



# The Structure of an eELP for sign languages

The ProSign Team

**PROSIGN**



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### Background for the creation of an eELP

Spoken languages (e.g. German, English, Portuguese or Italian) are characterized by their auditory-vocal modality. As a result, speech comprehension takes place through hearing and speech production through speaking. Written language is also used. In written modality, speech comprehension takes place through reading and speech production through writing. Foreign languages are generally acquired through these four competences (speaking, listening, reading, writing).



Sign languages (e.g. German Sign Language, DGS / British Sign Language, BSL or French Sign Language, LSF) function in a different way. Through the visual-gestural modality, speech is perceived visually (via the eyes) and produced by manual elements (hands and arms) and non-manual elements (face, eyes, mouth and posture). Sign language communication is realised through both face-to-face and video (e.g. via the internet). When learning a foreign language in the visual-gestural modality, four skills are acquired:



1. comprehension
  - a. face-to-face
  - b. watching a sign language video
  
2. production
  - a. face-to-face
  - b. producing a sign language video

In order to design a suitable structure for an ELP for sign languages it is important to take account of the different skills. Two different types of learners should be noted:

M1 / L2: People who have grown up with a sign language as first language (L1) in the visual-gestural modality (M1) and have acquired foreign languages (L2) in the same modality (M1).

M2 / L2: People who have grown up with a spoken language as a first language (L1) in the auditory-vocal modality (M1) and have acquired foreign languages (L2) in a new visual-gestural modality (M2).

For this reason a ELP written on paper is not a suitable form for learners of sign languages. A digital learning platform (i.e. electronic European Language Portfolio, eELP) is a better way of meeting the requirements of a visual-gestural language.

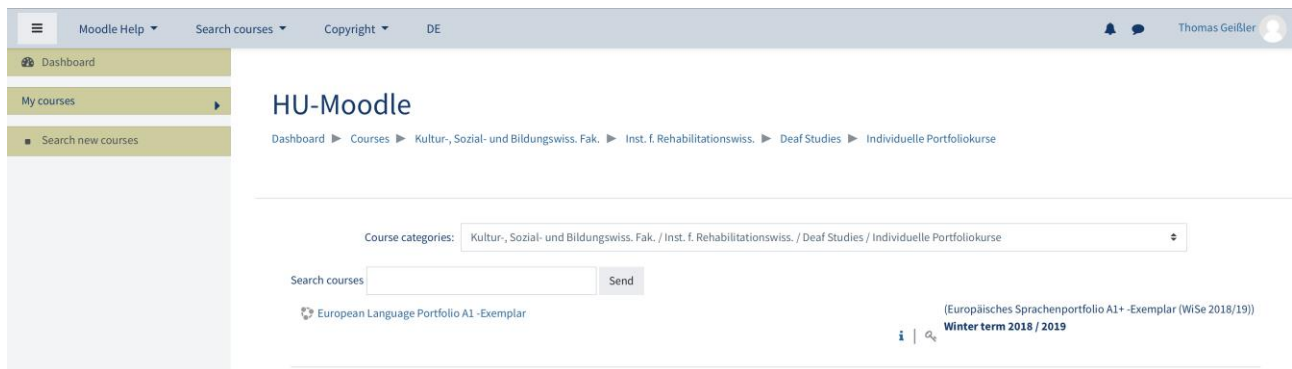
Because of this an eELP requires a platform through which the four competencies and learning pathways can be documented and reviewed. The learning processes are documented through written documents and video files, i.e. through different types of media. The possibility of using different kinds of media generates multimediality. In this way, learners can review their current level of performance at any time and actively reflect on their individual learning processes. Thus, multimediality supports autonomous learning because, amongst other things, it allows learners to work on different kinds of task.

A user-friendly platform is characterized by an easy handling (uploading and downloading of documents / files at any time, as well as clear classification of documents / files).

An open-source program is a requirement for a suitable learning platform, for example "Moodle" (<https://moodle.com>) where, among other features, material can be uploaded or downloaded.



The following section describes the structure of the eELP as it is used at the Humboldt University of Berlin in Germany with the assistance of the open-source program „Moodle“ (ill. 1).



ill. 1

## Structure of the eELP

As described in the introduction, the eELP is divided into three parts: the language passport, the language biography and the dossier.

The following illustration provides an overview of the eELP and the digital learning platform Moodle, which is used at the Humboldt University of Berlin (January 2019) (ill. 2).





ill. 2

, There are three areas of skills: comprehension, production, and interaction for learning sign languages. Learners can make meaningful self-assessments through recording detailed entries into the different areas. The three components - the language passport, the language biography and the dossier - combine to achieve the objectives of the ELP.



The **language passport** aims to keep learners always up to date with their current level and to give them the opportunity to assess their competencies. It also provides detailed information which can be used for a number of purposes. For example, learners can use their language passport online as part of “Europass“ where entries for other foreign languages can be made. (<https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu>)

The **language biography** helps learners to reflect retrospectively on their language learning process and to take notes on how best to proceed by defining individual learning steps. In this way it provides a tool for self-assessment of language skills and self-reflection.

In the language biography the following information can be noted in detail:



- history of learning
- personal experiences
- intercultural experiences

The language biography is divided into two parts (Cerceles, 2002):

1) The first part offers learners the opportunity to look back on their previous learning process and to document it. This enables them to present their motives for learning a language and to formulate the goals they pursue in it and why they want to learn the language. The language learning experiences include the personal experiences of the learners' past and the steps they have already taken to learn the language. When considering the language biography the language profile or language level must always be taken into account. There are also interfaces with the language passport.



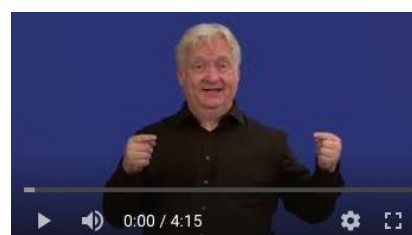
2) The second part gives the learners space to prepare, plan and reflect on their learning. Pathways to language learning can also be documented. To do this learners make notes regarding their next learning steps in the categories of comprehension (appendix 1), production (cf. appendix 2) and interaction (cf. appendix 3). The date is recorded in order subsequently to draw conclusions about the duration of a learning step.



Because the goals and methods of each learner are different - Here are two examples:

Goal: to increase competence in the **use of facial expressions**

Method: When watching a sign language video the focus could be mainly paid to facial expressions. When repeating the content the learner would pay attention to her\*his own facial expressions and compare he result with the original video.



Goal: to **internalize vocabulary**

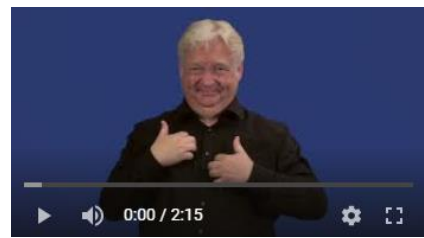
Method: Watch a video repeatedly to remember the signs used.

If the learner is satisfied with her\*his performance, this method can become a successful strategy that can be applied to other areas.



Learners become aware of what approach to learning is best for them by trying out and evaluating different methods. A wide range of methods are available and learners need to find out for themselves how they learn best.

They can exchange views with fellow-students and benefit from each other's language learning results. To help them to develop strategies, there are documents which the learners can complete while working with partners. On some days, learners manage to internalize new input very quickly, at others they need more time. By analyzing these differences learners can identify the conditions for successful learning and adapt these strategies to subsequent learning sessions. In addition, learning experiences outside the university language learning context can be included in the Portfolio (cf. appendix 4).



Other documents available to learners are checklists. These allow them to self-assess language skills; in the ELP for adults they have a special form for this.

Checklists aim to provide a tool for self-assessment that gives learners the opportunity to document their learning progress, track their own development and present their growth.

The various criteria can be commented using the symbols provided by the Council of Europe



- ++ I can do that very well. (e.g. sign, understand, interact)
- + I am good at that, but I still make mistakes or need aids. (e.g. a look at the vocabulary)
- ! That's still hard for me.

Learners are free to choose their own icons (e.g. emoticons). When they carry out self-assessment using the three symbols, they can note their new learning goals (cf. appendix 5; 6; & 7).



The set form of the checklists follows the criteria of the CEFR for sign languages (ProSign, 2016), depending on the level classification of the learners (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2).

The objectives which emerge from using the checklists can be transferred to the learners' personal learning plans to document the next steps and long-term goals. The phased learning goals are linked to appropriate learning strategies., Motivation for learning can be built up by planning small intermediate steps, since what can be concentrated on next is described in detail (cf. appendix 8).



The dossier is an important element for learning a foreign language. It is a collection of the learner's own work of different kinds, and shows examples of how learning is progressing.

## European Language Portfolio A1 -Exemplar

Dashboard ▶ My courses ▶ European Language Portfolio A1 -Exemplar ▶ Sections ▶ Dossier ▶ Comprehension

### Comprehension



Download folder Edit

The dossier is a documentation, a kind of summary, which helps learners to track their development compared to where they are at any given time. These insights, in conjunction with the checklists, can help to complete the further stages of development (ill. 3).

ill. 3

Various documents can be collected in the dossier:

- learning materials
- certificates
- assessments
- awards
- certificates of attendance
- recorded films or videos (e.g. own recordings for exercise purposes in class, in interaction with deaf people)
- creating a vocabulary to look up signs
- language documents
- other materials



In Moodle learners can classify their documents in the categories of comprehension, production, interaction and general.





Appendix 1

**Paths to language learning**

I ask immediately if I do not understand something.

Date:

I write down new signs and record them in a video.

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:



Appendix 2

**Paths to language learning**

I sign all the things I have planned to do once a week.

Date:

I try to remember and produce a new sign and check it out in the glossary afterwards.

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

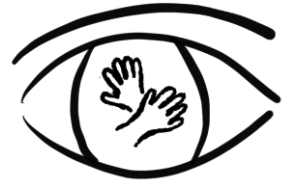
Date:

Date:

Date:

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Date:



**Paths to language learning**

I try to communicate with my fellow students in DGS during the breaks.

Date:

I ask people who are signing to repeat signs or to sign slowly.

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Date:

Appendix 4

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



Learning experience - learn sign language outside the classroom

Date:

1. Enter your own experiences.
2. Ask your partner for her\*his experiences.

	Me	My partner
I use breaks to sign with fellow students.		
I do research on the internet about sign languages.		
I watch the TV program „Sehen statt Hören“ (Watch instead of Listening) regularly.		
I watch movies with sign languages on YouTube		
I read many articles about sign languages.		
I go to events where sign languages are used.		
I watch training films at home.		
I do my homework.		
I search the glossary for new signs.		
I learn ... new signs every day.		
I follow discussions on social networks (e.g. Facebook) with sign language videos.		
I film my own sign language videos and post them in discussions.		
I record short videos and put them on social media (e.g. What's App).		
I receive short videos (e.g. What's App).		
I create a deaf space and use sign language there.		



Learning goals from checklist	Detailed description of the implementation of the learning goals	Schedule	 / 



# PROSIGN

[www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The European Centre for Modern Languages is a Council of Europe institution promoting excellence in language education in its member states.

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It includes 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union.

All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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