

LETTERS, PRONUNCIATION, AUXILIARY SIGNS, WRITING

Arabic has 29 characters (حُرُوفٌ حُرُوفٌ): 26 consonants (حُرُوفٌ سَاكِنَةٌ) and 3 vowels (حُرُوفٌ مُتَحَرِّكَةٌ). Two (ي، و) of the three, however, occur both as vowels and consonants.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PRONUNCIATION

The following consonants have more or less similar equivalents in English.

'	ء	Hamza	like 'a in 'arm, like 'i in 'inn, like 'oo in 'ooze (initial occlusive element, glottal stop)
b	ب	Bā'	like b in big
t	ت	Tā'	like t in tea
ṭ	ث	Ṭā'	like th in three
ġ	ج	Ġīm	like g in gentle
ħ	خ	Ḥā'	like ch in Scottish English, loch
d	د	Dāl	like d in door
ḍ	ذ	Ḍāl	like th in the
r	ر	Rā'	like r in Scottish English, room
z	ز	Zāy	like z in zero
s	س	Sīn	like s in sun
ʃ	ش	Šīn	like s in sure
f	ف	Fā'	like f in fog
k	ك	Kāf	like k in key
l	ل	Lām	like l in long, live or luck
m	م	Mīm	like m in monkey
n	ن	Nūn	like n in noon
h	ه	Hā'	like h in hot
w	و	Wāw	like w in wall
y	ي	Yā'	like y in year

Arabic has the following long vowels:

ā	ا	Alif	like a in far
ī	ي	Yā'	like ee in deer
ū	و	Wāw	like oo in school

The short vowels a (*hut, pat*), i (*lift*) and u (*look*) as well as the diphthongs ay (*write*) and aw (like in *how*, but short) are also the same as in English.

The following letters are typical Arabic consonants which do not have equivalents in English and can only be learned through regular practice with native speakers:

<i>h</i>	ح	<i>Hā'</i>	like <i>h</i> articulated with friction
'	ع	' <i>Ayn</i>	like <i>a</i> articulated in the pharynx with friction
<i>ġ</i>	غ	<i>Ġayn</i>	like the Parisian <i>r</i> in <i>renaissance</i>
<i>ṣ</i>	ص	<i>Ṣād</i>	like <i>s</i> articulated with emphasis
<i>ḍ</i>	ض	<i>Dād</i>	like <i>d</i> articulated with emphasis
<i>ṭ</i>	ط	<i>Tā'</i>	like <i>t</i> articulated with emphasis
<i>ẓ</i>	ظ	<i>Zā'</i>	like <i>dh</i> articulated with emphasis
<i>q</i>	ق	<i>Qāf</i>	like <i>k</i> articulated with emphasis

The last five of these consonants are the so-called emphatic consonants. They normally affect the pronunciation of adjacent consonants, vowels and diphthongs. Their correct pronunciation and the modifications in the adjacent sounds need special practising.

The Persian characters چ for *ch* (*chapter*), پ for *p* (*politics*), ژ for (French) *j* (*Jacques*), ف for *v* (*vehicle*) and گ for *g* (*go*) are sometimes used to write words or names of Persian or foreign origin.

The order of the Arabic consonants according to the place where they are articulated:

bilabial:	<i>b, m, w</i>
labiodental:	<i>f</i>
interdental:	<i>ḍ, ṭ, ẓ</i>
dental:	<i>d, t, ḍ, ṭ</i>
prepalatal:	<i>n, l, r, z, s, ṣ, ṣ̣, ġ, y</i>
postalatal:	<i>k</i>
velar:	<i>ġ, q, ḥ</i>
pharyngeal:	' , <i>h</i>
laryngeal:	' , <i>h</i>

AUXILIARY SIGNS (أَلْحَرَكَاتُ)

Since Arabic expresses only long vowels by special characters, a system of auxiliary signs was developed to distinguish whether or not a consonant is followed by a short vowel. But normally these signs do not appear in printed or written texts, since the reader who is familiar with the morphology of Arabic will be able to read the words correctly without such signs.

The auxiliary signs are mainly used in the Koran, poetry and children's books. Texts which contain such signs are called vocalized or pointed texts, whereas those without them are referred to as unvocalized.

The signs may be divided into two main groups:

a) Short vowels (for which Arabic has no characters)

Fatha = a short oblique stroke (َ) written on top of the letter

بَ *ba*, فَ *fa*, وَ *wa*

denoting that the consonant is followed by a short *a*.

(*Fatha* followed by *Alif* = long *ā*: مَا *mā*)

Kasra = a short oblique stroke (ِ) written below the consonant

بِ *bi*, لِ *li*, مِ *mi*

denoting that the consonant is followed by a short *i*.

(*Kasra* followed by *Yā'* = long *ī*: كَبِيرٌ *kabīr*)

Damma = a sign similar in shape to a small *Wāw* (ُ) written on top of the letter

مُدُنٌ *mudun*, كُمْ *kum*, هُمْ *hum*

denoting that the consonant is followed by a short *u*.

(*Damma* followed by *Wāw* = long *ū*: نُونٌ *Nūn*)

b) OTHER SIGNS

Sukūn = a small circle (ْ) on top of the letter

تَحْتَ *tahta*, نَحْنُ *nahnu*, مِنْ *min*

denoting that the consonant is not followed by any vowel.

Šadda = a small *Sīn* (ّ) written on top of the letter denoting that the consonant is doubled, which is pronounced in a somewhat prolonged way then.

Fatha and *Damma* are written on top of *Šadda*, whereas *Kasra* may be placed either below *Šadda* or below the doubled letter:

شُبَّاکٌ *šubbāk*, مُعَلِّمٌ / مُعَلِّمٌ *mu'allim*, تَقَدُّمٌ *taqaddum*

Madda = a sign on top of *Alif* (َآ) denoting a long *ā*.

الآن *al-āna*, القرآن *al-qur'ān*

DIPHTHONGS:

Fatha followed by a *و* with *Sukūn* denotes the diphthong *aw*, whereas *Fatha* followed by a *ي* with *Sukūn* denotes the diphthong *ay*: لَوْحٌ *lawḥ*, بَيْتٌ *bayt*

HAMZA (ء) AND TĀ' MARBŪṬA (ة)

Hamza, which has the shape of a small 'Ayn, normally needs a character to "carry" it. The characters which carry *Hamza* are أ (*Alif*), و (*Wāw*) and ع (*Yā'*), and they are referred to as chairs of *Hamza*. (Spelling of *Hamza*)

At the beginning of a word, the chair of *Hamza* is always *Alif*:

أَنْتَ 'anta, أُمُّ 'umm, إِنْ 'in

The *Tā' marbūta* ة is a special form of the *Tā'*. It only occurs in final position. It is pronounced as a short *a* when the word occurs isolated. However, if the word is the 1st term of a genitive construction, it turns into *t*. (☞ Genitive)

NUNATION / TANWĪN (التَّنْوِين)

The *Tanwīn* is used to mark that a noun is indefinite in the nominative, genitive or accusative case. The *Tā' marbūta* with *Tanwīn* turns into *t* and is pronounced – *atun*, *-atin*, *-atan*. The *Tanwīn* is also combined with *Šadda*:

n. (un)		g. (in)		a. (an)	
<i>tālibatun</i>	<i>kitābun</i>	<i>tālibatīn</i>	<i>kitābin</i>	<i>tālibatan</i>	<i>kitāban</i>
طَالِبَةٌ	كِتَابٌ	طَالِبَةٌ	كِتَابٌ	طَالِبَةٌ	كِتَابًا
<i>tibbun</i>		<i>tibbin</i>		<i>tibban</i>	
طِبُّ		طِبُّ		طِبًّا	

WRITING

Arabic is written from right to left. The letters differ in size, but there are no capitals. Each of them has a basic form, but modifications in their shapes occur according to their positions in words. Thus, each letter has a different shape in initial, medial, final and isolated position:

isolated position	final position	medial position	initial position
ب	ب	ب	ب

- The shapes of Arabic letters are generally similar both in script and printed form. However, a few differences occur.
- A number of letters share the same shape and are only distinguished by diacritical dots: ن *Nūn*, ت *Tā'*, ث *Thā'*, ب *Bā'*, ي *Yā'*. The letters و ز ا are only connected with the preceding letter, whereas all the others are connected with both sides.
- *Yā'* (ي) without diacritical dots in final position is always preceded by *Fatha* and is pronounced as the long vowel *ā*: إِلَى *ilā*, عَلَى *'alā*, مَتَى *matā*
- Final *Yā'* (ي) with diacritical dots is usually preceded by *Kasra*: فِي *fī*, كِتَابِي *kitābī*. However, many texts do not seem to be consistent in regard to the use of diacritical dots with ي when it occurs in the final position.
- *Allāh* (God) is mostly written in the form of اللهُ. The *Šadda* above the *Lām* shows that the *Lām* is doubled here; the small *Alif* above the *Šadda* means that a long *ā* has to be pronounced after it. This small *Alif* is also used in the word *rahmān* (the Merciful) and others.

Table 1: THE ALPHABET (أَلْحُرُوفُ الْأَبْجَدِيَّةُ)

The first letter of the alphabet is actually *Hamza*, but since *Alif* is the chair of *Hamza* in most cases, it appears in its place as the first letter.

The alphabet in its traditional order:

name of the letter	transliteration	isolated position	final position	medial position	initial position
<i>Alif</i>	<i>ā</i>	ا	ا	ا	ا
<i>Bā'</i>	<i>b</i>	ب	ب	ب	ب
<i>Tā'</i>	<i>t</i>	ت	ت	ت	ت
<i>Ṭā'</i>	<i>ṭ</i>	ث	ث	ث	ث
<i>Ġīm</i>	<i>ġ</i>	ج	ج	ج	ج
<i>Hā'</i>	<i>ḥ</i>	ح	ح	ح	ح
<i>Ḥā'</i>	<i>ḥ</i>	خ	خ	خ	خ
<i>Dāl</i>	<i>d</i>	د	د	د	د
<i>Ḍāl</i>	<i>ḍ</i>	ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ
<i>Rā'</i>	<i>r</i>	ر	ر	ر	ر
<i>Zāy</i>	<i>z</i>	ز	ز	ز	ز
<i>Sīn</i>	<i>s</i>	س	س	س	س
<i>Šīn</i>	<i>š</i>	ش	ش	ش	ش
<i>Ṣād</i>	<i>ṣ</i>	ص	ص	ص	ص
<i>Ḍād</i>	<i>ḍ</i>	ض	ض	ض	ض
<i>Ṭā'</i>	<i>ṭ</i>	ط	ط	ط	ط
<i>Zā'</i>	<i>z</i>	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ
<i>'Ayn</i>	'	ع	ع	ع	ع
<i>Ġayn</i>	<i>ġ</i>	غ	غ	غ	غ
<i>Fā'</i>	<i>f</i>	ف	ف	ف	ف
<i>Qāf</i>	<i>q</i>	ق	ق	ق	ق
<i>Kāf</i>	<i>k</i>	ك	ك	ك	ك
<i>Lām</i>	<i>l</i>	ل	ل	ل	ل
<i>Mīm</i>	<i>m</i>	م	م	م	م
<i>Nūn</i>	<i>n</i>	ن	ن	ن	ن
<i>Ha'</i>	<i>h</i>	ه	ه	ه	ه
<i>Wāw</i>	<i>w, ū</i>	و	و	و	و
<i>Yā'</i>	<i>y, ī</i>	ي	ي	ي	ي

SPELLING OF HAMZA

The key to the spelling of *Hamza* is to determine whether ا, و, or ي is the chair of *Hamza* or whether *Hamza* occurs without a chair. To determine which spelling must be chosen depends on which vowel precedes or follows *Hamza*. The formal order principle for the following rules distinguishes between initial, medial and final *Hamza* in the word.

Initial Hamza

Alif invariably is the chair of *Hamza*:

to take	أَخَذَ
mother	أُمُّ
production	إِنْتَاجٌ
delegation	إِيْفَادٌ

This also applies if the word is preceded by a preposition which is written together with it:

for my mother	لِأُمِّي
by the production of the cars	بِإِنْتَاجِ السَّيَّارَاتِ

Medial Hamza

a) If *Hamza* is not followed by a vowel, the chair of *Hamza* is determined by the vowel immediately preceding *Hamza*, i.e. *Alif* is used with *a/ā*, *Wāw* with *u/ū* and *Yā'* (without diacritical dots) with *i/ī*:

opinion	رَأْيٌ
well/spring	بَيْتْرٌ
(infinitive of رَأَى)	رُؤْيَةٌ

b) If *Hamza* is followed by a vowel, but if the consonant immediately preceding *Hamza* is vowelless, the chair of *Hamza* is determined by the vowel which follows *Hamza*:

he asks	يَسْأَلُ
questions	أَسْئَلَةٌ
responsible	مَسْئُولٌ

Spelling of Hamza

7

Exception: If the vowelless consonant preceding *Hamza* is a *Yā'*, the chair of *Hamza* is *Yā'* as well: هَيْئَةٌ "form/shape/appearance; group/body/committee".

- c) If *Hamza* is preceded by a vowel as well as followed by a vowel,
Alif is the chair of *Hamza* if both vowels are *a*,
Wāw is the chair of *Hamza* if one of the two vowels is *u* and
Yā' is the chair of *Hamza* if one of the two vowels is *i*.
 If *u* and *i* meet, *Yā'* is the chair of *Hamza*:

he has asked	سَأَلَ
presidents	رُؤَسَاءُ
question	سُؤَالٌ
hundred	مِئَةٌ
president	رَئِيسٌ
he was asked	سُئِلَ

If the sequence of vowels is *-ā a*, *-ā ā* or *-ū a*, *Hamza* is written in its isolated form on the line:

reading (infinitive of قرأ)	قِرَاءَةٌ
experts, chief performers	كِفَاءَاتٌ
manliness	مِرْوَةٌ

Final Hamza

- a) If *Hamza* is preceded by a short vowel, this vowel determines the chair of *Hamza*:

he has read	قَرَأَ
he reads	يَقْرَأُ
it was read	قُرِئَ
to be manly	مُرُوًى

- b) If *Hamza* is preceded by a long vowel or a vowelless consonant, *Hamza* occurs without a chair:

friends	أَصْدِقَاءُ
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<i>read (pass. part.)</i>	مَقْرُوءٌ
<i>coming (infinitive of جاء)</i>	مَجِيءٌ
<i>one (impers. pron.), man</i>	الْمَرْءُ
<i>building</i>	بِنَاءٌ

c) The following applies to the spelling of the indefinite accusative of nouns with final *Hamza*:

The *Alif* of the indefinite accusative is omitted if the chair of *Hamza* is an *Alif* or if *Hamza* follows *Alif* (= long vowel *ā* without chair *إِبْتِدَاءً*، *مُبْتَدَأً*).

The *Alif* of the indefinite accusative is used if *Hamza* occurs without chair (except after the long vowel *ā*) (*جُزْءاً*).

It has *Yā'* as its chair if it is preceded by *ي* (*شَيْئاً*).

d) Final *Hamza* may become medial *Hamza* by means of a suffix. In this case the rules for *Hamza* in medial position apply:

<i>friends</i>	أَصْدِقَاءُ
<i>your friends</i>	أَصْدِقَاؤُكَ
<i>with your friends</i>	مَعَ أَصْدِقَائِكَ
<i>he reads</i>	يَقْرَأُ
<i>they read</i>	يَقْرَؤُونَ
<i>you (f.) read</i>	تَقْرئينَ

e) *Hamza* together with the long vowel *ā* following is written as *Madda* (آ):

<i>August</i>	أَبُ
<i>minarets</i>	مَآذِنُ

This rule does not apply if *Hamza* is also preceded by the long vowel *ā*:

<i>experts, chief performers</i>	كَفَاءَاتُ
<i>measures</i>	إِجْرَاءَاتُ
<i>exemptions, excuses</i>	إِعْفَاءَاتُ

STRESS

Stress, i.e. to pronounce a syllable with more emphasis, is regular in Arabic. In general, it is not difficult to stress the Arabic words in the correct way. The stressed syllable is shown in italics in the following rules and examples:

1. Only the last three syllables of a word can be stressed. If *Nunation* is pronounced, it is included.

2. The last syllable that contains a long vowel is stressed:

ki-*tab* ki-*tā*-bun
 ġa-*dīd* ġa-*dī*-dun
 ma-*hā*-zin ma- *hā*-zi-nu

however, the vocalic final sound of the word is never stressed:

hu-nā
kur-sī (*but*: kur-*sī*-yun)

3. If the last three syllables do not contain a long vowel, the second to last syllable is stressed if it is a closed syllable (sequence of sounds: consonant - short vowel - consonant):

mu-'*al*-lim
 mu-*tar*-ġim,

and the same applies if the word consists of only two syllables:

an-ta
ra-ġul

Otherwise the third to last syllable is stressed, regardless of its structure:

mu-'*al*-li-ma
 muġ-*ta*-hi-dun

4. It is accepted in modern Arabic language that the stress may not advance beyond the last syllable but two. This requires the stress to be shifted if the number of syllables changes, when the *Nunation* is pronounced or suffixes are added.

<i>ṭā</i> -li-ba	ṭā- <i>li</i> -ba-tun
mu-' <i>al</i> -li-ma	mu-' <i>al</i> - <i>li</i> -ma-tun
<i>ku</i> -tu-bun	ku- <i>tu</i> -bu-nā (<i>our books</i>)
mu-' <i>al</i> -li-mun	mu-' <i>al</i> - <i>li</i> -mu-nā (<i>our teacher</i>)
<i>ṭā</i> -li-ba	ṭa- <i>li</i> -ba-tun
	ṭā- <i>li</i> - <i>ba</i> -tu-nā (<i>our student (f.)</i>)
mu-' <i>al</i> -li-ma	mu-' <i>al</i> - <i>li</i> -ma-tun
	mu-' <i>al</i> - <i>li</i> - <i>ma</i> -tu-nā (<i>our teacher (f.)</i>)

5. The definite article, and the first syllable of verbal Forms VII, VIII, IX and X are never stressed.

RADICAL, ROOT, PATTERN

The majority of Arabic words can be reduced to a trilateral root consisting of three consonants (ثَلَاثِيٌّ). They are called *radicals* (R₁, R₂ and R₃). There is also quite a number of quadrilateral roots (رُبَاعِيٌّ).

The root expresses a certain conceptual content, e.g. the meaning “to write” is inherent in the root K-T-B (ك - ت - ب), “to go” in D - H - B (ذ - ه - ب), and “to drink” in Š - R - B (ش - ر - ب).

This conceptual content is specified by short and long vowels between the consonants and by prefixes, infixes and suffixes regarding the part of speech (verb, noun, adjective) as well as regarding the grammatical category (tense, mood, number, case etc.). Simplified, one can say that the root consonants (*Radicals*) fulfil a semantic and the vowels a grammatical function in the Arabic word:

KaTaBa	(كَتَبَ)	= he wrote / has written
KāTiB	(كَاتِب)	= writing; writer, author
KiTāB	(كِتَاب)	= book
KuTuB	(كُتُب)	= books
maKTūB	(مَكْتُوب)	= written; letter
maKTaBa	(مَكْتَبَة)	= library, bookshop

The Arab grammarians use ف for R₁ (1st Radical), ع for R₂ (2nd Radical) and ل for R₃ (3rd Radical) in order to describe the numerous word forms systematically. *Fā'*, *'Ayn* and *Lām* fulfil the function of variables in the patterns, for which theoretically any consonant can be substituted.

فَعَلَ	fa'ala	is the pattern used for the perfect tense (3rd p.sg.m.):	كَتَبَ، ذَهَبَ
فَاعِلٌ	fā'il	is the pattern used for the active participle:	كَاتِبٌ، طَالِبٌ
فَعِيلٌ	fa'il	is a typical pattern of the adjective:	كَبِيرٌ، صَغِيرٌ
فَعَالٌ	fi'āl	is a typical pattern of the broken plural:	كِبَارٌ، طَوَالٌ
أَفْعَالٌ	af'āl	is another typical pattern of the broken plural:	أَقْلَامٌ، أَعْوَامٌ

A reliable knowledge of the patterns and their general meaning is very useful for obtaining a good command of the language, and enables the learner to deduce the meanings of derived nouns and verbal forms by knowing the meaning of the root.