shows the attachments in their relative locations. See the illustration below of a signer describing a pitcher.



2) Instrument classifiers (ICLs): Another way to describe attachments is to describe how the object is handled or how it works. Instrument classifiers are classifier handshapes and movements that indicate how an object or an attachment is handled, i.e., how it is pushed, pulled, lifted, turned. Here are some examples of how to use ICLs as part of a description: to indicate a pull-cord on a lamp, show how it is pulled; to indicate an oven door, show how you open it with the handle; to indicate a light switch on the wall, show how it is switched on and off.

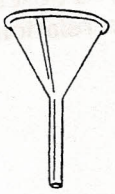
The Science Lab

In the next videotaped segment, Freda demonstrates descriptions of all of the objects pictured on the following page in the context of a skit. She plays the role of a scatterbrained scientist who asks Ben, her slow-witted assistant, to get various objects to set up an experiment.

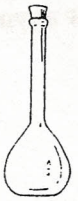
Observe how Freda contrasts sizes and distinctive features to clarify which object she means. Also observe how she uses her weak hand as a reference point.

Using reference points. Afterwards, you will see clips from the skit in slow motion. The clips show you how the scientist uses her weak hand (her left hand) to retain the DCL handshape for the basic shape while describing the additional features with her dominant hand (her right hand). Practice by imitating these descriptions.

1



2



3