

# Introduction to Arabic Grammar

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Quit

The Alphabet



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## 1. The alphabet الحروف الهجائية

Arabic, like Hebrew and Syriac, is written from right to left. The alphabet consists of 28 letters which are all consonants, though three of them are also used as vowels. They vary in form according to whether they are independent, initial, medial or final.

The following tables show the letters of the alphabet as regards writing and pronunciation.



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## 2. The alphabet (Pronunciation) ( الحروف الهجائية (النطق) )

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Click on the letter to hear the sound

ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ا
س	ز	ر	ذ	د	خ
ع	ظ	ط	ض	ص	ش
م	ل	ك	ق	ف	غ
هـ	لا	ي	و	هـ	ن



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### 3. Note about writing ملاحظة بخصوص الكتابة

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All the letters of the Arabic alphabet, whether handwritten or printed, are linked together. However seven are only linked to the preceding letters, not to the following ones. These letters are the following:

ا د ذ ر ز و لا

For this reason, there are two types of finals: linked and separate, depending on the preceding linked or detached letter, as shown by the following example:

عمل، نرل



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## 4. Writing (a) الخط (أ)

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F M I	Name of letter	Sound	As in
ا ا ا ا	'alif	a, i, ou	at
ب ب ب ب	bā'	b	book
ت ت ت ت	tā'	t	time
ث ث ث ث	tā'	th	thank
ج ج ج ج	ġim	j	June
ح ح ح ح	ḥā'	*	-
خ خ خ خ	ḥā'	*	-
د د د د	dāl	d	deed
ذ ذ ذ ذ	dāl	th	that
ر ر ر ر	rā'	r	root
	*no equivalent		

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## 4. Writing (b) الخط (ب)

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F M I S	Name of letter	Sound	As in
ز- ز- ز- ز	zāy	z	zone
س- س- س- س	sīn	s	seat
ش- ش- ش- ش	šīn	ch	sheet
ص- ص- ص- ص	ṣād	s (emphatic)	salt
ض- ض- ض- ض	ḍād	d (emphatic)	dome
ط- ط- ط- ط	tā'	t (emphatic)	tall
ظ- ظ- ظ- ظ	ẓā'	th (emphatic)	those
ع- ع- ع- ع	'ain	*	
غ- غ- غ- غ	ḡain	r (French)	<i>rīre</i>
ف- ف- ف- ف	fā'	f	fat

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## 4. Writing (c) الخط (ج)

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F M I S	Name of letter	Sound	As in
ق ق ق ق	qāf	*	-
ك ك ك ك	kāf	k	cat
ل ل ل ل	lām	l	life
م م م م	mīm	m	man
ن ن ن ن	nūn	n	noon
ه ه ه ه	hā'	h	hat
و و و و	wāw	oi	what
ي ي ي ي	yā'	i, y	yes
لا لا لا لا	lāmālif	l & a	
ء (أؤئئ)	hamza	a, i, ou	at

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## 5. The gutturals حروف الحلق

The gutturals are:

أ *hamza* (see Chapter *Hamza*).

ح ḥā' is a strongly guttural *h* produced by a strong expulsion of air from the chest. It should not be confused with :

خ ḥā', which is a guttural *ch* as in the Scottish "*loch*" and the German "*auch*", also, or Spanish "*ajo*", *garlic*.

ع ain is a very strong guttural, produced by compression of the throat and expulsion of breath.

غ *gain* is the sound made in gargling or like the French "*r*" with a little more of the "*g*".

ه ḥā' represents the same sound as does English *h*.



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## 6. The emphatics الحروف المضخمة

*ṣād* ص *ḍād* ض *tā'* ط, and *zā'* ظ form a group of emphatic sounds corresponding to *sīn* س, *dal* د, *tā'* ت and *dāl* ذ.

In pronouncing them, the tongue is pressed against the edge of the upper teeth, and then withdrawn forcefully.

Note especially that, with these emphatic consonants, the sound of fatha tends to be that of "a" in father; the sound of kasra tends to be that of "e" in tell; the sound of damma tends to be that of "oa" in boat.



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## 7. The short vowels الحركات

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The Arabs had originally no signs for short vowels. At a later period, the following signs were invented to express them:

- a) *fathā* َ is a sign written above the consonant having the value of "a", as in *man*.
- b) *kasra* ِ is a sign written below the consonant having the value of "î", as in *this*.
- c) *ḍamma* ُ is a sign written above the consonant having the value of "u", as in *full*.



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## 8. The long vowels خروف المد

The long vowels or the lengthening letters are the following:

ا 'alif for the lengthening of the consonant having as a short vowel  $\text{ـ}$  *fathā*, e.g. دَا *dā*.

و *wāw*, for the lengthening of the consonant having as a short vowel  $\text{ُ}$  *ḍamma*, e.g. دُو *dū*.

ي *yā'* for the lengthening of the consonant having as a short vowel  $\text{ِ}$  *kasra*, e.g. دِي *dī*.



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## 9. *Sukun* السكون

*Sukun* ْ is a small circle over the letter that indicates the absence of a vowel, e.g. كُنْ *kun, be*. It cannot follow the long vowels, except, rarely, in certain forms of the doubled verb.



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## 10. šadda الشدة

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A consonant that is to be doubled is written once, but marked with the sign ّ which is called *šadda* or *tašdīd*, e.g. مَدَّ *madda*, *to extend*.



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## 11. *tanwin* التنوين

The marks of the short vowels when doubled are pronounced with the addition of the sound "n".

ـَـان, ـِـان, ـُـان. This is called *tanwin* or *nunation* (from the name of the letter ن *nun*), and takes its place only at the end of nouns and adjectives.

Note that with fatha, the letter 'alif' is added to support the *tanwin* ـَـ after all the consonants, except ة *tā' marbuta*, ء *hamza* and ي *'alif maqsura* (i.e. a *yā'* without diacritic points).



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## 12. Lunar letters الحروف القمرية

The initial lunar letters of a noun do not assimilate the article that precedes them and do not receive *tasdid*. There are 14:

أ ب ج ح خ ع غ ف ق ك م ه و ي  
 Thus, one writes الْقَمَرُ *al-qamaru*, the moon, and one reads الْقَمَرُ *al-qamaru*, exactly the same way as one writes. Therefore, the initial consonant ق does not receive *tašdīd* and the consonant ل of the article maintains its *sukūn*.

These 14 letters are called *lunar* letters, because the word قَمَرٌ *moon*, happens to begin with one of them.



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### 13. Solar letters الحروف الشمسية

The initial solar letters of a noun assimilate the article that precedes them and receive the euphonic *tasdid*. There are also 14:

. ث د ذ ز س ش ص ض ط ظ ل ن

Instead of *al-samsu, the sun*, one writes: *al-shamsu* with the *tašdid* of the initial consonant *ش* and pronounces *aš-šamsu*. The consonant *ل* loses its *sukūn*, and though expressed in writing, is not pronounced; it is assimilated to the next solar letter. These 14 letters are called the *solar letters*, because the word *sun*, happens to begin with one of them.



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## 14. *Hamza* الهمزة

The *hamza* ء represents a glottal stop produced by completely closing the vocal chords and then by suddenly separating them. The rules for the writing of *hamza* are complicated. Explanations will be given in another chapter. Here a few guiding points will be mentioned. Initial *hamza* is always written on or under 'alif,

e.g. <sup>ء</sup>ا, <sup>ء</sup>u, <sub>ء</sub>li.

In the middle or at the end of a word, *hamza* may be written separately or over 'alif, wāw, or yā' (without the two dots), e.g. ء , أ , وء , ئ.



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If a *hamza* with *fathā* is followed by the long vowel '*alif*', the *hamza* and *fathā* are dropped, and the long vowel '*alif*' is written over the '*alif*' horizontally, thus :  $\acute{a}$ , for  $\acute{a}$ . This is called *madda*.

This also occurs when, at the beginning of a syllable, an '*alif*' with *hamza* and *fathā* is followed by an '*alif*' with *sukūn*, thus :  $\acute{a}$ 'ā, for  $\acute{a}$ .



## 16. *Tā' marbuta* التاء المربوطة

*Tā' marbuta* ة is written as ه *hā'* with, however, the two dots over it. This *tā'* is not pronounced in modern Arabic except when followed by a word beginning with a vowel. In classical Arabic it was not pronounced in pause, that is, at the end of a sentence, and became merely the short vowel a. This *tā'* is used as a feminine ending:

طَالِبٌ *student*, masc.; طَالِبَةٌ *student*, fem.; قِطٌ *cat*, masc.; قِطَّةٌ *cat*, fem.

It is also used to denote *nomen unitatis vel individualitatis*, the noun that denotes the individual نَحْلٌ *bees*; نَحْلَةٌ (one) *bee*.



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## 17. Pronunciation of the letters with the short vowels

Click on the letters to hear the sound

كُ كِ كِ	ضُ ضِ ضِ	دُ دِ دِ	أُ أِ أِ
لُ لِ لِ	طُ طِ طِ	ذُ ذِ ذِ	بُ بِ بِ
مُ مِ مِ	ظُ ظِ ظِ	رُ رِ رِ	تُ تِ تِ
نُ نِ نِ	عُ عِ عِ	زُ زِ زِ	ثُ ثِ ثِ
هُ هِ هِ	غُ غِ غِ	سُ سِ سِ	جُ جِ جِ
وُ وِ وِ	فُ فِ فِ	شُ شِ شِ	حُ حِ حِ
يُ يِ يِ	قُ قِ قِ	صُ صِ صِ	خُ خِ خِ

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## 18. Separate personal pronouns الضمائر المنفصلة

	3rd Person		2nd Person		1st Person
he	هُوَ	you,ms	أَنْتَ	I	أَنَا
she	هِيَ	you, fs	أَنْتِ	we	نَحْنُ
they, duel	هُمَا	you, d.	أَنْتُمَا		
they, mp	هُمْ	you, m.pl.	أَنْتُمْ		
they, fp	هُنَّ	you, f.pl.	أَنْتُنَّ		

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## 19. Affixed personal pronouns الضمائر المتصلة

	3rd Person		2nd Person		1st Person
m.s.	هُ	m. s.	كَ	sing.	ي - نِي
f.s.	هَا	f. s.	كِ	pl.	نَا
dual	هُمَا	dual	كُما		
m. pl.	هُم	m. pl.	كُم		
f. pl.	هُنَّ	f. pl.	كُنَّ		



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## 20. Software & Fonts used

### Software & Fonts used

The document was created first with al Nashir al Sahafi, an Arabic desktop publisher, based on Ready Set, Go! Then converted into Portable Document Format PDF.

Arabic font used is Geezah. Both the software and the font are available from Diwan Software limited, 37-39 Pickham Road, London SE5 8UH, United Kingdom, Phone +44 171 2525333 - Fax+44 171 2525444.

The font Roman LazerTransliterator used for Arabic transliteration is available from Linguist's Software, Inc., PO Box 580, Edmonds, WA 98020-0580, USA. Phone +206 775 1130 - Fax +206 771 59 11.



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## 21. Bibliography المراجع

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