

A Quick Guide.

For translating music into visual language. Before you translate the words, notice what the music is doing. Ten questions, drawn from the five modules of *Language Between the Beats*.

01 Feel It

FROM MODULE 01

What happens before you start signing?

- What is the overall mood?
- Where does the energy rise, fall, pause, or shift?
- What does your body naturally want to do?
- What feeling should the audience leave with?

Feel first. Translate second. Musicality often begins before language does.

02 See It

FROM MODULE 01

Build the visual world before choosing signs.

- What scene do you see?
- Who is speaking, and to whom?
- What is moving? What is still?
- What images, characters, locations, or relationships appear?

Clear imagery creates clearer signing.

03 Find the Intention

FROM MODULE 03

Ask what the lyric is doing, not only what it says.

Is it...

confessing · remembering · questioning · longing ·
warning · celebrating · pleading · teasing ·
grieving · declaring

Your intention influences your expression, movement, timing, and sign choices.

04 Find the Rhythm

FROM MODULE 01

Rhythm isn't only the beat. Look for:

Tempo — fast or slow?

Accents — where are the strongest moments?

Pauses — where does the music give you space?

Flow — smooth, sharp, heavy, light, repetitive?

Your hands don't have to move on every beat. Sometimes the musical choice is to wait.

05 Find the Breath

FROM MODULE 02

Phrasing is a group of movements that share the same emotional breath. For each phrase, ask:

Gather — what does the body do before this phrase begins?

Hold — how long do you let this thought exist?

Release — does it close cleanly, or dissolve?

Carry — does it stop, or spill into the next?

Where you stop is part of what you said. A phrase that does not breathe has nothing to land on.

06 Find the Motif

FROM MODULE 01

What keeps returning? It might be:

a sign · a movement · a handshape · a location ·
a character · an image · a rhythmic pattern

Repeating a visual motif creates memory and cohesion. Let the motif remain recognizable while its emotion evolves.

07 Inhabit the Space

FROM MODULE 04

Presence begins before the first sign. Ask:

Arrival — are you settled, or still arriving while your hands have started?

Gaze — where are your eyes sending the viewer?

Proximity — how far apart are these two ideas, and what does that distance say?

Stillness — what is happening inside the pause?

The viewer reads your space whether you intend it or not. So intend it.

08 Follow the Emotional Arc

FROM MODULE 04

Ask:

*Where does the song begin? → Where does it build? →
Where does it shift? → Where does it land?*

Your signing can change through:

size · speed · weight · space · facial expression ·
body movement · role shift · stillness

*Don't give the climax away too early.
Leave yourself somewhere to go.*

09 Choose Your Translation Approach

FROM MODULE 03

LITERAL

Closely follows the English words and structure.

MODIFIED LITERAL

English structure with more ASL features and visual clarification.

IDIOMATIC

Prioritizes meaning and natural ASL structure.

CREATIVE / UNDULY FREE

Reshapes or reimagines the material through the artist's interpretation.

One performance can move between approaches. Know what you're choosing and why. Every departure is a fingerprint.

10 Edit

FROM MODULE 04

Not every word needs a sign.

Not every sound needs movement.

Not every beat needs to be filled.

Ask: does this sign add meaning, rhythm, imagery, or intention?

If not, consider removing it. Knowing what not to sign is as advanced as knowing what to sign.

THE FOUR THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Translate intention, not just words.
- 2 Honor rhythm.
- 3 Trust restraint.
- 4 Let the body lead.

BEFORE YOU PERFORM...

What do I want the audience to *see*?

What do I want them to *feel*?

What can I leave *unsaid*?

Does this feel like *me*?