

The Arabic writing system

December 20, 2019

1. THE ALPHABET

| Name | Trans. | Isolated | Final | Medial | Initial |
|--------------|-------------|----------|-------|--------|---------|
| <i>alif</i> | <i>aa</i> | ا | ا | ا | ا |
| <i>baa'</i> | <i>b</i> | ب | ب | ب | ب |
| <i>taa'</i> | <i>t</i> | ت | ت | ت | ت |
| <i>thaa'</i> | <i>th</i> | ث | ث | ث | ث |
| <i>jiim</i> | <i>j</i> | ج | ج | ج | ج |
| <i>Haa'</i> | <i>H</i> | ح | ح | ح | ح |
| <i>khaa'</i> | <i>kh</i> | خ | خ | خ | خ |
| <i>daal</i> | <i>d</i> | د | د | د | د |
| <i>dhaal</i> | <i>dh</i> | ذ | ذ | ذ | ذ |
| <i>raa'</i> | <i>r</i> | ر | ر | ر | ر |
| <i>zaay</i> | <i>z</i> | ز | ز | ز | ز |
| <i>siin</i> | <i>s</i> | س | س | س | س |
| <i>shiin</i> | <i>sh</i> | ش | ش | ش | ش |
| <i>Saad</i> | <i>S</i> | ص | ص | ص | ص |
| <i>Daad</i> | <i>D</i> | ض | ض | ض | ض |
| <i>Taa'</i> | <i>T</i> | ط | ط | ط | ط |
| <i>DHaa'</i> | <i>DH</i> | ظ | ظ | ظ | ظ |
| <i>'ayn</i> | <i>'</i> | ع | ع | ع | ع |
| <i>ghayn</i> | <i>gh</i> | غ | غ | غ | غ |
| <i>faa'</i> | <i>f</i> | ف | ف | ف | ف |
| <i>qaaf</i> | <i>q</i> | ق | ق | ق | ق |
| <i>kaaf</i> | <i>k</i> | ك | ك | ك | ك |
| <i>laam</i> | <i>l</i> | ل | ل | ل | ل |
| <i>miim</i> | <i>m</i> | م | م | م | م |
| <i>nuun</i> | <i>n</i> | ن | ن | ن | ن |
| <i>haa'</i> | <i>h</i> | ه | ه | ه | ه |
| <i>waaw</i> | <i>w/uu</i> | و | و | و | و |
| <i>yaa'</i> | <i>y/ii</i> | 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 → سلام *salaam*
 لم → المسلم *al-muslim*
 في → في *fii*
 يح → يحيا *yaHyaa*
 تج → تجارة *tijaara*
 مح → محل *maHall*
 مم → ممل *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 | |
|---------------|--------|----------|-------|--------|---------|--|
| hamza | ʾ | أ | آ | أ | أ | Hamza is written with different "chairs" depending on surrounding vowels and its position in the word. |
| | | إ | أ | أ | إ | |
| | | ؤ | ؤ | ؤ | ؤ | |
| | | ئ | ئ | ئ | ئ | |
| madda | ʾaa | ء | ء | ء | ء | Hamza in the form of ء does not connect to surrounding letters. |
| taa' marbuuTa | a/at | آ | آ | آ | آ | |
| alif maqSuura | aa | ة | ة | | | The letters ة and ي only occur in word-final position. In words with possessive pronouns they transform to ى and ل respectively. |
| | | ي | ي | | | |

3. VOWELS

| Name | Short | Long | Nunation | |
|------------------|-------|------|----------|--|
| fatHa | a َ | aa َ | an َ/َ | The َ in َ is silent. |
| Damma | u ُ | uu ُ | un ُ | |
| kasra | i ِ | ii ِ | in ِ | |
| alif khanjariyya | | aa ِ | | Alifkhanjariyya is only used in the words الله, لكن, هذا, هذه and ذاك. Usually not printed even in voweled text. |

4. MISCELLANEOUS

| | | | |
|--------|----|---|---|
| sukuun | ◌ْ | Marks the absence of a vowel after a consonant. Not transcribed (دَرس dars). | Sukuun and shadda are only printed in voweled text. |
| shadda | ◌ّ | Marks doubling of a consonant. Vowel markers are written above or below shadda rather than above or below the letter (مُدَرِّس). Transcribed as double consonant (مُدَرِّس mudarris). | |