

The Arabic writing system

January 27, 2020

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, ص are so called emphatic letters and affect the quality of nearby vowels.

Common ligatures

لا → لا*	سلام	<i>salaam</i>
لم → لم	المسلم	<i>al-muslim</i>
في → في		<i>fii</i>
يح → يح	يحييا	<i>yaHyaa</i>
تج → تج	تجارة	<i>tijaara</i>
مح → مح	محل	<i>maHall</i>
مم → مم	ممل	<i>mumill</i>
الله → الله		<i>allaah</i>

* 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	’	أ	أ	أ	أ	Hamza is written with different "chairs" depending on surrounding vowels and its position in the word.
		إ	أ	أ	أ	
		ؤ	ؤ	ؤ	ؤ	
madda	’aa	ء	ء	ء	ء	Hamza in the form of ء does not connect to surrounding letters.
		آ	آ	آ	آ	
taa’ marbuuTa	a/at	ة	ة			The letters ة and ي only occur in word-final position. In words with possessive pronouns they transform to ت and ل respectively.
alif maqSuura	aa	ي	ي			

3. VOWELS

Name	Short	Long	Nunation	
fatHa	a َ	aa َا	an َ / َّ	The َ in َّ is silent.
Damma	u ُ	uu ُو	un ُ	
kasra	i ِ	ii ِي	in ِ	
alif khanjariyya		aa ِ		Alifkhanjariyya is only used in the words اللَّهُ, لَكِن, هَذَا, هَذِهِ and ذَلِكَ. Usually not printed even in voweled text.

4. MISCELLANEOUS

sukuun	◌ْ	Marks the absence of a vowel after a consonant. Not transcribed (دَرَسَ 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 (مُدَّرِّسٌ). Transcribed as double consonant (مُدَّرِّس mudarris).	