

Why are there 2 signs for

In Auslan, you may come across two signs for the same thing. There are a few reasons for this:

- **Translated meaning vs word translation**

In English one word can have multiple meanings (polysemy), Each meaning may have its own Auslan signs

- **Regional variation**

This is where the language evolved uniquely in different areas of Australia

State variations—some signs have string ties to states

- **Synonymy (multiple words same meaning)** Like English Auslan is a rich language with Synonyms

We will look at each with examples within this mini Auslan theory lesson.



For more resources and learning materials visit

Bilby Publishing for physical materials (books dictionaries, teaching guides and more)

www.Bilby.store



SignPlanet.net Is an online dictionary and resource point with thousands of ready made resources like this one, online courses and more

The material contained herein is used with permission from Bilby Publishing

(www.Bilby.store) and is an extract from assorted papers by Lee Bilby including :

-“The Auslan teaching guide Volume 3”

- “The Auslan Dictionary for teachers, Parents and professionals”

© Lee Bilby, Bilby Publishing & Consulting. All rights reserved

Translated meaning vs word translation

In English one word can have multiple meanings, this is called polysemy,

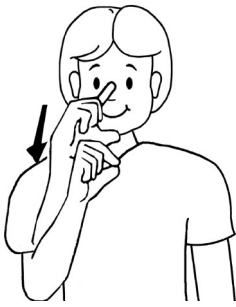
Some examples include :

- **Can**

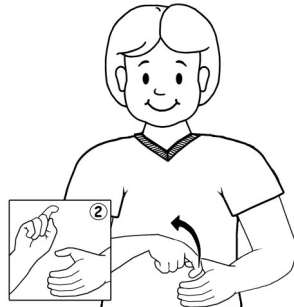
Meaning 1 : ability to do something. As in “I can jump”

Meaning 2: A vessel that holds a drink Eg “ I have a can of coke”

These very different meanings require different signs in a visual language where mime, hand shape, location and movement all contribute meaning



Meaning 1



Meaning 2

- **Funny**

Meaning 1 : Something that makes you laugh Eg “The comedian was so funny”

Meaning 2: Something that is unusual or strange Eg “The cream smelt funny, I think it is off”



Meaning 1



Meaning 2

Translate the meaning not the word

In the example above (“The cream smelt funny, I think it is off”) it is unlikely you would use either of these signs as this would not really translate the meaning of the sentence. You may actually use “not right/correct” to be more precise.

?

Regional Variations

This is where the language evolved uniquely in different areas of Australia.

Why?

There are two main reasons you need to understand

1. It is a visual language which was difficult to share across distances

Up until recent technological developments a person in Sydney never saw a person in Melbourne,

For example in a time where travel was predominantly by horse and people largely stayed in their place a Deaf person would never see Melbourne signers. The language evolved visually in regional areas. You could not share your language via written word, so the language evolved uniquely mostly around the Deaf schools.

2. Historical influence

Auslan evolved in Australia from key influences as follows:

- **BRITISH Melbourne** : F J Rose (and his wife Elizabeth Manning) started the Victorian Deaf and Dumb institute in 1860 (bringing a strong two handed British Sign language history with him)
- **SCOTISH Sydney** Thomas Patterson, from Scotland, started classes for the deaf in 1860
- **Adelaide:** Kelmzig Primary was started in 1960 with a bilingual approach
- **IRISH Newcastle (2hrs north of Sydney):** Sister Gabriel Hogan and the Dominican nuns are credited with being the first to formally bring sign language into education in Australia (using their Irish signs)
- **Brisbane:** 1894 Queensland Blind, deaf and dumb institute—non-sign language approach
- **Tasmania:** 1898 first deaf school starts—oral only approach until 1990!

So you see simultaneously Scottish sign language, British sign, and Irish catholic sign language entered the country.

Scottish and British Sign Language being very similar and two handed in basis, while Irish sign is more closely related to the one handed sign language of France and later the USA.

As a result we see the one handed influence in Auslan signs like dictionary and daddy which draw on the Irish D hand shape. The French heritage is clear in the P handshape in the sign for Perth



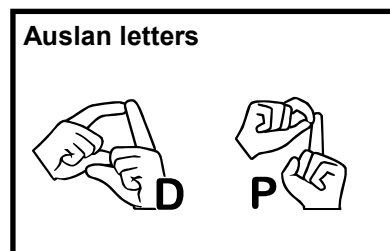
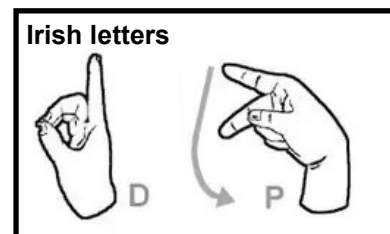
Dictionary



Daddy



Perth



State variations

Some signs have strong ties to state history, and as a result are far more common in one state of Australia vs another. This again draws back to that school history (on previous page)

Below are some examples, however you should be aware that the strength of the state bond to these signs is significantly demised today verses the past. Interstate travel and migration is a strong influence here. Again this stems all the way back to the two major schools and their influences and a time where travel was extremely limited so signs were not shared between communities like Sydney to Melbourne.

You may see these called Northern and Southern variations.

Northern being more common in Queensland and NSW

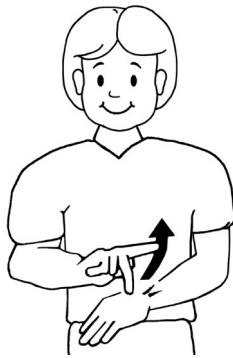
Southern more common in Melbourne through to Perth

More common

Northern

Southern

Blue



Red



Red in ASL (American sign) is almost identical to the northern sign for red, showing their joint French influences.

Water

Synonymy (multiple words same meaning)

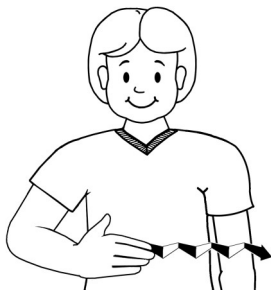
Like English Auslan is a rich language with synonyms that at the end of the day come down to personal preference which may have more to do with the signers age, the formality of the setting, cultural influences or other personal preferences that do not directly correlate to geographical location

For example, in English we have the words Swimmers, Bathers and togs, but each is more strongly used in particular family circles rather than cities.

In Auslan we have examples like **FISH**



Most commonly used in reference to fish you eat;
but also used more generally



Most commonly used in reference to fish swimming;
but also used more generally



General sign for fish

Some signs evolved over time for cultural reasons.

For example, the hooked pointer finger is culturally inappropriate in many aboriginal communities.



Older sign for come



evolving sign for come



Very old sign for Japanese



Modern one