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Overview of Arabic

Arabic is spoken in more than 20 countries, from Morocco to Egypt to Saudi Arabia, by over 180 million people. It is the language of Islam, one of the worlds major religions, and has a literary tradition that dates back more than 12 centuries. Arabic belongs to the Semitic family of languages, and, like Hebrew, is written from right to left.

Although Classical Arabic is used primarily in writing throughout the Arab world, the spoken forms of Arabic vary widely, and each Arab country has its own dialect. Some form of Classical Arabic, sometimes referred to as Modern Standard Arabic, is used to communicate between people from different countries. Of all the spoken dialects, Egyptian Arabic is the most widely understood, due to Egypts role as producer of movies and TV programs in the Arab world.

Alphabet and Pronunciation

Written Arabic consists of consonants and long vowels, with short vowels often left out of the written language. In this program, Arabic is transliterated, that is, written with letters from the Roman alphabet. The following chart shows the symbols used for transliteration, and an example of the pronunciation for each. The examples given below are meant as an approximate guide to pronunciation; since many of the sounds of English and Arabic are so different, the audio component of this program should be used to get a more precise feel for the pronunciation of Arabic.

Alphabet:

Letter name:	Transliteration:	Approximate pronunciation:
alif	aa	as in mad
baa	b	as in boy
taa	t	as in tip
thaa	th	as in three
jiim	j	as in jump
Haa	H	as in hi, but heavily aspirated, with friction at back of throat
khaa	kh	as in the German ich, with friction at back of tongue
daal	d	as in dog
dhaal	dh	as in this
raa	r	as in the Spanish pero, or butter said rapidly with a tapped t
zaay	z	as in zoo
siin	s	as in same
shiin	sh	as in ship
Saad	S	as in sock, but darker
Daad	D	as in dog, but darker
Taa	T	as in talk, but darker
DHaa	DH	as in this, but darker
äayn	ä	guttural sound, made by constricting air in the throat
ghayn	gh	as in the French rivier, like a gargle
faa	f	as in fame
qaaf	q	as in cough, but darker and unaspirated
kaaf	k	as in came
laam	l	as in line
miim	m	as in made
nuun	n	as in no
haa	h	as in hi
waaw	w	as in win
yaa	y	as in yes

Additional signs:

fatha	a		as in mat
damma		u	as in put
kasra	i		as in fin
hamza			glottal stop; as in eaten (eaen) when said quickly without t

Transliterated diphthongs (vowel combinations):

aw	as in house
ay	as in cry

Nouns

A noun is a word that names a person, place, or thing.

hasan (Hassan)

aswaan (Aswan)

Sabah (morning)

See Also:

[Gender and Agreement](#)

[Number and Agreement](#)

[Articles](#)

Gender and Agreement

The GENDER of an Arabic noun is either masculine or feminine. Generally speaking, feminine nouns end in **a**, and other nouns are masculine.

Examples:

Feminine: muqabala (meeting)

Masculine: funduq (hotel)

See also:

[Adjectives](#)

[Articles](#)

[Pronouns](#)

Number and Agreement

There are three numbers in Arabic: singular, dual and plural.

The **dual** refers to two items. It is formed by adding **ayn** or **-aan** to the singular regardless of gender:

awad shiraa tadhkarat**ayn** ila aswaan. (I would like to buy two tickets for Aswan.)

The **plural** is often formed by adding **iin**, **-aat**, or another ending:

tahiy**aat** (greetings)

See Also

[Nouns](#)

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Pronouns

In English, the only personal pronouns that differ in gender are he and she. Arabic not only has this distinction, but also differentiates between gender in the pronouns you and they.

You (f): anti You plural (f): antuuna They (f): huuna
You (m): anta You plural (m): antuum They (m): hum

The dual pronouns are the same for both genders:

You (dual): antuumaa They (dual): hummaa

The remaining personal pronouns correspond to their English counterparts:

I: anaa He: huuwa She: hiiya
We: nahnu

The demonstrative pronouns differentiate between gender:

This (m): hadha That (m): dhalik
This (f): hadhihi That (f): tilka

Possessive Pronouns in Arabic take the form of suffixes attached to the end of the words they modify. The following chart outlines the possessive pronouns of Arabic:

	Suffix	Example	Meaning
my	-ii	ismii	my name
your (f)	-ki	ismuki	your name
your (m)	-ka	ismuka	your name
your (dual)	-kum	ismukum	your name
your (f) (pl)	-kuna	ismukuna	your name
your (m) (pl)	-kum	ismukum	your name
his	-hu	ismuhu	his name
her	-haa	ismuhaa	her name
our	-naa	ismunaa	our name
their (f)	-huna	ismuhuna	their name
their (m)	-hum	ismuhum	their name

Articles

There is only one DEFINITE ARTICLE in Arabic. It is **al-**, and is attached to the beginning of the word it modifies. When the definite article precedes a consonant that is emphatic or doubled, the l is not pronounced. It can be used with both masculine and feminine nouns, singular and plural nouns, and countable and non-countable nouns. Two of the main categories in which the definite article is used are:

1. General class of persons or things.
ana atahadath faqat qaliil min **al**āarabiya. (I only speak a little Arabic.)
2. Abstractions
aṢṣabr jamiil. (Patience is beautiful.)
arjuu **al**maādhira (I ask forgiveness.)

See Also:

[Nouns](#)

[Gender and Agreement](#)

[Number and Agreement](#)

Adjectives

The adjective in Arabic follows the noun it qualifies, and must agree in gender and article. For example:

Masculine (with definite article): **aTTaq̣s aljamīl** (the beautiful weather)

Feminine (with definite article): **alzahra aljamīla** (the beautiful flower)

Masculine (without article): **Taq̣s jamīl** (beautiful weather)

Feminine (without article): **zahra jamīla** (beautiful flower)

Derived adjectives comprise the second category of adjectives. They are formed by adding the suffix *ii* to a noun. When the original noun (from which the adjectival form is derived) is feminine, the feminine ending is usually omitted.

From the masculine noun **malik** (king) comes the adjective **malikii** (royal).

From the feminine noun **siyaasa** (politics) comes the adjective **siyaasii** (political).

See Also:

[Gender and Agreement](#)

[Number and Agreement](#)

[Articles](#)

Adverbs

Arabic has very few true adverbs, and they are invariable in form. They include **hunaa** (here), **alaan** (now), **faqaT** (only), and **aams** (yesterday).

Adverbial function is usually derived from a form of a noun (such as with adjectives). The following adverbs are actually nouns in the accusative indefinite form, and thus function as adverbs:

aaHii	(sometimes)	from the noun Hiin	(time)
mathalan	(for example)	from the noun mathal	(example)
jiddan	(very)	from the noun jidd	(earnestness)

The following adverbs are derived from adjectives:

aawwalan	(firstly)	from the adjective aawwal	(first)
qariiban	(soon)	from the adjective qariib	(nearby)
Hadiithan	(recently)	from the adjective Hadiith	(new)

See Also:

[Adjectives](#)

Verb Conjugations

Every Arabic verb (and noun) is theoretically derived from a root consisting of three consonants. (There are roots that have only two consonants, but one of the consonants is considered doubled. There are also roots that have four consonants (quadriliteral), but these are relatively rare.) Most Arabic dictionaries list ALL words under these roots.

From these roots can be derived a number of TYPES of verbs. Although similarities emerge between verbs of the same type, one must usually learn each type individually since there is no prescribed correlation between type and shades of meaning.

In order to create the simple present tense, a series of prefixes and suffixes is added to the root. The following table demonstrates how to conjugate the root kataba (to write):

Meaning	Prefix	Suffix	Arabic
I write	aa-	-u	aaktubu
You (f) write	ta-	-iina	taktubiina
You (m) write	ta-	-u	taktubu
He writes	ya-	-u	yaktubu
She writes	ta-	-u	taktubu
We write	na-	-u	naktubu
You two write	ta-	-aani	taktubaani
They (two) write (f)	ta-	-aani	taktubaani
They (two) write (m)	ya-	-aani	yaktubani
You (plural) (f) write	ta-	-ubna	taktubna
You (plural) (m) write	ta-	-uuna	taktubuuna
They (f) write	ya-	-ubna	yaktubna
They (m) write	ya-	-uuna	yaktubuuna

To form the simple past tense, no prefixes are needed. The conjugation from the same root:

Meaning	Suffix	Arabic
I wrote	-tu	katabtu
You (f) wrote	-ti	katabti
You (m) wrote	-ta	katabta
He wrote		kataba
She wrote	-at	kabat
We wrote	-naa	kabnaa
You two wrote	-umaa	kabumaa
They (two) wrote (f)	-ata	kabata
They (two) wrote (m)	-aa	kabaa
You (plural) (f) wrote	-tuna	kabtuna
You (plural) (m) wrote	-tuum	kabtuum
They (f) wrote	-na	kabna
They (m) wrote	-uu	kabuu

Prepositions

A PREPOSITION, along with its object, forms a prepositional phrase. Each preposition serves a specific purpose:

from, than	min
to, towards	ilaa
from, about	an
on, upon	alaa
in	fii
perhaps	rubb
by, in with	bi-
for, to	li-
like	ka-
since	munDHu

I am from America. ana min amriikaa.

She is in the hotel. hiiya fii al-funduq.

I am going to the bank. adhahaab ilaa albank.

Conjunctions

The two major conjunctions in Arabic are **wa** (and) and **fa** (for). They link two words, phrases, or sentences so that each has equal syntactical status. The conjunction **wa** is sometimes used in a purely structural sense, for instance, when it is used to begin new paragraphs in a text; in this case it should not be translated as and. It should be omitted.

waahida **wa**äashara
(twenty-one literally, one and twenty)

anta muäaTib **fa**anta taämalu laylan **wan**ahaaran.
(You're tired, for you work day and night.)

The other seven conjunction particles:

Conjunction	Meaning
thumma	then
hataa	even, then
aaw	or
aam	or (in questions)
bel	but not
lakin	but
laa	not

