

# **Beginning Urdu**

## **A Complete Course**

ابتدائی اردو  
ایک مکمل کورس

**Joshua H. Pien and Fauzia Farooqui**

Georgetown University Press/Washington DC

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# About *Beginning Urdu*

The goal of *Beginning Urdu* is to lead students in a regularly paced first-year course to the intermediate proficiency level (ILR level 1) in all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Exceptional students as well as students in accelerated courses will be able to attain intermediate-high proficiency (ILR 1+) by completing the book.

The book begins with an introduction to the sound system and script. This is followed by the core of the book, which focuses on the language and its associated culture. This core is organized around two major components: *units* and *chapters*. Units divide the content into broad themes, whereas the chapters focus on specific topics. At the back of the book are three appendices. The first appendix presents Urdu numbers; the second presents additional grammatical structures to help students proceed to more advanced levels after completing all eight units; the third appendix lists the suggested number of class hours to be spent on each activity set. The book also contains Urdu–English and English–Urdu glossaries of the words that are used in the texts.

The eight units are defined by broad themes, which lend continuity to the large amounts of content that the units contain and also provide realistic contexts for communication. The unit themes are appropriate intermediate-level topics, such as home and family; everyday life; the marketplace; responsibilities at home, work and school; and travel. We have chosen a diverse sampling of themes to broadly represent the targeted proficiency level as a whole.

Each unit culminates in a review chapter that contains tasks or activities in which the language is employed to reach a realistic and measurable nonlinguistic goal. Some examples of tasks that this book contains are purchasing food and clothing; arranging lodging and transportation; giving and following directions; and visiting a doctor. The review activities also include assignments for student-driven projects in which students can further explore and personalize topics related to the overarching theme.

The book contains a total of 41 chapters. In addition to the eight review chapters, there are 33 chapters that introduce new content. Each of these 33 chapters focuses on one or two language functions and the structures—grammar and vocabulary—that are required to express them. The chapters are grouped and distributed among the units so that the contents of the chapters serve as building blocks for the more complex tasks and projects at the end of each unit. The chapters contain straightforward grammar explanations that explain not only the forms of structures, but also their meanings and uses. The chapters also include topically organized vocabulary lists and sequences of exercises that lead students to structurally accurate yet meaningful use of the forms. The exercises address all four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and provide opportunities for actual communication through role-playing and games.

The book's chapters cover the grammar and vocabulary that are typically covered in first-year courses. We have organized the grammar by balancing two independent but equally important needs. First, the grammar must be distributed throughout the book so that students have the necessary tools at hand to express what they need and wish to say when they are asked to use the language for a given purpose. Second, complex structures composed of simpler ones should be covered after the simpler ones have already been learned. Organizing

the grammar according to these principles is extremely important from the perspective of the learner. The language appears less complicated when the level of grammatical complexity increases in smaller increments, and having the tools at hand to express one's desired meaning reinforces the notion that the language is a genuine means of communication and not just a set of rules.

*Beginning Urdu* not only contains the resources necessary to maintain a dynamic and student-centered classroom environment, but also contains tools to encourage students to develop as independent learners. Each unit's review chapter includes tips for increasing fluency and sets of questions to help personalize learning. Students should be encouraged to take charge of their learning by utilizing these resources regularly and developing their own additional resources according to their self-assessed needs. Students can also be encouraged to study in pairs to review and repeat the tasks that they have practiced in class.

The book presents culture in a manner that is integrated with the thematic units. Most of the relevant culture is embedded in the texts, situational activities, and tasks. We focus on commonplace aspects of culture related to communication about everyday living and social needs. Students acquire not only explicit knowledge of the culture, but also practicable proficiency in the culture by engaging in culturally authentic situations. Additional notes on culture are included where further explicit explanations are necessary.

We also offer a glimpse into the higher-order culture of values and ideas through our selection of three types of authentic materials. The first type consists of photographs from South Asian cities. These include simple signs as well as typical scenes. The second type of authentic material consists of aphorisms called *aqvāl-e zarri*, or “golden sayings.” These are short statements of wisdom attributed to major historical figures, such as the prophet Muhammad, famous sufis, and classical Greek philosophers. These sayings have a high value for beginning-language learners. They are relatively simple in structure, yet they convey important cultural values and also employ vocabulary that is more abstract and literary than the typical intermediate-level language, which tends to be tied to speech. These sayings therefore serve as a valuable doorway into higher proficiency levels, both linguistic and cultural. The third category of authentic material in our book is poetry. Poetry has much of the same pedagogical value as *aqvāl-e zarri*. It is useful to be aware of both aphorisms and poetry because they are frequently employed by native Urdu speakers to adorn everyday speech.

*Beginning Urdu* is written in a way that is consistent with the five Cs of ACTFL's Standards for Foreign Language Education. The core goal of the book is to promote communication. Ample opportunities are provided for students to engage in all three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational). Culture is presented in a manner that is integrated with communication. Students become familiar with the products and practices of Urdu culture as well as the perspectives that they represent by engaging in communication in situations that are realistic in Urdu-speaking society. The connections goal is addressed through student projects as well as through the authentic materials that present distinctive viewpoints available only through Urdu. The comparisons goal is addressed through the comparative approach used to present Urdu language and culture. Students develop an understanding of the nature of language and culture through regular comparisons between Urdu and English. The communities goal is addressed through tools that encourage students to take charge of their own learning and become life-long learners. Instructors are encouraged to provide students with opportunities for engagement with the Urdu language community outside of the classroom. We recommend designing structured trips to local communities to use the language in the contexts presented throughout the book.

# How to Use This Book: For Teachers

This book was written to support a student-centered classroom in which Urdu is the primary language, and a significant portion of the time is devoted to hands-on interactive activities. This program covers approximately 150 contact hours and should bring students to the intermediate level upon completion.

We recommend that grammar explanations be read and vocabulary be learned by students as homework prior to carrying out the associated activities in class. In addition, grammar-focused reading and writing activities can be assigned as homework. These explanations and activities should sufficiently prepare students to engage in the hands-on, meaning-focused activities in class. Activities with a focus on reading, writing, or grammar can be recognized by the following icons:



Reading



Writing



Grammar

If students need additional time to practice structure-focused activities prior to engaging in meaning-focused activities, the grammar activities may be adapted as pair activities and reviewed in class.

The following icons identify activities that have a listening, speaking, or interpersonal component:



Listening



Speaking



Interpersonal

Speaking activities in general and interpersonal activities in particular are intended to be carried out in class. However, the “Tips for Increasing Fluency,” given in each set of unit activities, are an exception. They are intended to be used as independent speaking drills by students at home. Students should be encouraged to review these regularly. Many of the interpersonal activities have supporting materials in the form of tables and illustrations. These should be photocopied before class so that the relevant portions can be distributed to the students prior to each activity (see instructions in appendix 3). This practice will allow students to focus better on the task at hand and will discourage them from referring to their books during these activities.

The book also includes associated audio files that can be used either in class or at home. The following icon identifies activities with accompanying audio:



Audio

All audio recordings have accompanying transcripts, yet it is important that students listen to the texts identified by the  icon before reading them. Many audio files are essential

to listening activities, whereas others are provided as supplementary review material. For example, vocabulary list recordings can be used by students to review pronunciation. The recordings related to personalization questions can be used as speaking drills at home.

The presentation of grammar has been sequenced, and situations for communication have been defined in such a way that students should be able to communicate exclusively in Urdu beginning with the first unit. We have included a number of useful classroom-management phrases in the first unit to help you and your students stay in Urdu not only during activities, but also when transitioning between them. These are intended to be learned as fixed expressions without regard to their internal structure. We encourage you to add any additional phrases that you frequently use but are not included in our list.

The book also includes an introduction to the Urdu sound system and script prior to unit 1 in the printed textbook. It is intended to be covered concurrently with the first unit. Unit 1, accordingly, focuses on speaking and focuses less on reading and writing. We have included transliteration through unit 2, but students are expected to have learned the script before proceeding to unit 3 and beyond.

It is important to note that the chapters and units are of varying length due to the different demands of the content that they contain. Accordingly, some units and chapters will require more time than others to complete. To aid in planning and scheduling class time, we have included a table in appendix 3 that lists the suggested number of class hours to be spent on each activity set.

# How to Use This Book: For Students

There are three keys to using this book successfully to learn Urdu. The first is preparation, the second is participation, and the third is regular review. These keys roughly correspond to what you should do at home and what you should do in the classroom. In very general terms, the more you actively use the language in class, the quicker you will acquire it; and the better you prepare and review at home, the more you will be able to participate in class.

It is always a good idea to learn the grammar and vocabulary at home prior to coming to class on the day you will be using it. When learning the grammar, please keep in mind that any complete understanding of a structure should include three points: form, meaning, and function. The form of a structure is its pattern of changes to express different grammatical relations. The meaning of a structure is often easiest to understand by comparing and contrasting it with the closest equivalent English structure. The function of a structure is how it can be used in various contexts. All of these points are addressed in each grammar explanation. The short-term aim of learning grammar is to develop the ability to recall these three points about a structure from memory, whereas the long-term aim should be to become familiar enough with the structure to use it without thinking.

Vocabulary should also be learned prior to the day in which it will be used in class. When learning vocabulary, it's important to remember that the ability to recognize an Urdu word and tell its English meaning does not automatically translate to the ability to produce the Urdu word from the English. Although all words should always be memorized for passive recognition (from Urdu to English), it's important to be able to identify and memorize the most frequently occurring and functional words from English to Urdu. These words include core vocabulary items such as pronouns (*I, you, he, she, it*), conjunctions (*and, or, but, that*), postpositions (*in, at, on, by, from*), and any other function words such as interrogatives and relatives (*who, what, when, where*). Special attention should also be paid to verbs because it is impossible to form sentences without them. Vocabulary should be reviewed regularly, and eventually all of the words in the book should be learned for both passive and active retrieval.

Preparing regularly before class will allow you to focus more time on using the language in class for real communication and less on the structure of the language. Through the process of actually communicating with the language, using it will become automatic. The more you participate in class, the faster this will happen. We therefore encourage you to be as active as possible in class; you will excel if you have fun and use the language creatively.

It is also important to regularly review what you have already learned. We have provided a number of review activities that include the first three activities in each set of unit activities. In addition, we encourage you to study in pairs with classmates so that you will also be able to review the role-playing activities and other tasks covered in class.

## For Independent Learners

Much of what we recommend for classroom learners also applies to independent learners. Studying will be most efficient and effective if preparation time is devoted to conceptually grasping and committing to memory the grammar and vocabulary prior to carrying out the activities. While written transcripts are provided for each listening text, we recommend first listening exclusively before reading the transcripts. The additional audio files for vocabulary lists and personalization questions should also be utilized as much as possible.

Although it will not be possible to carry out the role-play activities if you are learning completely independently, one suggestion that might be useful is that you can write dialogues for the role-plays in place of acting them out. The reading and listening texts that we provide can serve as models as you do this. Of course, if you can also find a conversation partner with whom you can practice the role-plays, that will be the most useful. Speaking can be practiced without a partner by focusing on the second and third activity in each set of unit activities, “Tips for Increasing Fluency,” and “Personalization Questions.” The personalization questions can be listened to and responded to orally.

One of the challenges that independent learners face is how to manage time. It’s better to practice regularly for a short amount of time than to practice for extended lengths intermittently. We recommend that you set aside a fixed amount of time every day and devote that time to Urdu study.

Another challenge is pronunciation. We have provided extensive phonetic descriptions of the sounds of Urdu. It is a good idea to review pronunciation regularly and make full use of the accompanying audio materials as models for pronunciation.

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# About the Urdu Language

Urdu is an Indo-European language, belonging to the same language family as European languages such as French, Spanish, German, and English. While Urdu's relationship to European Romance and Germanic languages is distant, it is more closely related to other South Asian languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Panjabi, Marathi, Gujarati, Nepali, and Sindhi, all of which share a common ancestor, which was a form of Sanskrit.

According to the most recent count cited by Ethnologue ([www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)), Urdu has approximately 60.5 million native speakers, approximately 11 million of whom live in Pakistan where Urdu is the national language. The vast majority of the remaining Urdu speakers live in India, where Urdu is an official language in various states.

Urdu has a unique relationship with the language Hindi. Urdu and Hindi have nearly identical grammar and basic vocabulary, and in many contexts it makes sense to talk about the two languages as a single variety. When counted as a single variety, Urdu-Hindi (also commonly referred to as Hindi-Urdu and Hindustani) has approximately the fourth-highest number of native speakers among world languages, preceded only by Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and English. Both Urdu and Hindi also function as contact languages in South Asia, and are spoken as second languages by many more individuals.

This book presents a standard variety of Urdu appropriate for everyday uses of the language. These uses include fulfilling social needs such as exchanging basic biographical information, sharing one's personal experiences, and making future plans; in addition, the uses include carrying out everyday language tasks such as arranging food, clothing, housing, and transportation. The language that this book presents will enable learners to communicate with hundreds of millions of Urdu and Hindi speakers throughout Pakistan and Northern and Central India, as well as members of South Asian heritage communities throughout the world.

Learning Urdu will open access to one of the most culturally rich and diverse regions of the world. Urdu possesses a rich literary heritage that dates back three hundred years. Its colloquial form, which is shared with Hindi, is the language of the world's largest film industry, Bollywood. In addition, Urdu is one of the major languages of traditions such as qawwali, made famous to the West by the late Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Urdu will also give deeper access to the increasingly important politics and economics of South Asia.

Urdu, along with Hindi, is representative of the rich Ganga-Jamuni (Ganges-Yamuna) culture of the central Gangetic plane. This culture is a unique mixture of northern Indian and Persian Islamicate cultural elements. The fascinating history of this region is actually imprinted on the Urdu language itself. Urdu is genetically an Indo-Aryan language, having evolved from a spoken form of Sanskrit. Its core vocabulary (which it shares with Hindi) consists largely of evolved forms of Sanskrit words, but also contains many loanwords from Arabic and Persian, the latter of which was a major language of government administration and high culture in India for several centuries. Arabic and Persian loanwords become even more common in more formal styles of Urdu. Loanwords also include a few Turkish words (including the name 'Urdu'), reminding us of the original Central Asian heritage of the Mughal rulers of the Indian subcontinent.

Urdu's journey, however, is not limited to the northern plains of India. An early variety of Urdu was carried by a fourteenth-century migration of people to the Deccan and continues to thrive in cities such as Hyderabad. Interestingly, this southern variety of Urdu has a literary tradition that predates that of the northern variety by two hundred years. Urdu is also used by many speakers of regional languages who use Urdu as a contact language alongside their local language. As a result, the Urdu that is spoken in many regions has a local flavoring. Urdu's journey has been a long one with stops in various stations such as Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Karachi, and Lahore. We welcome you as you embark on your voyage with Urdu and wish you a pleasant journey.



Qawwali singers in Deva Sharif, India