

The Arabic writing system

December 20, 2019

1. THE ALPHABET

Name	Trans.	Isolated	Final	Medial	Initial
alif	aa	ا	ا	ا	ا
baa'	b	ب	ب	ب	ب
taa'	t	ت	ت	ت	ت
thaa'	th	ث	ث	ث	ث
jiim	j	ج	ج	ج	ج
Haa'	H	ح	ح	ح	ح
khaa'	kh	خ	خ	خ	خ
daal	d	د	د	د	د
dhaal	dh	ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ
raa'	r	ر	ر	ر	ر
zaay	z	ز	ز	ز	ز
siin	s	س	س	س	س
shiin	sh	ش	ش	ش	ش
Saad	S	ص	ص	ص	ص
Daad	D	ض	ض	ض	ض
Taa'	T	ط	ط	ط	ط
DHaa'	DH	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ
'ayn	'	ع	ع	ع	ع
ghayn	gh	غ	غ	غ	غ
faa'	f	ف	ف	ف	ف
qaaf	q	ق	ق	ق	ق
kaaf	k	ك	ك	ك	ك
laam	l	ل	ل	ل	ل
miim	m	م	م	م	م
nuun	n	ن	ن	ن	ن
haa'	h	ه	ه	ه	ه
waaw	w/uu	و	و	و	و
yaa'	y/ii	ي	ي	ي	ي

This chart was designed as a complement to the Alif Baa Arabic textbook (Georgetown University Press, 1995) and follows the transcription system used therein.

Gray background marks letters that do not connect forward. A following letter takes the initial or isolated form.

The baseline is marked with a red line on descending letter forms.

ظ and ط, ض, and ص are so called emphatic letters and affect quality of surrounding vowels.

Common ligatures

لا → لا*	salaam
لم → لم	al-muslim
في → في	fii
يح → يحيا	yaHyaa
تج → تجارة	tijaara
مح → محل	maHall
مم → مم	mumill
الله → الله	allaah

* Non-optional

The letters و and ي represent either a consonant or a long vowel and are transcribed accordingly.

2. OTHER LETTERS

Name	Trans.	Isolated	Final	Medial	Initial	
<i>hamza</i>	ʾ	أ	آ	أ	أ	<i>Hamza is written with different "chairs" depending on surrounding vowels and its position in the word.</i>
		إ	أ	أ	إ	
		ؤ	ؤ	ؤ	ؤ	
		ئ	ئ	ئ	ئ	
<i>madda</i>	ʾaa	ء	ء	ء	ء	<i>Hamza in the form of ء does not connect to surrounding letters.</i>
<i>taa' marbuuTa</i>	<i>a/at</i>	آ	آ	آ	آ	
<i>alif maqSuura</i>	<i>aa</i>	ة	ة			<i>The letters ة and ي only occur in word-final position. In words with possessive pronouns they transform to ة and ل respectively.</i>
		ي	ي			

3. VOWELS

Name	Short	Long	Nunation	
<i>fatHa</i>	<i>a</i> ا	<i>aa</i> آ	<i>an</i> َ/ّ	<i>The َ in ّ is silent.</i>
<i>Damma</i>	<i>u</i> اُ	<i>uu</i> أُ	<i>un</i> ُ	
<i>kasra</i>	<i>i</i> اِ	<i>ii</i> إ	<i>in</i> ِ	
<i>alif khanjariyya</i>		<i>aa</i> اِ		<i>Alifkhanjariyya is only used in the words اَللّٰهُ, لٰكِنْ, هٰذَا, هٰذِهِ and ذٰلِكَ. Usually not printed even in voweled text.</i>

4. MISCELLANEOUS

<i>sukuun</i>	◌ْ	Marks the absence of a vowel after a consonant. Not transcribed (دَرْسِ <i>dars</i>).	<i>Sukuun and shadda are only printed in voweled text.</i>
<i>shadda</i>	◌ّ	Marks doubling of a consonant. Vowel markers are written above or below <i>shadda</i> rather than above or below the letter (مُدَّرِّسٌ). Transcribed as double consonant (مُدَّرِّس <i>mudarris</i>).	