Note: See the assignment at the end!

**Indexing** is when you point your index finger at a person, place or thing that is (present referent") or isn’t (absent referent) in the signing area.

If the person is there, (present) you can just point at them to mean "HE" or "SHE." You can point at an object to mean "IT."

In American Sign Language, the index or forefinger handshape is used to indicate the pronouns "me," "you," "he-she-it," "we," "you-all," and "they." Thus the concept is called “indexing.”

If the person is not there, you can identify him by spelling his name (or some other method of identification--like a "name sign," then you can "index" him to a point in space. Now you have a referent for that person. Once you have set up a referent, you can refer back to that same point each time you want to talk about that person.

When talking about people, places or things (referents) that are not in the immediate environment, it is important to establish these referents in specific locations in the signing space in front of you. Referents are established by naming what you are referring to - then designating (by pointing to) a location. They can be referred to again by simply pointing to the same location.

Example: If you’re talking about your two brothers, you would start by “assigning” them a space. Whenever you want to say something about one of the referents, you just point to the spot you assigned that referent to: rather than needing to finger spell their names every single time.

As you compare or contrast two people, places, or things, be sure to shift your head and body slightly in agreement with the space you established for each referent. If you point to the left, shift to the left, if you point to the right, shift to the right.

**Contrastive structure** means establishing spatial referents and then referring to them using body shift with appropriate agreement between the body shift and the referent as you contrast various characteristics about those referents. An example of when contrastive structure is good to use is when you are talking about how many sisters and brothers you have.

The rules of contrastive structure are easy. First, identify the person by fingerspelling his or her name; describing a few key features such as hair color or height also helps. Second, just point to the right of one's body. That's all there is to it. Once a person has been established using contrastive structure, you simply point back to that spot to refer back to them. These works with multiple people as well, but try to refrain from using more than two people at a time, as it may confuse the other signer.

Using CONTRASTIVE STRUCTURE here is an example of a short story about two friends: Jack and Carol.

Jack is a student at Ashland University. Carol is a teacher at Ashland University. Jack studies Spanish. Carol teaches ASL. Jack grew up in New Orleans. Carol grew up in Pittsburgh.
I HAVE TWO FRIENDS

(Point left and spell) **J-A-C-K** (place on Left)  
(Point right and spell) **C-A-R-O-L** (place on right)

(Point left, body shift left/ eye gaze left)  
**STUDENT HERE ASHLAND U**  
(Point right)  
**TEACHER ASHLAND U**

(Point left)  
**STUDY SPANISH**  
(Point right)  
**TEACH ASL**

(Point left)  
**GROW-UP NEW ORLEANS**  
(Point right)  
**GROW-UP PHILADELPHIA**

Notice you did not have to repeat the names Jack or Carol after you established their referent location!

**Assignment**

Now, it’s your turn! Using the format above, write a short story about 2 of your own friends. Be sure to include their name and AT LEAST THREE bits of information about each person.