Try reading the following paragraph quickly:

The pweor of the hmuan mnid

Aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer in what oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can stll raed it wouthit any porbelms. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.

Not that hard, is it? This demonstrates the fallacy of trying to see each letter when reading fingerspelled words. Many Deaf children—children not old enough to read—can understand many fingerspelled words. That’s because they recognize the words as whole units, rather than as a series of letters. Being able to recognize all the words in the above paragraph is an example of the three Cs of fingerspelling—Context, Clozure, and Configuration.

**Context:** Once you determine the paragraph is a report on scientific research, that reduces the number of possible words you might encounter.

**Clozure:** Because you see the first and last letter of each word in its proper place, it’s much easier to determine what the word is. Similarly, though you may miss some of the internal letters in a fingerspelled word, you can usually see the first and last letter.

**Configuration:** The capitalized letters denote proper nouns (Cambridge University) as well as the beginnings of sentences. Additionally, some words seem to have a unique “shape”: research, important, without, and whole. Even scrambled, these words stand out in the paragraph.