

## FOR THE BEGINNERS OF ARABIC

Let's start with the Arabic alphabet, as this is the basis for the other lessons. Here are some basic characteristics of the Arabic writing system:

- The Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters.
- Arabic is written from right to left.
- Arabic letters change their shape according to their position in a word.

Let's go through these points in more detail.

### **The Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters.**

This means that the Arabic alphabet contains only two more letters than the English alphabet (26 letters). However, unlike English, the Arabic letters are always pronounced in the same way. In English the letter "c" is sometimes pronounced like an "s" (*celebration*) and sometimes like a "k" (*cucumber*). Or, to take another example, "gh" is sometimes pronounced "f" (*enough*) and sometimes pronounced "g" (*ghost*). In Arabic, the letters always retain their sound.

### **Arabic is written from right to left.**

English, of course, is written from left to right like this.

#### **from left to right**

-> -> -> -> ->

Arabic, on the other hand is written from right to left:

#### **tfel ot thgir morf**

<- <- <- <- <-

Sure, this takes some getting used to, but is not that hard with enough practice.

### **Arabic letters change their shape according to their position in a word.**

The Arabic script is essentially a cursive script, much like handwritten English. I.e. almost all the letters within a word are connected to each other. This necessitates certain changes in their shapes. If you write an English word cursively, then you will also make certain changes to the letters. For example, the letter "s" will be connected to the letter on the left with a diagonal stroke if that preceding letter is e.g. an "n".

However, in Arabic these changes can be quite drastic. Take a look at the following table that summarizes the letters in the Arabic alphabet and their shapes according to whether they are:

- 1) on their own (isolated),
- 2) at the start of a word
- 3) in the middle of a word     *or*
- 4) at the end of a word.

sound	name	name	end	middle	start	isolated
ā	alif	ألف	ا	ا*	ا*	ا
b	bā'	باء	ب	ب	ب	ب
t	tā'	تاء	ت	ت	ت	ت
th	thā'	ثاء	ث	ث	ث	ث
dj	djīm	جيم	ج	ج	ج	ج
H	Hā'	حاء	ح	ح	ح	ح
kh	khā'	خاء	خ	خ	خ	خ
d	dāl	دال	د	د*	د*	د
dh	dhāl	ذال	ذ	ذ*	ذ*	ذ
r	rā'	راء	ر	ر*	ر*	ر
z	zāy	زاي	ز	ز*	ز*	ز
s	sīn	سين	س	س	س	س
sh	shīn	شين	ش	ش	ش	ش
S	Sād	صاد	ص	ص	ص	ص
D	Dād	ضاد	ض	ض	ض	ض
T	Tā'	طاء	ط	ط	ط	ط
Z	Zā'	ظاء	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ
c	ʿayn	عين	ع	ع	ع	ع
gh	ghayn	غين	غ	غ	غ	غ
f	fā'	فاء	ف	ف	ف	ف
q	qāf	قاف	ق	ق	ق	ق
k	kāf	كاف	ك	ك	ك	ك
l	lām	لام	ل	ل	ل	ل
m	mīm	ميم	م	م	م	م
n	nūn	نون	ن	ن	ن	ن
h	hā'	هاء	ه	ه	ه	ه
w, ū	wāw	واو	و	و*	و*	و
y, ī	yā'	ياء	ي	ي	ي	ي

\* The six letters marked with an asterisk (\*) cannot be connected to the left.  
You should write the letters a few times each to get a feeling for them.

For simplicity let's divide the letters into three groups, according to their difficulty.

### Easy

In this group are all the letters that are more or less exactly pronounced as their English counterparts.

ا	ā	long <a> sound like in the English word “mad”
ء	’	a glottal stop; depending on where it’s put it can be a short “u”, “a”, or “i” sound
ب	b	the same as our English “b” in “bread”
ت	t	the same as our English “t” in “tea”
ث	th	like the “th”-sound in “three”; but not like the <th> in “there”!
ج	dj	as in the <j>-sound in the name “John”
د	d	the same as our English “d” in “door”
ذ	dh	like the <th> sound in “there”; but not like the <th> in “three”!
ز	z	the same as our English “z” in “zoo”
س	s	the same as our English “s” in “serpent”
ش	sh	the same as our English “sh” in “shine”
ف	f	the same as our English “f” in “ferry”
ك	k	the same as our English “k” in “kilo”
ل	l	the same as our English “l” in “look”
ن	n	the same as our English “n” in “nose”
م	m	the same as our English “m” in “mouse”
ه	h	the same as our English “h” in “hurricane”
و	w	the same as our English “w” in “water”
و	ū	a long “u”-sound as in our English word “boom”
ي	y	the same as our English “y” in “year”
ي	ī	a long “i”-sound, like the two “e”s in “three”

## Medium

These letters are still somewhat similar to English sounds, but already more difficult to pronounce.

ر	r	similar to the English "r"- sound at the beginning of a word, e.g. in "road", but more towards the front of the tongue and trilled like the Spanish "r"
ح	H	similar to the English letter "h", but stronger and more from the throat
ص	S	similar to the English letter "s", but more emphatic and "darker"
ض	D	similar to the English letter "d", but more emphatic and "darker"
ط	T	similar to the English letter "t", but more emphatic and "darker"
ظ	Z	sounds like a "darker" version of the Arabic "dh" sound

## Difficult

These Arabic letters can prove tough to pronounce for beginners. Keep at it, though, and listen to recordings of native speakers. Eventually, your throat will hurt and you'll get it right!

خ kh like the <ch> sound in the English word "loch"; if you know German, it's the <ch> sound in the word "Sprache" or the "j" in the Spanish word "jamón".

ع c this sounds like a high-pitched version of the English <a> sound, but squeezed from the back of the throat

غ gh the same position of the throat as above, but the tongue touches the roof of the mouth; like a French "r"

ق q like the English letter "k", but produced from much further back the throat and much "darker"

## Putting letters together to form words

Now that you know how to write and pronounce individual Arabic letters, let's take a look at putting them together to form words.

*salaam* means "peace" in Arabic. To write the word start from the right and connect all the letters:

س ل ا م ← سلام

Let's take a look at another word: *mumtaaz* - which means "excellent" in Arabic.

م م ت ا ز ← ممتاز

Dear Parents,

Arabic is a compulsory subject in every School in UAE and 50% mark has to be scored to be eligible for promotion. With your support and cooperation, it can be made possible.

With regards,

Arabic Department