Northeastern University
Center for Atypical Language Interpreting

Activities- ASL Receptive Skills Improvement

As students progress through ASL coursework, the same language sample may be revisited with different analytical lenses. **Early learners** focus on visual noticing and comfort with variation, while **later learners** begin identifying patterns, describing language features, and reflecting on their own comprehension strategies. The videos do not change — the learner's lens does.

ASL Classroom Activity — Receptive Noticing & Self-Awareness Cycle

Purpose:
To help students build receptive skills by practicing **noticing, meaning capture, and self-reflection** when viewing language samples. The focus is on comfort with variation, visual attention, and awareness of one's own comprehension — **not correctness or interpretation.**

Suggested Activity Flow

1. First Viewing — Observe Without Pressure

- Play a short clip (15–45 seconds).
- Students simply watch — no note-taking.
- Instructor reminder: *"You are not expected to understand everything."*

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2. Feature Noticing

- Replay the clip.
- Students jot quick notes or icons about what they notice:
    - Movement size or speed
    - Facial expression changes
    - Repetition or pauses
    - Use of space or pointing

Goal: describe **what is seen**, not judge or translate.

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3. Meaning Capture

- Students identify the **overall idea or emotion** rather than individual signs.
- Options: short phrases, icons, or topic words.
- Emphasize “big picture” understanding.

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4. Interaction & Strategy Spotting

- Students briefly notice what helped them understand:
    - Nods, pacing, repetition, pointing, waiting
- Connect these to everyday communication supports rather than evaluation.

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5. Comfort & Curiosity Check-In

Students respond privately or in pairs:

- What felt familiar?
- What felt new?
- What helped me stay engaged?
- How confident did I feel (1–5)?

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6. Short Share or Debrief (Optional)

- Students share **one feature noticed** and **one insight about their understanding.**
- Instructor models neutral, descriptive language and reinforces that comprehension varies.

Instructor Notes

- Keep clips short for newer learners; increase length gradually.
- Allow drawings or single words for early students.
- Redirect judgmental wording toward description.
- Revisit the same video later in the term so students can see their growth.

Key Message to Students:

This activity is about learning **how to watch language**, building comfort with variation, and noticing your own understanding process. Growth comes from exposure, curiosity, and reflection over time.

Activity Type	1st Semester ASL	2nd Semester ASL	3rd Semester ASL	4th Semester ASL
Viewing Length & Replay	5–15 second clips; multiple replays encouraged; normalize partial understanding	15–30 second clips; 2–3 replays; begin encouraging first-view noticing	30–60 second clips; 1–2 replays; emphasize gist on first viewing	60–90 second clips; limited replay; emphasize sustained attention and overall message
Observation Focus	Concrete visual noticing: movement size, facial expression changes, pauses, repetition	Visual + emerging pattern noticing: pacing, space use, recurring signs/gestures	Pattern recognition across time: timing shifts, discourse flow, turn-taking cues	Integrated pattern awareness: movement, timing, space, interaction flow, and consistency across the clip
Comfort & Curiosity Check-Ins	“What felt familiar?” “What felt new?” “What helped me stay engaged?”	Add: “Where did my understanding increase?”	Add: “What helped me stay with the message when I was unsure?”	Add: “How did my comfort level influence what I noticed or missed?”
Visual Feature Scavenger Hunt	Concrete categories (big movements, eyebrow changes, repetition, pauses)	Same categories + add space use and head movement	Expand to include timing/pacing and referencing/pointing	Use open-ended feature lists; students select and justify which features supported comprehension

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Meaning Mapping (Global Understanding)	Choose or draw icons for emotion, topic category, or setting	Identify main topic and one supporting idea	Identify topic, 2–3 key ideas, and emotional tone	Identify topic, key ideas, emotional tone, and shifts in focus across the clip
Interviewer Strategy Spotting	Notice nods, waiting, pointing, turn-taking cues	Notice clarification strategies and pacing adjustments	Notice question structuring and feedback signals	Notice conversational flow management and how strategies support mutual understanding
Micro-Transcript / Idea Capture *(Receptive Only)*	5–10 second segments; capture a single idea or theme	10–15 second segments; capture 1–2 ideas	15–20 second segments; capture clusters of meaning	20–30 second segments; capture idea sequences and transitions
Strategy Brainstorm (Interaction Supports)	“What might help me understand in a conversation?” (e.g., repetition, slowing pace, pointing)	Add: confirmation checks and visual mapping	Add: sequencing information and environmental supports	Add: anticipating clarification needs and continuity supports

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Language Variation Reflection	Normalize “different signing styles” and “individual expression” using simple language	Add “community variation” and “personal style”	Discuss how familiarity and exposure affect understanding	Reflect on how variation informs expectations and preparation for future interactions
Assumption Reflection	Gentle prompts: “What surprised me?” “What questions do I have?”	Add: “What assumptions did I notice?”	Add: “How did my prior experiences affect my understanding?”	Add: “What patterns do I notice in my reactions across multiple clips?”
Receptive Stamina Building	Very short clips; frequent breaks; normalize ambiguity	Short clips; brief sustained viewing; introduce silent first viewing	Moderate clips; encourage staying with uncertainty before replay	Longer clips; emphasize sustained attention before any replay

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