

Take nothing but pictures,
Leave nothing but bubbles,
Kill nothing but time.

nauti diver



Divers Hand Signal Guide

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One really important under rated dive skill is underwater communication. Unless we have full comm sets the only way we can communicate is through hand signals. Good communication skills can really help improve the enjoyment and safety of your dive.



The first step is to know the hand signals and the second step is to run through the signals you will use during your dive – this is done either during their dive brief and/or during your buddy check. After all, its not enough for only one diver to understand the signals – both divers must know what each signal means.

There are lots of sites and dive agencies that produce hand signal guides but I've yet to find one that covers 'all' signals. We've tried to pull together a compilation of signals to cover most diving scenarios

OKAY (Underwater)

The OKAY hand signal, a demand response signal, is usually the first one a new diver will learn and probably the one that you'll use the most. It is used as a question and a response.

You make the signal toward your buddy to ask if they are OKAY. If they are, they respond with the OKAY signal.

How to do it: Join your thumb and index finger to form a loop and then extend the remaining three fingers up.



SURFACE "Go Up, End the Dive Now"

Not to be confused or accidentally used as the "OK" signal is the thumbs-up. Use this signal to communicate that it's time to ascend and end the dive.

This can be used if the diver is feeling uncomfortable for any reason and wants to end the dive. It's also used just at the end of the dive to communicate it's time to go up.

How to do it: The universal thumbs-up



TURN AROUND "Turn the Dive, Go Back"

This signal is used to let your buddy know it's time to turn around and head back towards the shore or the boat. This is usually based on air consumption

How to do it: Take your finger and swirl it around in a circular motion.



HOLD (Stop)

Divers typically communicate "stop" in one of two ways. The first method (common in recreational diving) is to hold up a flat hand, palm forward, as a traffic cop would.

Technical divers, however, favour the "hold" sign, made by extending a fist with the palm-side of the fist facing outward. The "hold" sign is a demand-response signal: A diver who signals "hold" should receive a "hold" sign in return, indicating that his fellow divers have understood the signal and agree to stop and hold their position.



BUBBLES

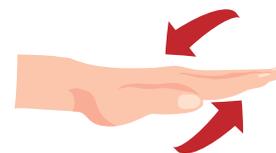
The "bubbles" or "leak" signal communicates that a diver has noticed a leaking seal or bubbling piece of gear either on herself or her buddy. To make the "bubbles" hand signal, open and close your fingertips rapidly. You should then end the dive and begin a slow and controlled ascent to the surface.



PROBLEM (Something's Wrong - Underwater)

Let other divers know there's a problem by using the "Not OK" signal and then pointing to the source of the problem.

How to do it: Using an open, flat hand facing downwards, rotate it slowly up and down as if to say "so-so"



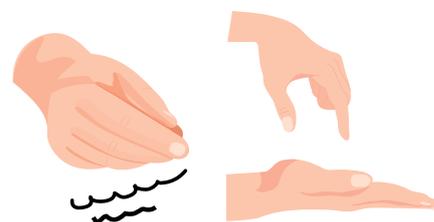
SWAP PLACES

Asks that divers change places or reverse order. Requires a response.



WRITE DOWN MESSAGE

When all other communication fails, divers sometimes find it easiest to simply write down the information to be communicated on an underwater slate or wet-notes underwater notebook. A writing device is a valuable tool underwater. It can save time and increase diver safety by allowing a diver to express complex ideas or problems. The "write it down" signal is made by pantomiming that one hand is a writing surface, and the other hand is writing with a pencil.



SPEED UP

Asks that pace be increased



GO UNDER

Directs diver to swim under some feature of cave such as a projection or line



GO OVER

Directs diver to swim over some feature of cave such as a projection or line



SLOW DOWN

Asks that pace be reduce

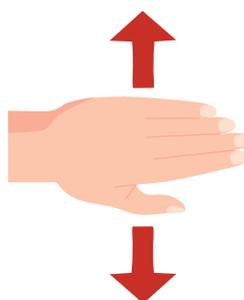


LEVEL OFF

This signal is used to communicate with others to maintain or remain at a particular depth. This may be because you've reached the planned maximum depth or the depth for making a decompression or safety stop.

May be used to ask that dive depth be limited to current level. May also be used to modify questions or statements concerning maximum depth.

How to do it: Extend a flat hand with the palm facing down and move your hand side to side.



THE SAFETY STOP

This signal is used to inform divers that you have reached the safety stop depth and that everyone should level off for at least three minutes.

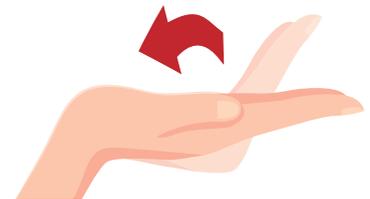
The safety stop depth and time frame may depend on several factors. However, three minutes at 5m depth is typical.

How to do it: Hold the “Level off” signal over the “Ascend” signal. It is also common to use three fingers instead of a thumbs-up as most safety stops are three minutes long for recreational divers.



COME HERE

For the “come here” hand signal, extend a flattened hand, palm up, and bend the fingertips upward toward yourself. The “come here” signal is basically the same signal that people use in everyday conversation.



LOOK

The “look” hand signal is made by pointing the index and third fingers at your eyes and then indicating the object to be observed. A scuba instructor uses the “look at me” signal to indicate that students should watch him demonstrate an underwater skill, such as mask clearing during the open water course. “Look at me” is signaled by making the “look” signal and then gesturing toward your chest with a finger or thumb.

Divers can also enjoy showing each other aquatic life and other underwater attractions by using the “look over there” signal, made by signaling “look” and then pointing toward the animal or object.

Look at me



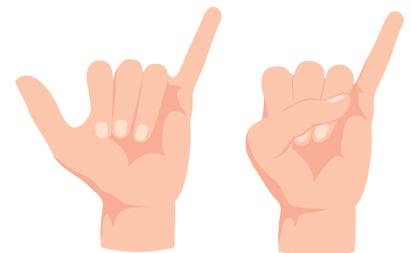
Look over there



DECO OR DECOMPRESSION

The “decompression” hand signal is commonly made in one of two ways—either with an extended pinkie or with an extended pinkie and thumb (similar to a “hang loose” sign). Technical divers trained in decompression diving techniques use this signal to communicate the need for a decompression stop. Recreational divers should also be familiar with this signal.

Although recreational scuba divers should never plan to make a decompression dive without proper training, this sign is useful in the unlikely event that a diver accidentally exceeds their no-decompression limit for a dive and must communicate the need for an emergency decompression stop.



CUT

Directs that line be cut





BOAT

This simple signal is commonly used to either indicate you can see the boat or that you are starting to head back to the boat. It can also indicate to other divers to watch for boats when on shallow dives or when ascending.



DISTRESS (Surface)

Communicating that you're okay or that there's a problem is a little different above and below the water. This is mostly so that it's easier for the captain or crew to see your signals from a distance.

How to do it: Wave your arm over your head continuously as if you're waving to say hello.



OK (Surface)

Use the surface OK signal to let the crew know you're good after you enter the water, or if asked.

How to do it: Join both of your hands to create a ring over the top of your head.

Alternatively, you can put one closed fist on top of your head



DOWN/DESCEND

The thumbs-down sign allows you to let your dive buddies know that you are ready to begin the dive. It also can be used to communicate you are good to go deeper.

Don't confuse this sign with "Not OK" even though it may look like second nature to use a thumbs-down signal to communicate something's wrong.

How to do it: Use the thumbs-down hand signal



BUDDY



GET WITH YOUR BUDDY

The scuba diving hand signal may not be used outside of instructors and students, but it's still helpful to know. You never know when you may need to use it.

It may be used to remind students to stay close to their buddies. It may also be used to reassign teams in the middle of dives or pair up with another diver for a specific reason.

How to do it: Form fists side by side and extend index fingers.

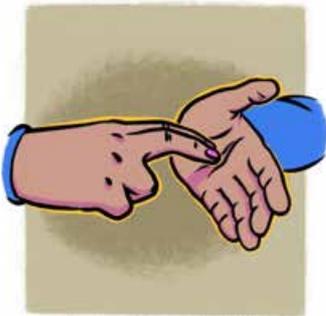


I'M COLD

Getting too cold while diving can lead to problems. When divers get excessively cold, this may lead to unclear thinking and their body may not eliminate absorbed nitrogen as efficiently.

If you or your diver buddy are feeling extra cold, use this signal and then end your dive with a normal safety stop and ascent.

How to do it: Cross your arms and rub your upper arms with your hands.



HOW MUCH AIR DO YOU HAVE?

Ask your divers or buddies how much air they have to make sure you're turning the dive with enough time to get back to the boat or shore.

How to do it: Take two fingers and tap them onto your other flattened hand.



LOW ON AIR

Not necessarily an emergency signal, the low air signal is still an important one. It allows other divers to know that you need to end your dive and slowly start ascending so that you don't end up running out of air.

How to do it: Hold a closed fist against your chest.



OUT OF AIR

This emergency scuba signal is used to inform fellow divers when they have no air - whether because they have run out or something has happened that their equipment is not working properly.

This is not something that should be happening if pre-dive checks are taking place and divers are cognizant of their air consumption during the dive, it's always best to be prepared.

How to do it: Move a flat hand across your throat in a slicing motion.



SHARE AIR

If you or your buddy is out of air or having trouble with their air source, use this signal to indicate you need to share or use their alternate air source.

How to do it: Take a flat hand and motion back and forth between your mouths.



EARS NOT CLEARING

Probably one of the most common problems is trouble equalizing. It's usually a fairly simple fix, but still, something that's best to communicate with your buddy.

How to do it: Use the "Not OK" signal first (above) and then point to your ear



YOU LEAD, I'LL FOLLOW

Let your buddy know that you'll follow their lead. Or, let your buddy know that you'll take the lead.

How to do it: Point at your buddy first with that finger leading if you want them to lead.



CRAMP

A cramp underwater can be painful and immobilise you. Let your buddy know you have a cramp so they can know you may need a minute before continuing or help you if needed.

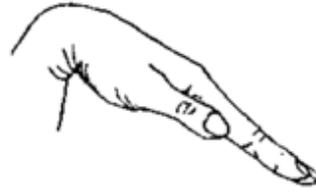
How to do it: Point to afflicted muscle and repeatedly open and close your fist.





TIE OFF

Directs that line be tied off.

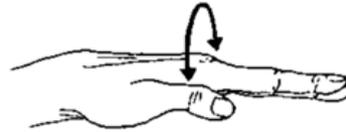


BENT



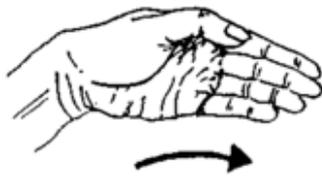
TURN ON

Directs that diver turn on some piece of equipment, usually a tank valve.



BAD

Also used to indicate that a problem exists.



GO AROUND

Directs diver to swim around some feature of cave such as a projection or column



STUCK

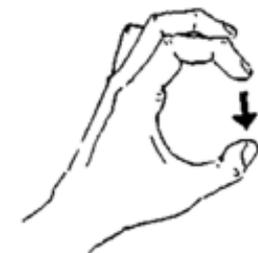


REEL

May be used to ask that diver operate the reel, either for deployment or retrieval.

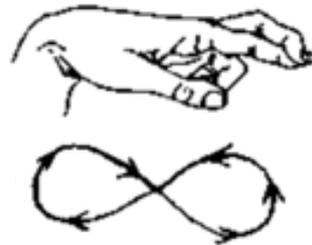


BIG



TAKE PICTURE

Refers to the taking of photographs, movies or videos



ENTANGLED



BACKUP



SMALL

NUMBERS



ONE



TWO



THREE



FOUR



FIVE



SIX



SEVEN



EIGHT



NINE



ZERO

ASKING QUESTIONS:



QUESTION

For the “question” signal, raise a crooked index finger to mimic a question mark. The “question” signal is used in conjunction with any one of the other scuba diving hand signals. For example, the “question” signal followed by the “up” signal communicates “Should we go up?” and the “question” signal followed by the “cold” signal could be used to express “Are you cold?”



QUESTION + DECOMPRESSION + (POINT TO BUDDY)

What is your decompression?



QUESTION + (POINT IN A DIRECTION) + (SWIM)

Do you want to go that way?



QUESTION + (POINT TO DEPTH GAUGE) + LEVEL OFF =

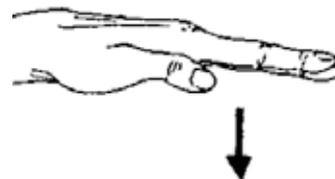
What is your max depth? OR

Do you want to level off at this depth?

[Precise meaning usually determined by context]



SWAP PLACES



SWIM CLOSER TO FLOOR

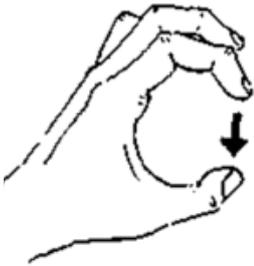
NOUNS



LIGHT



CURRENT



CAMERA



WALL

Move hand up and down to suggest a wall



KNIFE

Make a sawing or slashing motion



CEILING

Hold hand high and move it back and forth to suggest a ceiling

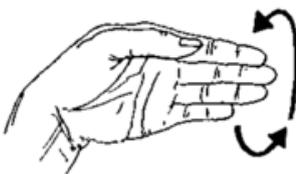


TANK

Make a motion at least a foot high, simulating a cylinder.



ROOM



REEL



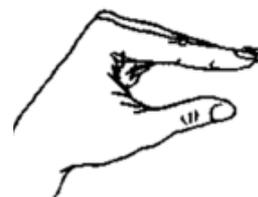
BOTTOM



SILT



TUNNEL



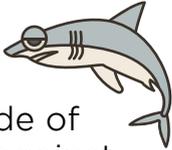
RESTRICTION

FISH



SHARK

Hold the side of your hand against your forehead



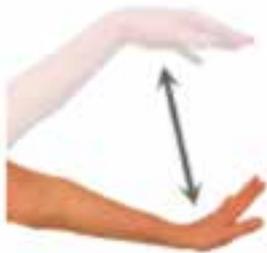
HAMMERHEAD

Place your fists on either side of your head



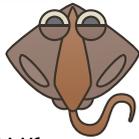
TURTLE

Place one hand on top of the other and rotate your thumbs



MANTA RAY

Flap both of your arms like you're flying



OCTOPUS

Wiggle your downturned fingers like they're tentacles



MORAY EEL

Tap the fingers and thumb of one hand together



LOBSTER

Same as for crab, only using your middle and index fingers.



CRAB

The same as for moray eel, but do it with both hands turned sideways



ANGELFISH

Draw a hoop (halo) shape above your head with your finger.





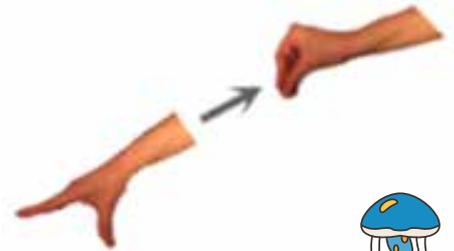
TRIGGERFISH

Point and bend your index finger, similar to pulling a trigger



STONEFISH

Make a fist and place it on the palm of your other hand



JELLYFISH

Move your hand while opening and closing your fingers like tentacles



LIONFISH

Interlock your fingers and wiggle them



NAPOLEON WRASSE

Hold your closed fist against your forehead



TRUMPETFISH

Hold and move your fingers like you're playing the trumpet



BLUE-SPOTTED RAY

use your finger to tap random points on the back of your other hand.



TUNA

Create a turning motion with one hand against the other, as if you're opening a tin



SEAHORSE

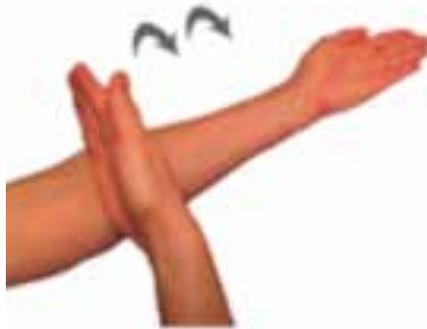
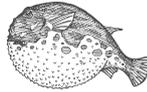
Move both hands up and down like you're riding a hobby horse





PUFFERFISH

Clasp your hands and move them towards and away from each other



BARRACUDA

With one hand, do a chopping motion along your other arm



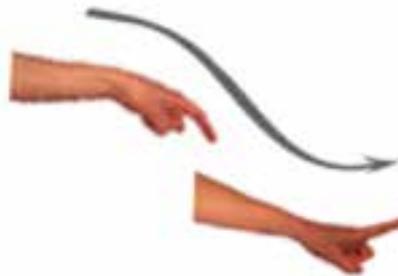
SCORPIONFISH

Like lionfish, but put your hands on top of your head



SEAL/SEA LION

Do a clapping motion with both of your arms extended



DOLPHIN

Ripple and move your index finger to mimic the way a dolphin swims



CROCODILEFISH

Put your palms together, then open and close them at the fingertips



BABY/JUVENILE

Add a cradling motion before the regular hand signal to indicate a juvenile



SHRIMP

Point your index fingers upwards on either side of your forehead



NUDIBRANCH

Create a "V" shape with your fingers and wiggle the ends





SPANISH DANCER

Like clapping a castanet, a Spanish instrument



BOXFISH

Like carrying a luggage, indicating its body shape



PARROTFISH

Indicating a talker, a parrot



**UNICORNFISH/
LOGNOSE HAWKFISH**

Indicating its long nose



MASK PUFFERFISH

Indicating the marks around its eyes



GARDEN EELS

Indicating how it looks

