

## Alphabet and Pronunciation

The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 (29 if letter *Hamza* considered as a consonant) letters, all of which are considered to be consonants. Vowels are designated by diacritic marks above or below the consonants. Modern Standard Arabic is generally written without short vowels, although vowels within words are pronounced. Vowels and nunation (an 'n' sound) are added to the ends of words to express a variety of grammatical functions.

Arabic script is cursive. The letters are joined by ligatures, much like cursive handwriting in English. Arabic is written from right to left, the opposite of English.

The chart below gives the letters of the Arabic alphabet, their names, their transliteration symbols, and their approximate pronunciations. The examples given below are meant as a general guide to pronunciation. Many of the sounds of English and Arabic are very different, so the best way to get a precise feel for the pronunciation of Arabic is to listen to it pronounced.

Letter:	Letter Name:	Transliteration Symbol:	Approximate Pronunciation:
ا	alif	aa	as in mad
ب	baa	b	as in boy
ت	taa	t	as in tip
ث	thaa	th	as in three
ج	jiim	j	as in jump
ح	Haa	H	as in hi, but heavily aspirated, with friction at back of throat
خ	khaa	kh	as in the Scottish word loch, but more raspy
د	daal	d	as in dog
ذ	dhaal	dh	as in this
ر	raa	r	as in red
ز	zaay	z	as in zoo
س	siin	s	as in same
ش	shiin	sh	as in ship
ص	Saad	S	as in sock, but heavier
ض	Daad	D	as in dog, but heavier

ط	Taa	T	as in talk, but heavier
ظ	DHaa	DH	as in this, but heavier
ع	aayn	'a	guttural sound, made by constricting air in the throat
غ	ghayn	gh	as in the French raison, like a gargle
ف	faa	f	as in fame
ق	qaaf	q	as in cough, but unaspirated
ك	kaaf	k	as in came
ل	laam	l	as in line
م	miim	m	as in made
ن	nuun	n	as in no
ه	haa	h	as in hi
و	waaw	w	as in win
ي	yaa	y	as in yes

In addition to the letters of the alphabet listed above, Arabic also has special signs and letters used to indicate short vowels and grammatical constructions, and for other purposes. In the chart below, a line has been drawn to indicate where the diacritical signs go in relation to the letter.

Sign	Name	Transliteration Symbol	Approximate Pronunciation
— َ	Fatha	A	as in mat or as in met
— ِ	Kasra	I	as in fin
— ُ	Damma	U	as in put

—   	Shadda	Double consonant (ex. dd or ll)	doubles the consonant
◌ ◌	Damma Tanween	"un"	adds n to the end of the word (nunation)
◌ ◌	Fatha Tanween	"an"	adds n to the end of the word (nunation)
◌ ◌	Kasra Tanween	"in"	adds n to the end of the word (nunation)
— ◌ —	Sukuun	none	indicates the lack of a vowel
◌	Hamza	◌	glottal stop; as in eaten (eaen) when said quickly
◌	Taa marbutta	A or T or t	may be pronounced as t prior to a vowel at the end of a word
◌	Alif maqsura	aa or Aa	as in mad, at the end of a word
◌	Alif madda	Aa	as in mad, at the beginning of a word

Depending on the context, Arabic letters may be categorized to two types:

**Joinable**; those have to be joined to the following letters in words. They come in four different patterns depending on their position in words (Initial, Medial, Final and Isolated) as shown in the diagram below.

**Non-Joinable**; those can not be joined to the letters on the left. They are called Naughty letters as they do not follow the joining rule of Arabic writing. They come in only two different patterns (connected & non-connected). These letters are:

ر ز ذ د و ا

Initial	Medial	Final	Independent (Isolated)
ا	باب	با	ا
ب	ببب	بب	ب

ت ث ن ه ح د ز س ش ص ض ط ظ ع غ

تث نة نه نج نه دة ذة سة شه صة ضة ظه عه غه

تث نة نه نج نه دة ذة سة شه صة ضة ظه عه غه

تث نة نه نج نه دة ذة سة شه صة ضة ظه عه غه

ف	بفب	بف	فا
قا	بقب	بق	قا
كا	كبب	كب	كا
لا	لبب	لب	لا
مب	بمب	بم	ما
نا	بنب	بن	نا
ها	بهب	به	ها
		بة	ها
و	بو	بو	وا
يا	بي	بي	يا

Special Cases:

1. 1. When ا follows the letter ل, it takes on a distinctive shape, somewhat slanted and connected to the ل at the base of the letter: لا
2. The glottal stop, called hamza ء, is considered a fully functioning consonant and has four distinct placements:
  - a) standing alone ء
  - b) seated on semi-yaa ئ
  - c) seated on waaw وء
  - d) seated on an alif أ