

# Learn Standard Arabic

A self-instruction textbook with grammar, vocabulary, and exercises

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Work in progress. Not ready for study.

## Brief Contents

Preface 7

1 Introduction 9

A Rules for writing hamzah 13



## Detailed Contents

Preface 7

1 Introduction 9

1.1 History of Arabic 9

1.2 Scope of this book 11

1.3 How to study from this book 11

A Rules for writing hamzah 13

A.1 Seats of hamzah 13

A.2 Rules for determining the seat of hamzah 14



## Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The primary texts of Islām (the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth) are in Arabic. So too is much of its scholarly literature. However, there is a multitude of Muslims for whom Arabic is not a native language, yet who are familiar enough with English to study textbooks written in this language. The goal of this book is to help them learn Arabic at a beginner’s level so that, together with a study of the appropriate expository texts, they are one step closer to understanding the primary texts in their original language. We hope that this will, if Allāh wills, make them feel more connected to the primary texts and their teachings. Furthermore, they can be empowered to study the vast body of Arabic Islāmic literature.

This book is a teaching grammar and not a reference grammar. So, in the initial chapters, topics are presented sequentially at only a basic level, without treating them exhaustively, before moving on to the next topic. Furthermore, since this is a beginner’s textbook, only the more common usages are explained.

We have also aimed to make this a self-instruction textbook so that a diligent student should, if Allāh wills, be able to study it without an instructor. The target learner is someone who has not been exposed to grammatical terminology like *inflection*, *case*, *mood*, etc. While terminology is necessary for a rigorous non-immersive learning of language, we have tried to steer away from Latin-based terms like *accusative* and *jussive*. Such terms, when first encountered by an uninitiated learner, may deter from proceeding further. (Learning a language can be hard enough without getting the feeling that your grammar book is accusing you of something!) So we have in some places translated the meaning of Arabic grammar terms to English. In other places, we have used established English grammar terms where the

terms are basic enough. We have even, in places, invented terms where we deemed appropriate. The drawback to this non-standard approach, however, is that the student may not be able to immediately relate the terminology he has learned in this book to established terminology in other grammar textbooks. To remedy this to some extent, we provide a glossary in the appendix which maps the grammatical terminology used in this book to other, established, Latin-based and Arabic-based counterparts.

It may also be appropriate to inform the reader that we chose to present a simplified version of Arabic grammar. As such, the grammar presented here may not be entirely consistent with the comprehensive and harmonious framework developed by the Arab grammarians. We chose this approach because we felt that exposing the beginner to complex grammatical details at this stage would be more of a hindrance than a help in learning the language.

This book is produced with the R bookdown package. The code and text are open-sourced and developed at [github.com/adamiturabi/arabic-tutorial-book](https://github.com/adamiturabi/arabic-tutorial-book). The typeset output is published at [adamiturabi.github.io/arabic-tutorial-book/](https://adamiturabi.github.io/arabic-tutorial-book/).

THE AUTHORS



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

All praises are due to Allāh. We praise Him, seek His help, and ask for His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allāh from the evil in our souls and from our sinful deeds. Whomever Allāh guides, no one can mislead. Whomever Allāh leads astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that there is no one worthy of worship except Allāh. I also bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger.

May the peace and blessings of Allāh be upon the Prophet Muḥammad, his family, his companions, and those who followed them with good conduct.

#### 1.1 History of Arabic

Allāh, may He be glorified and exalted, revealed the Qurʾān 1400 years ago to the Prophet Muḥammad, may Allāh grant peace and confer blessing upon him. The language of the Qurʾān is the Arabic language, as it was understood by the Arabs at that time. The sayings and actions of the Prophet, may Allāh grant peace and confer blessing upon him, were recorded by his companions also in this Arabic language. We will call the Arabic of this pre-Islāmic and early Islāmic era as Classical Arabic. The Classical Arabic language consisted of multiple dialects that were spoken by the different tribes and in the different regions of the Arabian peninsula.

All languages change naturally over time. For example, English has changed to such a degree that the Old English language spoken 1400 years ago would be unintelligible to us today. So too did the Classical Arabic dialects begin to change. But as part of preserving His religion, Allāh preserved the Arabic language as well. This was by means of the

efforts of scholars who recorded the Classical Arabic language of the time of the revelation.

In the process of preserving Arabic, one particular variety became standardized and gained prevalence as a literary language over the other dialects of the Arabic of the early-Islāmic period. This *Standard Arabic*, in its early period after standardization, is called Classical Standard Arabic. The pre-Islāmic and early Islāmic Arabic dialects (of which Classical Standard Arabic is but a standardized variety) are then referred to, collectively, as pre-standard Classical Arabic. Classical Standard Arabic was used as the language of religious scholarship, science, and literature in the Islāmic world. As scholars developed new branches of religious and secular sciences, new terms and meanings were added to it that are termed post-classical. A few words were also borrowed from foreign languages and Arabicized, as needed by the different scientific disciplines. (Pre-Standard Classical Arabic itself had a few Arabicized foreign borrowings from neighboring languages.) These additions were, by and large, deliberate, done by scholars who were experts in their fields and also well versed in Classical Standard Arabic, and validated by subsequent generations of scholarly discourse. Besides these needed additions, the grammar and core language remained remarkably unchanged.

While Standard Arabic was thus preserved from major change and was used for literary purposes, the language that was spoken by Arabs in their day-to-day lives continued to change over time from the pre-standard Classical Arabic dialects into the modern colloquial dialects. And so today, there exist two very distinct types of Arabic: the preserved Standard Arabic which is taught at schools and is primarily a written language, and the modern colloquial Arabic dialects which Arabs learn as their mother tongue and which are primarily only spoken and not written.



Figure 1.1: Timeline of the development of Standard Arabic.

In modern times, many new words and meanings have been added to Standard Arabic, often via translation from Western languages, to keep up with technological advancements and modern media. This modern development of Standard Arabic is called Modern Standard Arabic. There are also a small amount of words, meanings, and grammatical usages, which ex-

isted in Classical Arabic, but which are deemed archaic, and are therefore largely unused, in Modern Standard Arabic.

Figure 1.1 (above) depicts this historical development of Standard Arabic.

## 1.2 Scope of this book

In this book, we will study Standard Arabic. We will focus on the pre-modern language. If Allāh wills, this will help you to begin to understand the language of the Qurʾān, the Ḥadīth, and Islāmīc literature.

If your goal is to learn Modern Standard Arabic, then this book may still be of help because the core language and the grammar are essentially the same. However, you may prefer to study from a resource that focuses on the modern language.

This book does not touch at all upon the modern colloquial dialects that are spoken in the Arab world today.

## 1.3 How to study from this book

We will start with the Arabic script and present in each chapter a new concept of Arabic grammar, together with examples. We will also give vocabulary for you to memorize and have chapter exercises. Unfortunately, some of the sentences we present, both as examples and as chapter exercises, because of their construction and subject matter, may seem of dubious usefulness to a learner wanting to learn practical usage. We ask that you overlook this and bear with us as we try to reinforce grammatical concepts. In answering the exercises, we strongly recommend that you memorize the vocabulary in full and write down the answers on paper with a pen.

We strongly recommend that you **not**:

- answer the exercises verbally without writing them down,
- look up the answers before attempting to write the answer yourself,
- look up words in the vocabulary list without memorizing them,
- proceed to the next chapter before memorizing the vocabulary and going through the exercises.

Be aware that while Arabic grammar requires effort to master to a proficient degree, the real barrier to reading and understanding Arabic texts by oneself is vocabulary. Arabic is a very rich language and knowledge of a

few thousand words is needed before the student can begin to read texts independently.

You may also find yourself having to go back a few chapters every once in a while and revising the concepts therein. This is very normal and not a cause for any alarm. It may also prove beneficial to re-do the exercises of that chapter when this occurs.

Work in progress. Not ready for study.

## Appendix A

### Rules for writing hamzah

#### A.1 Seats of hamzah

Hamzah is written in four different ways:

1. Seated on an 'alif: أ or إ
2. Seated on an wāw: و
3. Seated on an yā': ي
4. Unseated: ء

Here are some of notes about writing hamzah in the above four methods:

- When unseated hamzah comes between two letters that are joined, then it is written above the line that joins them, for example: خَطِيءَةٌ *khaṭī'ah*. In this word, the yā' ي joins to the tā' marbūṭah ة.
- When unseated hamzah is followed by an 'alif: اء, the combination of hamzah and 'alif is usually written as ā as a convention. Examples: آمَنَ *'āmana*, طَمَّانَ *ḍham'ān*, شَنَّانَ *shana'ān*. However, when the 'alif is a suffix or part of a suffix, or the hamzah is doubled, or there is an 'alif before the hamzah then we will write اء, not ā. Examples: شَيْءَانِ *shay'āni*, سَاءَالِ *sa''āl*, قِرَاءَاتِ *qirā'āt*.
- When hamzah is seated on 'alif, if it has an *kasrah*, it is written below the 'alif: اِ. Otherwise, it is written above the 'alif: أَ, إ, إِ.
- When hamzah is seated on yā' ي the dots of the yā' are no longer written. Here's how it will appear in different positions:

Isolated	End	Middle	Beginning
أ	إ	ئ	ء

Note that hamzah is seated on *yā'* in the middle position ئ is different from unseated hamzah between two joining letters ءـ.

So how do we know when to write hamzah unseated and when seated? And how do we choose between its three different seats? There are a set of rules that we need to follow in order to correctly write hamzah. Before we give the rules we will first present the underlying principle behind the rules.

## A.2 Rules for determining the seat of hamzah

### A.2.1 Separate main word from prefixes and suffixes

In order to determine the seat of hamzah for a words, we must first separate the main word from any prefixes and suffixes. We will determine the seat of hamzah for the main word first. Hamzah can occur in three positions in the main word:

1. At the beginning of the word
2. In the middle of the word
3. At the end of the word

We will treat each of these positions below.

#### A.2.1.1 At the beginning of the word

When hamzah occurs in the beginning of a word, then:

- a. If the hamzah carries a long-*ā* vowel, it is written unseated followed by an *ʿalif* and written as *ā*, for example آمَنَ *ʿāmana*.
- b. If the hamzah carries any other vowel, it is written seated on an *ʿalif*, and is marked with the appropriated vowel mark, for example أَسْلَمَ *ʿaslama*, أُرِيدُ *ʿurīdu*, إِسْلَامَ *ʿislām*, إِيْمَانٍ *ʿīmān*, أُوحِدَ *ʿūkhidha*.

#### A.2.1.2 In the middle of the word

The most general case is when hamzah is in the middle of a word.

Arabic has three short vowels, three long vowels, two diphthongs, and a *sukūn*. Each of these has an order of precedence and a hamzah seat.

Precedence	Vowel	Seat
1.	<i>ī/ay</i>	ء
2.	<i>i</i>	ئ
3.	<i>ū/aw</i>	ء
4.	<i>u</i>	ؤ
5.	<i>ā</i>	ء
6.	<i>a</i>	أ
7.	◌ْ	ء

**Main rule:** Disregard any doubling mark ◌ْ and consider the vowel on the consonant before the hamzah and the *shortened* vowel on the hamzah itself. Determine which of the two vowels wins by being higher in precedence in the above table. The winning vowel's seat will be the seat of the hamzah.

**Sub-rule:** If the main rule determines that hamzah is to be seated on 'alif, and there is a long *ā* vowel on the hamzah using an 'alif, then hamzah shall be unseated. And the combination of لَء will usually be written as آل.

Examples:

Word	Vowel on consonant before hamzah	Shortened vowel on hamzah	Winning vowel	Seated hamzah
هَيَّاهَ <i>hay'ah</i>	<i>ay</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ay</i>	ء
خَطِيئَةٌ <i>khaṭi'ah</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ī</i>	ء
اِسْتِيْءَاس <i>'isti'ās</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ī</i>	ء (Exception: لَء is not written as آل when the preceding vowel is ī.)
تَوَّامَ <i>taw'am</i>	<i>aw</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>aw</i>	ء
سَائِلَ <i>sā'il</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	ئ
تَسَاوُلَ <i>tasā'ul</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>	ؤ
تَسَاوَلَ <i>tasā'ala</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ā</i>	ء
قِرَاءَاتَ <i>qirā'āt</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ā</i>	ء

Word	Vowel on conso- nant before hamzah	Shortened vowel on hamzah	Winning vowel	Seated hamzah
مَسْئُول <i>mas'ul</i>	◌ْ	u	u	وْ
تَرْئِيس <i>tar'is</i>	◌ْ	i	i	ئْ
مِرْآة <i>mir'ah</i>	◌ْ	a	a	ء (Using sub-rule.)
ظَمَّان <i>ḥam'ān</i>	◌ْ	a	a	ء (Using sub-rule.)
مَسْأَلَة <i>mas'alah</i>	◌ْ	a	a	أْ
الْمَرْأَة <i>almar'ah</i>	◌ْ	a	a	أْ
بَيْتَس <i>bi'sa</i>	i	◌ْ	i	ئْ
سُؤْلُكَ <i>su'laka</i>	u	◌ْ	u	وْ
كَاس <i>ka's</i>	a	◌ْ	a	أْ
سُؤْل <i>su'ila</i>	u	i	i	ئْ
يَيْس <i>ya'isa</i>	a	i	i	ئْ
رَيْس <i>ra'is</i>	a	i	i	ئْ
سُؤْل <i>su'al</i>	u	a	u	وْ
رُؤُوس <i>ru'ūs</i>	u	u	u	وْ
لُؤْي <i>lu'ayy</i>	u	a	u	وْ
شَنَان <i>shana'an</i>	a	a	a	ء (Using sub-rule.)
سَأَلَ <i>sa'ala</i>	a	a	a	أْ
رَأَى <i>ra'a</i>	a	a	a	أْ
رَأَسَ <i>ra'asa</i>	a	a	a	أْ
يُرَئِس <i>yura'isu</i>	a	i	i	ئْ
رُئِيس <i>ru'isa</i>	u	i	i	ئْ
تَقُول <i>tafa'ul</i>	a	u	u	وْ
سَأَلَ <i>sa'al</i>	a	a	a	ء (Using sub-rule.)
لَأَلَ <i>la'al</i>	a	a	a	ء (Using sub-rule.)

### A.2.1.3 At the end of the word

When hamzah occurs at the end of a word, disregard the vowel on hamzah itself, and consider only the vowel on preceding consonant. Plug it into the table as above, and determine to determine the seat of hamzah.



Word	Vowel on consonant before hamzah	Seated hamzah
دُعَاءُ <i>duḗa'u</i>	<i>ā</i>	ء
سُوءٌ <i>sū'u</i>	<i>ū</i>	ء
جِيءَ <i>jī'a</i>	<i>ī</i>	ء
ضَوْءٌ <i>ḍaw'a</i>	<i>aw</i>	ء
شَيْءٌ <i>shay'a</i>	<i>ay</i>	ء
بُطءٌ <i>buṭ'u</i>	◌ْ	ء
عِبءٌ <i>ʿib'u</i>	◌ْ	ء
شَطءٌ <i>shaṭ'u</i>	◌ْ	ء
يُهْدَى <i>yuhaddi'u</i>	<i>i</i>	ئ
سَيِّىٌ <i>sayyi'u</i>	<i>i</i>	ئ
بَطْوٌ <i>baṭu'a</i>	<i>u</i>	ؤ
يَهْدَا <i>yahda'u</i>	<i>a</i>	أ
مُبْتَدَا <i>mubtada'i</i>	<i>a</i>	إ

The exception to this rule is when the previous letter is a doubled *wāw* with an *ḍammah*. In this case the hamzah will again be unseated. Example تَبَوُّءٌ *tabawwu'u*.

Note also that مُبْتَدَا *mubtada'i* can be written with the hamzah below the *ʾalif* because of the *i*-mark on the hamzah. But it is also common to write it as مُبْتَدَا *mubtada'*, especially when the hamzah is unvoveled.

## A.2.2 Prefixes and suffixes

### A.2.2.1 Prefixes

If hamzah is in the beginning of a word, adding a prefix to the word will not alter the writing of the hamzah. Examples:

- ل + أُسْتَاذٌ = لِأُسْتَاذٍ
- ال + آخِرَةٌ = الْآخِرَةُ

### A.2.2.2 Suffixes

If hamzah is at the end of a word, adding a suffix to the word can, in general, alter the writing of the hamzah. Hamzah is now, generally, treated as if it is in the middle of the word, and the rules for hamzah in the middle of a word apply. Examples:

Word	Vowel on conso- nant before hamzah	Shortened vowel on hamzah	Winning vowel	Seated hamzah
بَرِيءُونَ <i>bari'ūna</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
بَرِيءَان <i>bari'āni</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
بَرِيءِينَ <i>bari'ina</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
بَرِيءَيْن <i>bari'ayni</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
شَيْءُهُ <i>shay'uhu</i>	<i>ay</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ay</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
شَيْءَاهُ <i>shay'ahu</i>	<i>ay</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ay</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
شَيْءَاهِي <i>shay'ahi</i>	<i>ay</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ay</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
شَيْءَان <i>shay'āni</i>	<i>ay</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ay</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
شَيْءَيْن <i>shay'ayni</i>	<i>ay</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ay</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
مَجِيءُهُ <i>maji'uhu</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
مَجِيءَاهُ <i>maji'ahu</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
مَجِيءَاهِي <i>maji'ahi</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ī</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سُوَيْءُهُ <i>sū'ihu</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
صَوَيْءُهُ <i>ḍaw'ihu</i>	<i>aw</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سُوَيْءَاهُ <i>sū'ahu</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ū</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سُوَيْءَان <i>sū'āni</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ū</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
صَوَيْءَاهُ <i>ḍaw'ahu</i>	<i>aw</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>aw</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
صَوَيْءَان <i>ḍaw'āni</i>	<i>aw</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>aw</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سُوَيْءُهُ <i>sū'uhu</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ū</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
يَسُوءُونَ <i>yasū'ūna</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ū</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
نُوءَان <i>nū'ānun.</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ū</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
مُتَّكِيْنَ <i>muttaki'ina</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
يُبَرِّئُونَ <i>yubarrī'ūna</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>i</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
يُبَرِّئُونَ <i>yubarra'ūna</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There are some exceptions:

If the letter before the hamzah has a *sukūn* and is not *wāw* or *yā'*, then the hamzah will be written unseated. Examples:

- جُزْءَان *juz'āni*

- عِبْءَانِ *ʿibʿāni*
- عِبْءَيْنِ *ʿibʿayni*
- بُطْءُهُ *buṭʿahu*
- بُطْءُهُ *buṭʿuhu*
- بُطْءِيهِ *buṭʿihi*

(انِ, يِنِ, هُ, and هِ are suffixes.)

### A.2.3 *tanwīn* on final hamzah

*tanwīn* on a final hamzah does not affect the writing of the hamzah except in the case of *tanwīn al-fatḥ*. When writing *tanwīn al-fatḥ* on a hamzah at the end of a word:

1. If there is an *ʿalif* before a unseated hamzah ء, then we don't add a silent *ʿalif* when writing *tanwīn al-fatḥ*. For example دَاء becomes دَاءٌ *dāʿan*, not دَاءِ.
2. Otherwise, we add the silent *ʿalif* after the hamzah so that the hamzah is now in the middle of the word with a suffix *ʿalif* after it. We now pretend that the hamzah has an *fatḥah* and that the *ʿalif* after it is a long-*ā* vowel. Then we go through the rules for writing hamzah in the middle of a word (given above) to determine how hamzah will be written. We then write the *an*-mark on the hamzah. Examples:

- مُبْتَدَأٌ becomes مُبْتَدِئًا, مُبْتَدِئًا, مُبْتَدِئًا
- مَلَجٌ becomes مَلَجِئًا, مَلَجِئًا, مَلَجِئًا
- جُزْءٌ becomes جُزْئِئًا, جُزْئِئًا, جُزْئِئًا
- شَيْءٌ becomes شَيْئِئًا, شَيْئِئًا, شَيْئِئًا

### A.2.4 Variants

There are some historical and regional variants to the above rules. The main one is a variant of rule 2.b.ii above. In this variant, when the letter before hamzah has a *sukūn*, the hamzah is generally written unseated. So they write:

- مَسْئُولٌ instead of مَسْئُولٌ
- أَسْئَلَةٌ instead of أَسْئَلَةٌ

- مَسْأَلَةٌ instead of مَسْأَلَة

However, this rule appears to be not consistently followed. For example, *al-nash'ah* is generally always written النَّشْأَة never النَّشْءَة.

A second variant is to avoid the repetition of vowel letters like و and ي. So they write:

- رُؤُوس instead of رُؤُوس.
- رَئِيس instead of رَئِيس.