

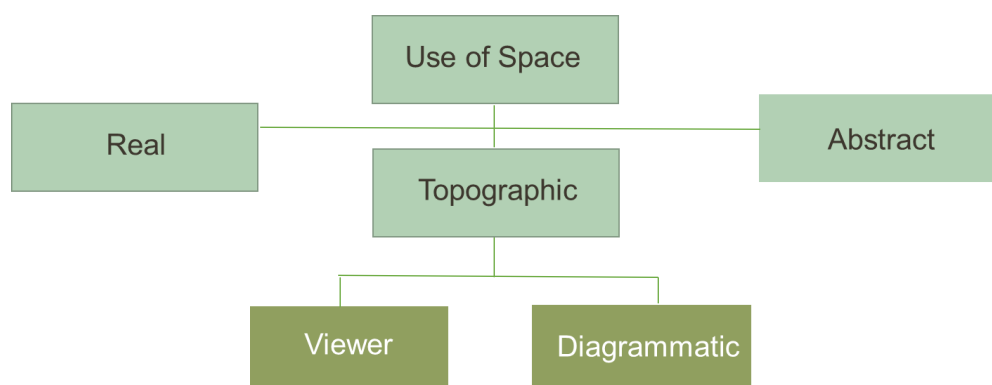
Translation of USE OF SPACE IN AUSLAN from the Linguistics of Auslan series, which is located at <http://www.deafconnected.com.au/linguistics-of-auslan/>

USE OF SPACE IN AUSLAN

Auslan by nature involves the use of space.

Entities such as people or objects are not randomly placed in the space around the signer's body; there is a logical arrangement to their placement, in order to give information to others and for it to be clearly understood. Native signers of Auslan innately use features related to the use of space.

How space is used in Auslan falls under specific categories, each with its own distinctive conventions. The following diagram will highlight these categories and I will give you examples related to each one. This information comes from *Australian Sign Language: An introduction to sign language linguistics* - Authors Trevor Johnston and Adam Schembri (2007)



The diagram shows three categories. The first is '**Real Space**', which means that the entity is actually in the room and can be seen by the viewers.

If I am going to describe this mug to another person, I can point to it, since it is physically here. If I move the mug to another location, I will not be referring to it in its original position; instead, I will be indicating (by pointing and eye gaze) to its new location because you can physically see the mug has moved. This use of space is referred to as 'Real Space'.

The second category is '**Topographic Space**'. This refers to entities that are not actually there in front of you. However, they are not randomly positioned in space but it is a recreation of a scene from the location where it took place. There are two types of Topographic Space - *Diagrammatic* and *Viewer*. I will explain each of these terms in more detail.

Diagrammatic represents the location and spatial arrangements of people and objects in the real world; similar to the theatre where you place people and objects in their correct position as taken from an original scene.

Similarly, when describing the layout of a house, the actual dimensions of the house cannot be shown within a signing space; however, this can be represented as a scaled down model of the house. For example, from the front door you indicate where to go through to the lounge room, to the left is the bedroom followed by the kitchen etc.

Diagrammatic Space can also be representation as a two-dimension form either as a vertical or a horizontal plane. If you consider Australia and its vast size, it can be scaled down like a map within

your signing space, making it is easy to demonstrate concepts such as flying from state to state around Australia. This type of placement or mapping is known as using Diagrammatic Space.

In *Viewer Space*, a signer uses the space around their body to reflect their point of view in a life-size environment, embedding themselves as part of the information. For example, I walk and I am using my eye gaze to observe things around me, as if I am in that environment.

If I was describing a recent trip to the library, I could show the action of picking out a book from a shelf above me, then reading and returning the book to its location. I perform these actions as if I am there to help you visualise the events that took place.

Another example of *Viewer Space* is the act of teaching someone how to use a computer. I demonstrate how to turn on the computer, how to use the mouse and using non-manual features to show that I am looking at the computer screen. The signer puts themselves into the scene, as if they are actually there.

The third category is '**Abstract Space**'. This occurs when entities are not physically present and the signer assigns a location to them, in order to reduce the need to continually repeat signs or fingerspelling whenever they are referred to. For example, if I am describing the Australian Government, I could place Labor to the left and Liberal to the right side and then subsequently point to these locations when referring to them. This is not a recreation of how they have actually appeared in another setting; it is a means to easily refer to each one by simply pointing to the assigned location the signer has attributed to them.

Abstract Space can also be used to describe two people meeting, for example, a teacher and student. I can show one person coming from the left meeting up with another person approaching from the right. In the real situation, they may not have actually come together in this way, the student might be seated and the teacher standing; however, for simplicity, I have shown this as two entities meeting in the middle to have a discussion.

This information covers the three categories related to the use of space – Real, Topographic and Abstract – you should now be able to observe Auslan signers and notice their use of space and be able to describe these features in signing.