

# Arabic politeness formulae and their responses

Arabic has a highly developed system of formulaic polite phrases for different situations, and most phrases have a specific response. Knowing these phrases, in what situations they are used, and how to properly respond to them, is an important part of oral language proficiency in Arabic. I have not seen a comprehensive list of such phrases [^steward] and thought I'd set out to make one.

The phrases below are given in EALL transliteration and, since they often have no equivalent in English anyway, very literal translations. Each phrase is followed by its appropriate response. Forward slash indicates alternative responses.

## Greetings

- Formal greeting. The pronoun *-kum* (3mpl) is invariable in this phrase and its response. The extension of the reply in brackets is recommended in a *ḥadīth*.

*as-salāmu ʿalaykum* | *wa-ʿalaykum salām* [*wa-raḥmat allāh wa-barakātuh*]  
|  
Peace be upon you. | And upon you peace [and God's grace and his blessings]. |

- Informal greeting.

*marḥaban* | *ahlan/marḥabatayn* |  
Hello | Hi/Two *marḥabans* |

- Greeting before noon.

*ṣabāḥ al-xayr* | *ṣabāḥ an-nūr/al-full\** |  
Morning of goodness | Morning of light/rose |

- Greeting after noon.

*masāʾ al-xayr* | *masāʾ an-nūr\** |  
Evening of goodness | Evening of light |

- Welcoming. Also general polite filler of pauses in conversation.

*ahlan wa-sahlan | ahlan fik |*

On flat ground and as family | On falt ground for you as well |

## Goodbyes

- When parting.

*ma'a salāma | allāh ma'ak |*

With peace. | May God be with you. |

- Before parting and saying goodbye (Syria).

*biddak šī? | salāmtak |*

Do you want something? | Your wellbeing |

- When parting before sleep.

*tuṣbiḥ 'alā xayr | wa-inta min ahl al-xayr/wa-inta bi-xayr |*

Wake up in good health | And you are of the good people/And you are well |

## Phrases for specific occasions

- To someone has recently cut their hair,shaved, or had a shower or bath.

*na'īman | allāh yan'am 'alek/'aleki |*

Gracefully. | May God bestow grace upon you. |

- By someone's passing away.

*al-'awāḍ bi-salāmtak | \*\* |*

May the compensation be in your health | |

- To someone who has completed their prayer (*ṣalāt*).

*taqabbal allāh | minni u-minnak |*

May God accept | From me and from you |

- Asking someone to calm down.

*ṣalli 'a-n-nabi | allāh yuṣalli 'a-n-nabi |*

Pray for the Prophet | May God pray for the Prophet |

- To someone returning from a journey.

*al-ḥamdu li-llāh 'ala s-salāma | allāh yusallimak |*

God be praised for your wellbeing | May God preserve you |

- Asking someone to pass a greeting.  
*sallim ʿala X | allāh yusallimak/yūṣal |*  
 Greet X | May God preserve you/It will arrive |
- Guest after finishing food.  
*dāʾiman | ṣaḥḥa |*  
 [May you] Always [have food] | Health |
- To someone who is eating/drinking.  
*ṣaḥḥa/ṣaḥḥatayn | ʿala qalbak |*  
 Health/Two healths | On your heart |
- To someone who has purchased something.  
*mabrūk | allāh yubārīk fīk |*  
 Blessed | May God bless you |
- After being introduced to someone.  
*tašarraḥna | yazīdak aš-šaraf |*  
 We are honored | May he increase your honor |
- To someone returning from the toilet. (I was told about this phrase but have never actually heard it in use. People seem to be aware of it, however, since I have used it jokingly with some measure of success. The pronoun is invariable.  
*šufītum | ʾufītum |*  
 May you have been healed. | May you have been ... |