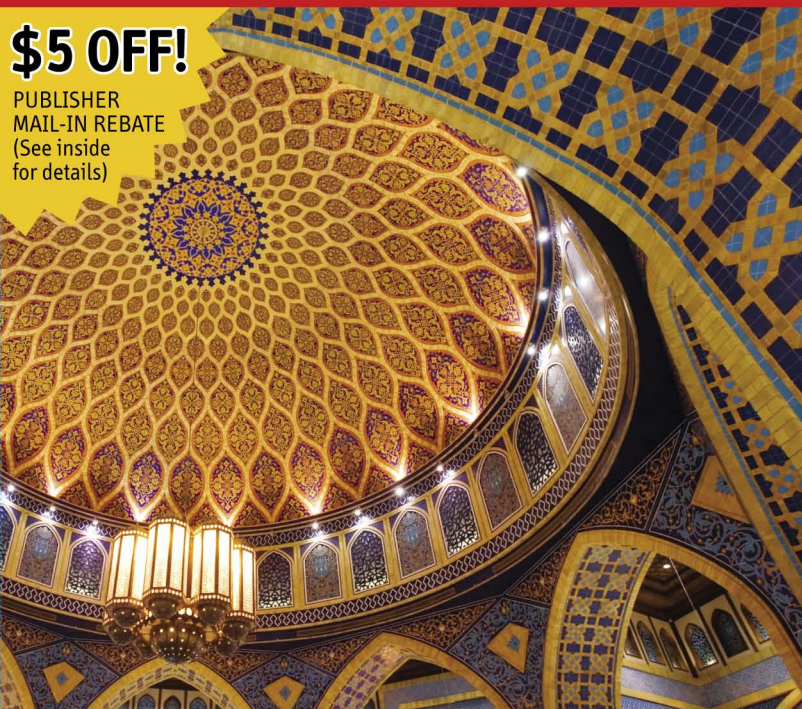


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LESSON 1

PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

In this first lesson you're going to focus on Modern Standard Arabic pronunciation and the transcription system used in this course. The purpose of this first lesson is not to make you an expert, so don't pressure yourself to master every sound and memorize every single transcription symbol used. You don't even have to memorize the meanings of the examples now. What this lesson is meant to do is to give you a general sense of Arabic pronunciation and show you that by far the majority of sounds used in Arabic are not really so foreign. That way, when you move into the actual language lessons, you'll have something to hold on to.

Luckily most of the sounds in Arabic are pronounced exactly like sounds in English, and in these cases the transcription system in this course simply uses the letters that represent those sounds. For example, there is a sound in Arabic that is pronounced just like the sound at the beginning of the English word “big,” so the transcription symbol used for that sound is *b*. Then there are other sounds that do not occur in English, but are found in other European languages, so even if you're not familiar with them, they're explained easily enough. Finally, there are a small number of sounds that are most likely very foreign to you, but still, they'll be described in detail, and you'll have plenty of opportunities to hear, repeat, and practice them. The key is to listen carefully to the recordings and mimic the native speakers as they pronounce the examples of each sound.

Before we get into the pronunciation of Arabic, let's talk very briefly about the Arabic alphabet and writing system. For a much more in-depth presentation of Arabic script, along with plenty of reading and writing practice exercises, see the *Complete Guide to Arabic Script*. Arabic is written right-to-left in a cursive script, meaning that most of the letters are joined to one another, like English handwriting as opposed to the letters you're reading right now. The letters take different shapes depending on where they appear in a word—first, in the middle, last, or in isolation. The Arabic letters you'll see in this section are the isolated forms, and they're included not so that you memorize them, but just to remind you that the transcription you'll be using is a short-cut to the “real” thing.



Another characteristic of written Arabic to keep in mind is that short vowels are not normally written, except in children's courses, the Koran, and, thankfully, in courses for students of Arabic! Normally, just the consonants, long vowels, and diphthongs are written. When the short vowels are written, they appear as small strokes or swirls above or below the consonant that is “carrying” them. In other words, *da* would be written in Arabic as the letter *d* with a small stroke written just above it. Long vowels and diphthongs are written as bona fide letters, but you don't need to concern yourself too much with this right now. All vowels are of course written in the transcription used in this course. You'll learn much more about the Arabic alphabet in the Arabic Script section of each lesson and in the supplemental *Guide to Arabic Script*.

Now we'll take a look at all of the sounds in Modern Standard Arabic so that you'll know how to pronounce each new word that you see in this course. We'll divide the sounds into groups—vowels, the many sounds that will give you no problem because they're pretty much identical to sounds in English, the fewer sounds that will give you very little trouble because they're found in other familiar languages, and finally the few difficult cases. You'll see the actual Arabic letter, its name, the transcription letter used in this course, a description of the sound, and several examples of Arabic words where the sound occurs. Don't worry if you want more practice—you'll focus on particular sounds of Arabic in each of the lessons that follow.

Vowels

There are three vowels in Modern Standard Arabic, but each one has both a long and a short variety. There are also two diphthongs, which are compound vowel sounds formed by gliding more than one simple vowel together. So, all in all, there are eight vowel sounds to focus on. Bear in mind that vowels in Arabic should always be clear and crisp, and they should never be reduced as vowels often are in English.



ا

a

The first short vowel in Arabic, called *fatHa*, is written as a short stroke on top of other letters. It can be pronounced like the *o* in *hot*, the *u* in *sun* or the *e* in *bet*, depending on the consonant before it. Consonants pronounced in the front of the mouth or with the teeth tend to make this sound more like *eh*.

wa (and)	man (who)
walad (boy)	kataba (he wrote)

و

u

The second short vowel in Arabic is *Damma*. It is written like a tiny, backwards *e* over another letter. It's pronounced like the vowel sound in *put* or *foot*.

kutub (books)	hum (they)
hunna (they)	funduq (hotel)

ي

i

The third and last short vowel in Arabic is *kasra*, written just like the *a* sound, but below the letter that carries it instead of above it. It's pronounced like the vowel in *sit* or *fit*.

bint (girl)	min (from)
'ism (name)	rijl (foot)

آ

aa

The long vowel *'alif*, which is also the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, is pronounced like the short *a*, but it's held longer. It can also sound like a long *-eh*, depending on the consonant before it.

baab (door)	kitaab (book)
laa (no)	salaam (peace)

و

uu

The long vowel written with the Arabic letter *waaw* is pronounced like the vowel in *pool* or *tool*. If you pronounce the English words *look* and *Luke*, but hold the vowel in *Luke*, you're pronouncing both the short and long *u* and *uu* of Arabic.

nuur (light)**duud** (worms)**thuum** (garlic)**katabuu** (they wrote)

ي

ii

The long vowel written with the Arabic letter *yaa'* is pronounced like the vowel in *sea* or *me*. If you pronounce the English words *pit* and *Pete*, you're pronouncing the short and long Arabic *i* and *ii*.

diin (religion)**kabiir** (big)**qaSiir** (short)**'ismii** (my name)

و

aw

The compound sound, or diphthong, written with the letter *waaw* with a small circle over it is pronounced like the vowel in *house* or *brown*.

yawm (day)**SawT** (sound)**dhawq** (taste)**xawm** (swim)

ي

ay

The diphthong written with the letter *yaa'* with a small circle over it is pronounced like the vowel in *bait* or *late*, or sometimes like the vowel in *my* or *buy*.

bayt (house)**laylaa** (Layla)**kayf** (how)**khayr** (goodness)

Consonants

Now let's take on the consonants. Remember that we'll use the convention of dividing them into three groups—the ones that are just about identical to sounds found in English, the ones that occur in other familiar languages, and finally the really tricky ones that generally give non-native speakers the hardest time.

Before we begin to look at the consonants, though, it's important to mention one important point. There is a difference in pronunciation between single and double consonants in Arabic. A double consonant must be held longer than a single one. For example, the *n* in *'anaa* (I) is held for about half as long as the *n* in *fannaan* (artist). This is easier to do with some consonants, such as *f*, *z*, *s*, *sh*, *th*, *n*, and *m*, which are produced with a continuous flow of air. Say these consonants aloud and you'll see that you can hold them for as long as your air supply lasts. Other consonants, such as *b*, *t*, *d*, or *k*, are produced by blocking airflow, so you can't hold them as you can the others. In these cases, pronounce the double consonants with a pause in the word. For example, *shubbaak* (window) sounds almost like two words *shub* and then *baak*.

Group One

ب

b

The letter *baa'* is pronounced just like the *b* in *boy* or *book*.

bint (girl)

bayt (house)

baab (door)

al-baSra (Basra)

ت

t

The letter *taa'* is pronounced like the *t* in *take* or *tip*.

taktub (you write)

tazuur (you visit)

tilmiidh (pupil, student)

fathiyya (woman's name)

ث

th

The letter *thaa'* is pronounced like the *th* in *thank* or *think*. Be careful not to pronounce it like the *th* in *this* or *that*; this sound is a separate letter in Arabic.

thaaniya (second)**thalaatha** (three)**thaa'** (the letter *th*)**thuum** (garlic)

ج

j

The letter *jiim* is pronounced differently throughout the Arab world. In western and central North Africa as well as in the Levant, it is pronounced like the *s* in *measure* or *pleasure*. In Egypt and Yemen, it is pronounced like the hard *g* in *go* or *get*. And in the eastern Arab world, it is pronounced like the *j* in *jelly* or *joke*.

jarida (newspaper)**jamil** (beautiful)**jaziira** (island)**jayid** (good)

د

d

The letter *daal* is pronounced like the *d* in *day* or *do*.

darasa (he studied)**diin** (religion)**dunyaa** (world)**dimaagh** (brain)

ذ

dh

The letter *dhaal* is pronounced like the *th* in *this*, *that*, or *other*. Do not confuse it with the *th* of *thank* or *think*.

dhabab (gold)**dhababa** (he went)**dhiraax** (arm)**'ustaadh** (professor)

ز

z

The letter *z* is pronounced like the *z* in *zoo* or *zipper*.

zaytuun (olives)

zaada (he added)

zaziiz (man's name)

zawj (husband)

س

s

The letter *s* is pronounced like the *s* in *so* or *sit*.

samiik (thick)

rasm (painting)

'islaam (Islam)

salaam (peace, hello)

ش

sh

The letter *sh* is pronounced like the *sh* in *shoe* or *ship*.

shukran (thank you)

shams (sun)

sharibat (she drank)

shaykh (sheikh)

ف

f

The letter *f* is pronounced like the *f* in *far* or *feel*.

fii (in)

faransaa (France)

fannaan (artist)

fiil (elephant)

ك

k

The letter *k* is pronounced like the *k* in *kite* or *keep*.

kitaab (book)

kalb (dog)

kayfa (how)

kursiyy (chair)

ل

l

The letter *laam* is pronounced like the *l* in *like* or *let*.

layl (night)

laa (no)

laTiif (friendly)

laysa (he is not)

م

m

The letter *miim* is pronounced like the *m* in *make* or *meet*.

maa (what)

masaa' (evening)

maktab (office)

mumtaaz (wonderful, excellent)

ن

n

The letter *nuun* is pronounced like the *n* in *now* or *neat*.

nuur (light)

'anaa (I)

nawm (sleep)

naxam (yes)

ه

h

The letter *haa'* is pronounced like the *h* in *here* or *happy*.

hunna (they)

huduu' (quiet)

haadhaa (this)

hiya (she)

و

w

The letter *waaw* is pronounced like the *w* in *we* or *wool*. (It is also used in the Arabic alphabet to represent the long vowel in *tool* or *pool* and the diphthong in *house*.)

wa (and)

walad (boy)

wazir (minister)

waSala (he arrived)

ي

y

The letter *yaa'* is pronounced like the *y* in *yes* or *yellow*. (It is also used in the Arabic alphabet to represent the long vowel in *week* or *see* and the diphthong in *bait*.)

yawm (day)**yaabaan** (Japan)**yaktubu** (he writes)**yasmiin** (woman's name)

Group Two

The following three consonants occur in other languages you may be familiar with.

خ

kh

The sound of the letter *khaa'* is not found in most varieties of English, but the sound at the end of the Scottish word *loch* is very close to it. It's also similar to the German sound in *Bach* or *Buch* or the Hebrew *Baruch*. It's a deep, throaty sound like a tight, raspy *h*.

khawkh (peach)**'akh** (brother)**'ukht** (sister)**khamisa** (five)

ر

r

The sound of *raa'* is not the standard *r* of English, but rather the rolled *r* of Italian or Spanish.

rajul (man)**rakhiis** (inexpensive)**rasm** (painting)**ra's** (head)

غ

gh

The sound of the letter *ghayn* is very similar to the gargled *r* of the French words *rue* or *rare*. It comes from the back of the throat, near where *g* or *k* are produced.

ghadan (tomorrow)
ghurfa (room)

ghariib (strange)
dimaagh (brain)

Group Three

Finally, these are the letters that are most likely to give you trouble, because they're very much unlike sounds in English or in other European languages.

ص

S

The letter *Saad* is pronounced like an emphatic, forceful *s*. It doesn't exist in English, but it's not difficult to make if you practice. Start by saying *s* as in *saw*, but then draw your tongue back and lower your jaw slightly. If you're having trouble doing this, just pronounce the long, deep "ah" that you make when the doctor examines your throat. That will automatically put your tongue in the right position for *Saad*. *Saad* (as well as *Daad*, *Taa'* and *Dhaa'*) change the quality of the vowels near them—they make them deeper. (Be careful in the transcription system to differentiate between *s*, which is like the English *s*, and *S*.)

Siin (China)

Saghiir (small)

Sadliq (friend)

SabaaH (morning)

ض

D

The letter *Daad* has the same relationship to the *d* in *day* as *S* has to the *s* in *say*. Practice in the same way—say a *d*, and then draw your tongue back and lower your jaw. Make the surrounding vowels deep.

Dabaab (fog)

Daruuriyy (necessary)

mariID (sick)

Daxiif (skinny)

ط

T

The letter *Taa'* is a *t* with the tongue drawn back and the jaw lowered. Start with *t* as in *toy*, and make the same adjustments as you did for *S* and *D*.

Taqs (weather)**Tifi** (child)**Taalib** (student)**Taawila** (table)

ظ

DH

The letter *DHaa'* is the last of the emphatic letters. It's the *th* in *this*, but pronounced with the tongue drawn back and the jaw lowered.

DHahr (back)**DHuhr** (noon)**DHahara** (he appeared)**DHalaam** (darkness)

ق

q

The letter *qaaf* is similar to the sound of a *g* or a *k*, but it's produced further back in the throat, closer to where the sound of the gargled French *r* is produced. You should feel the constriction at the very back of your mouth, near the top of your throat.

qaa'id (leader)**qalb** (heart)**qaamuus** (dictionary)**Sadiiq** (friend)

ع

'

The sound of the letter *hamza* isn't thought of as a "standard" English sound, but if you know what to listen for, you'll hear that it's far from rare. In fact, you produce it every time you say "uh-oh!" It's technically called a glottal stop, because it's a quick block in the airflow through your mouth caused by closing the very top of your throat, the glottis. But you don't need to get so technical to make this sound. Think

of the Cockney pronunciation of the words “bottle” or “settle,” with a short, gentle coughing sound where the double *t* is written. There are also many regional American accents, particularly around New York City, that use a very similar sound to pronounce the final *t* in words like *put*, *cat*, or *sit*. Notice that this sound is transcribed by an apostrophe, and in fact it occurs in the names of many of the Arabic letters. Make sure you pronounce it when you see it.

ka's (glass)

maa' (water)

qara'a (he read)

maa'ida (dining room table)

You'll also see this letter at the beginning of Arabic words that start with a vowel. Don't make any special effort to pronounce the *hamza* at the beginning of words. It's natural, even in English, to automatically produce a glottal stop whenever you begin to pronounce a word that starts with a vowel.

'ayna (where)

'adrusu (I study)

'awlaad (boys)

'ibn (son)

ح

H

The sound of the letter *Haa'* is perhaps the second hardest Arabic sound to make. But again, you've probably made this sound many times. Imagine that you're lowering yourself into a very hot bath. That very enthusiastic, forceful *Ha!*, with some constriction at the top of your throat, is the sound of *Haa'*. You also make this sound when you've put too much jalapeño in your chili or too much wasabi on your sushi. Or, if you prefer meat and potatoes, you make this sound when you blow on your glasses to clean them. The only difficulty in pronouncing *Haa'* probably comes from the fact that you think of it as an exclamation rather than a consonant. If you get used to that, you'll have no trouble pronouncing *Haa'*.

Haarr (hot)

Hajar (stone)

masraH (theater)

miSbaaH (lamp)



ع

x

Following the tradition of leaving the best for last, the letter *xayn* is almost definitely the hardest Arabic sound to pronounce. It's similar to the very emphatic *H* of *Haa'*, but it vibrates as well, and airflow is just about choked off by constriction at the top of the throat. You use the necessary muscles when you gag, and if you put your fingers on your throat and make yourself gag slightly, you'll feel the muscles you'll need to produce *xayn*. Again, it's not that it's impossible to produce this sound, but it's hard to get used to the idea that it's a regular consonant in a language. In Arabic, it's even a common consonant!

xarabiyya (Arabic language)
al-xiraaq (Iraq)

xalaykum (on you)
faxaltu (I did)



LESSON 2

HELLO! *'assalaamu xalaykum!*

In this first lesson you're going to learn some basic greetings and how to ask questions such as "how are you doing?" and "what is your name?" If you need to review any of the tips for how to use each lesson and get the most out of this course, turn back to the introduction.

2A Dialogue

Listen as Kareem bumps into an old high school friend, Kamal. They haven't seen each other in a long time.

kariim *'ahlan wa sahlan!*
kamaal *'ahlan wa sahlan!*
kariim *kayfa l-Haal?*
kamaal *al-Hamdu lillaah. wa 'anta, kayfa l-Haal?*
kariim *al-Hamdu lillaah.*

Kareem Hi!
Kamal Hi!
Kareem How are you?
Kamal I'm doing well. And you, how are you?
Kareem I'm doing well.

That wasn't so bad, was it? Now let's let's listen as Chris, a student at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, introduces himself to his classmate Layla on the first day of classes.

kris *'as-salaamu xalaykum.*
laylaa *wa xalaykum as-salaam.*
kris *kayfa l-Haal?*
laylaa *al-Hamdu lillaah. wa 'anta, kayfa l-Haal?*
kris *al-Hamdu lillaah, shukran.*
laylaa *maa 'ismuka?*
kris *'ismii kris. wa 'anti, maa 'ismuki?*
laylaa *'ismii laylaa.*
kris *'ahlan wa sahlan.*
laylaa *'ahlan wa sahlan.*

Chris Hello.
Layla Hello.
Chris How are you?



Layla I'm doing well. And you, how are you?
 Chris I'm doing well, thank you.
 Layla What's your name?
 Chris My name is Chris. And you, what's your name?
 Layla My name is Layla.
 Chris Nice to meet you.
 Layla Nice to meet you.

2B Language Notes

The most basic greeting in Arabic is the phrase '*as-salaamu xalaykum*. Literally it translates as “may peace be upon you,” but it is the English equivalent of “hello.” When a person says '*as-salaamu xalaykum*, the most common reply is *wa xalaykum as-salaam*. This translates as “and upon you peace,” but it also simply means “hello.”

Another very common greeting, a bit less formal, is '*ahlan wa sahlam*. This is the friendly greeting that Kareem and Kamal used.

In Arabic, just like in many other languages, there are certain greetings that are used at specific times of the day. For example, you can use *SabaaH al-khayr* or “good morning” to greet someone before noon. If someone says *SabaaH al-khayr* to you, you can reply by saying *SabaaH an-nuur*, which also means “good morning.” As a general rule, you can use this greeting anytime between sunrise and noon.

You can use the greeting *masaa' al-khayr* and its response *masaa' an-nuur* during late afternoon, early evening, or at nighttime. As a general rule you can start using *masaa' al-khayr* and *masaa' an-nuur* an hour before the sun sets. This greeting can then be translated as “good afternoon,” “good evening,” or even “good night” in some circumstances.

To say good night more personally, for example to a loved one before going to bed, you might say *layla saxiida* (good night) or *TusbiH xalaa khayr* (wake up in good health).

An important and useful expression to know is, of course, “good bye.” In Arabic it's literally “[go] with peace,” or *maxa s-salaama*.



Did you notice in the second dialogue that when Layla speaks to Chris she says *'anta* for “you” and *maa 'ismuka* for “what is your name?” But when Chris speaks to Layla he says *'anti* and *maa 'ismuki* to mean the same things. Those aren't typos—they're feminine and masculine forms for the same expression. You'll also notice that in the first dialogue, Kamal addresses Karim with *'anta*. You'll learn much more about these forms later, but for now, just be careful to notice the differences.

2C Vocabulary

Now let's take a look at the vocabulary you saw in the dialogue as well as some other words and expressions you'll come across in this lesson. Read through the list and familiarize yourself with the new words by repeating them several times, writing them down, or even using flashcards. At the end of the lesson, you might want to come back and work with the list again. For more tips on learning new vocabulary, turn back to the introduction.

'as-salamu xalaykum	hello, good day
wa xalaykum as-salaam	response to <i>'as-salamu xalaykum</i>
kayfa l-Haal	How are you?
al-Hamdu lillaah	I'm fine, I'm doing well.
'anta, 'anti	you (masculine, feminine)
kayfa	how
'ism	name
'ismii	my name
'ismuka, 'ismuki	your name (masculine, feminine)
wa	and
maa	what?
yawm	day
SabaaH	morning
masaa'	late afternoon, evening
layl	night
shukran	thank you
kitaab	book
Taalib	student (m.)
Taaliba	student (f.)
'ustaadh	professor (m.)
'ustaadha	professor (f.)
jaamixa	university

kulliyya	college
qaamuus	dictionary
bint	girl
walad	boy
rajul	man
'imra'a	woman
Saghiir	small, little, young (people)
kabiir	big, old (people)

2D Vocabulary Practice

Before you go further, take a moment to practice some of the new vocabulary you've just learned. Answer each of the following questions.

1. You walk into a conference room in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. What is the first thing that you say?
2. What would be said to you in response?
3. How do you say "morning?"
4. How would you say "night?"
5. You see a friend and want to ask her how she's doing. How would you say it?
6. To tell someone your name, what would you say?
7. Translate into English: *bint*, *Saghiir*, *shukran*, *kitaab*.
8. Now translate into Arabic: woman, man, big, and, what?

2E Grammar and Usage

Now let's begin to take a closer look at Arabic grammar and structure. Every lesson will add on to what you've learned in previous ones, so be sure that you're comfortable with each of the following points. Go at your own pace, and don't be afraid to review.

1 "To Be" in Arabic

Take a look at the sentences *kayfa l-Haal?* and *'ismii laylaa*. You know that they mean "How are you?" and "My name is Layla," but do you notice anything missing in the Arabic? If you've guessed that there are no words for "are" and "is," you're right. In Arabic, there is no translation of "to be" in



the present tense. That means that “am,” “are,” and “is” are understood.

'anaa Taaliba.
'ismii kamaal
kayfa l-Haal

I [am] a student.
My name [is] Kamal.
How are you? (Literally,
How [is] the condition?)

2 Definite and Indefinite Articles

An article is a little word that tells you something about a noun. For example, in English, if you say “a computer,” the indefinite article “a” shows that you mean any old undefined computer. But if you say “the” computer, that definite article “the” means that you have a specific, defined computer in mind.

There are no overt indefinite articles (a/an) in Arabic. For example, *SabaaH* (morning) means both “morning” and “a morning,” because even though it’s not there, the indefinite article is implied. Similarly, *masaa'* (evening) can mean both “evening” and “an evening.” But Arabic does have a definite article (the) which can be added to the beginning of a word by attaching the prefix *al-*. For example, *al-masaa'* means “the evening.” Here are a few more examples

<i>bint</i>	(a) girl
<i>al-bint</i>	the girl
<i>kitaab</i>	(a) book
<i>al-kitaab</i>	the book

Arabic uses the definite article much like English, to specify something in particular. But it also uses the definite article to make general statements. For example, while in English we’d say “chocolate is good” or “international phone calls are expensive,” Arabs say “the chocolate is good” and “the international phone calls are expensive.”

There is one other important rule to keep in mind when it comes to the definite article *al*. Do you remember the expression *SabaaH an-nuur*, or “good morning?” The *an* in *an-nuur* means “the,” but as you can see, it’s pronounced differently from *al*. That’s because the *-l* in *al* will change before the letters *t-*, *th-*, *d-*, *dh-*, *r-*, *z-*, *sh-*, *S-*, *D-*, *T-*, *DH*, and finally *n-*, into that letter. You’ll sometimes hear these letters called “sun letters,” because the word for

“sun”—*shams*—begins with one of them. The other letters, which don’t force the *l* in *al* to change, are called “moon” letters, because the word for moon—*qamar*—begins with one of them. The easiest way to remember the sun letters is that they’re the ones that are pronounced with the tongue very close to where it is when the *l* in *al* is pronounced.

<i>SabaaH</i>	(a) morning
<i>aS-SabaaH</i>	the morning
<i>dhahab</i>	gold
<i>adh-dhahab</i>	the gold
<i>shams</i>	sun
<i>ash-shams</i>	the sun
<i>rajul</i>	(a) man
<i>ar-rajul</i>	the man

3 Gender

Arabic, like Spanish or French or German, is a language that has gender. This means that every noun is either masculine or feminine. Sometimes this can be pretty obvious, if the grammatical gender of a noun is the same as its natural gender. So, an animate male noun will be masculine, and an animate female noun will be feminine.

<i>ar-rajul</i>	the man (masculine)
<i>al-‘imra’a</i>	the woman (feminine)
<i>walad</i>	a boy (masculine)
<i>bint</i>	a girl (feminine)

But even nouns that do not have natural gender—inanimate objects, for example—are grammatically either masculine or feminine. Luckily, it’s easy to tell whether an inanimate noun is masculine or feminine. Inanimate nouns are generally feminine if they end in *-a*, and masculine if they end in anything else, including a *hamza* (‘).

<i>kitaab</i>	(a) book (masculine)
<i>Taawila</i>	(a) table (feminine)
<i>al-qaamuus</i>	the dictionary (m.)
<i>al-kulliyya</i>	the college (f.)
<i>al-masaa’</i>	the evening (m.)

Keep in mind that not all feminine nouns end in *-a*. An animate female noun, regardless of its ending, is feminine, such as *bint* (girl) or *‘ukht* (sister). There are also a few inanimate

nouns which are feminine but do not end in *-a*, such as *ash-shams* (sun). This kind of irregular gender is rare, though, and it will be indicated in the vocabulary lists.

4 Nouns and Adjectives

Nouns in Arabic function the same way as they do in English—they are used to name a person, place, thing, quality, or concept. In both English and Arabic, we use adjectives to describe or modify nouns. But in Arabic, unlike in English, adjectives come after the nouns that they modify.

<i>kitaab Saghiir</i>	a small book
<i>qaamuus kabiir</i>	a big dictionary

As you can see, since there are no definite articles in the above phrases, they're translated into English as indefinite phrases—that is, phrases with “a” instead of “the.” So, *kitaab Saghiir* means “a small book” and not “the small book.” We'll see how to say “the small book” in the next lesson. For now, get used to the idea that whenever you see a noun followed by an adjective, and neither one has *al* (or its other forms) attached, it's translated as an indefinite phrase such as “a small book” or “a big dictionary.”

2F Grammar and Usage Exercises

Are you ready to practice some of what you've learned in this lesson? If not, don't be afraid to go back and read over the Grammar and Usage section again.

Exercise 1 Change these indefinite nouns into definite nouns, making sure to use the appropriate form of the prefix *al-*. Then translate each definite noun phrase into English.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>shams</i> | 5. <i>rajul</i> |
| 2. <i>kitaab</i> | 6. <i>'ustaadh</i> |
| 3. <i>qaamuus</i> | 7. <i>Taaliba</i> |
| 4. <i>bint</i> | 8. <i>dhahab</i> |

Exercise 2 Give the gender of each of the following Arabic nouns.

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>rajul</i> | 5. <i>'imra'a</i> |
| 2. <i>Taawila</i> | 6. <i>kulliyya</i> |
| 3. <i>qaamuus</i> | 7. <i>kitaab</i> |
| 4. <i>'ustaadh</i> | 8. <i>shams</i> |

Exercise 3 Translate the following phrases into English.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. aT-Taawila | 5. kitaab Saghiir |
| 2. rajul kabiir | 6. maa 'ismuka? |
| 3. 'ismii laylaa. | 7. al-kulliyya |
| 4. wa 'anta, kayfa l-Haal? | 8. 'ustaadh kabiir |

2G Pronunciation Practice Vowels

In each lesson we'll focus on certain sounds in Arabic. As you know, some of them are very simple and similar, if not identical, to sounds you know from English and perhaps from other European languages. But there are a few that you've probably never heard before. Don't worry, we'll get to them slowly and steadily. For now, let's begin with some easy sounds. Listen to your recordings and repeat after the native speakers as you work through this section.

Arabic has three basic vowel sounds, *a*, *i*, and *u*. These are each short, crisp sounds.

kamaal, wa, 'ahlan, walad
'ism, bint, min, 'ibn
mudun, 'ukht, kutub, shukr

One important aspect of Arabic pronunciation is that these vowels have a range of pronunciation, especially the *-a*, which can sometimes sound like the *a* in “father” and sometimes like the *e* in “set.” It all depends on the consonant before the vowel. Don't worry about any rules at this point—just be careful to listen to how the vowels are pronounced on the recordings.

Another important aspect of Arabic pronunciation is that these vowels can be either short or long. A long vowel is pronounced literally longer than a short one—hold it for a beat or two. In transcription, we'll show these vowels as *aa*, *ii*, and *uu*.

masaa', laa, 'ustaadh, Taalib
kabiir, Saghiir, diin, qariib
nuur, thuum, tuunis, suuq

2H Arabic Script Overview, the letters *baa'*, *taa'* and *thaa'*

The Arabic script is written and read from right to left, so if you were to pick up a book you would have to open it from



the opposite side of a book written in English. Lines would also start on the right side of the page instead of on the left, and you would read the letters in individual words from right to left as well. The Arabic script consists of two kinds of letters—ones that connect to the letters after them, and others that don't.

For example, the letter *baa'* (*b*) is a connecting letter, which means that it is written differently depending on whether it is located at the beginning of a word, in the middle of a word, at the end of a word, or isolated and not part of a word. So, there are really four different forms of each connecting letter—initial, medial, final, and isolated. Non-connecting letters only have two forms. Since they do not connect to the letters after them, their isolated and initial forms will look alike, as will their final and medial ones. This may not make much sense right now, but it will become clear as you see examples of actual Arabic letters and how they're used to form words.

We'll start with the first three consonants of the Arabic alphabet—*baa'*, *taa'*, and *thaa'*. They're pronounced *b-*, *t-*, and *th-* respectively, and they're all connecting letters. This means that they have four different forms, although there is only a slight variation among those forms. The initial form is written with a "tail" that connects to the letter after it, the medial has two "tails" connecting to letters on either side of it, and the final has a "tail" connecting it to the letter before it.

	isolated	initial	medial	final
<i>b</i>	ب	ب	ب	ب
<i>t</i>	ت	ت	ت	ت
<i>th</i>	ث	ث	ث	ث

As you can see, these three letters are all identical, except for the number of dots that they carry. The letter *baa'* has one dot below, while *taa'* has two above and *thaa'* three above.

Try reading these example words using the letters *baa'*, *taa'*, and *thaa'*. Don't worry about the vowel sounds yet—we'll come back to them. For now, focus on picking out *baa'*, *taa'* and *thaa'*.

باب	baab (door)	ثبت	thabata (it was confirmed)
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For more practice, read *The Basics*, *The Arabic Alphabet*, *Connecting and Non-Connecting Letters*, and Reading Practice 1 of *Part 2: Reading Arabic* in the *Complete Guide to Arabic Script*. Or, if you prefer to tackle Arabic script later, move right ahead to section 21.

21 Cultural Note What, Exactly, is Arabic?

Generally speaking, there are three forms of Arabic found in any given place in the Arabic-speaking world. There is Modern Standard Arabic, which is the language of business, literature, education, politics, the media, and most “official” situations. There’s also Koranic Arabic, which is the strict and traditional form used in religious matters, such as the Koran. These two forms of Arabic do not vary across the Arab world. But the third form does vary from place to place. It is the local colloquial (spoken) dialect, which is used in informal and familiar settings, and which is not usually written. These dialects do not necessarily split along easily identified geographical lines, but you’ll often hear of such dialects as Egyptian, Saudi, Iraqi, Gulf, Levantine, and North African. These dialects are all very closely related, of course, but their differences can be either subtle or not so subtle, related to pronunciation, vocabulary, or even grammatical constructions. In other words, the Arabic spoken among men sitting at a café in Amman, Jordan, is going to be different from the Arabic spoken by a family sitting down to a meal in Bahrain. But the language that they use when reading the Koran, listening to the news, or conversing in academic or business settings will be the same for the most part.

That is the type of Arabic that we are using in this book, called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is the most generic and most widely used and understood form of Arabic in the Middle East and beyond. It is more formal than some of the local dialects, but less rigid than the very strict Koranic Arabic. Most people in the Arab world understand and speak Modern Standard Arabic, and if you learn it, you can communicate with the majority of Arabic speakers.

If you would like to move on later to learn a local dialect, MSA will be an excellent foundation.

Lesson 2 Answer Key

Vocabulary Practice: 1. *'as-salaamu xalaykum.*; 2. *wa xalaykum as-salaam.*; 3. *Sabaah!*; 4. *lay!*; 5. *kayfa l-Haal?*; 6. *'ismii . . .* (insert your name); 7. girl, little/small/young, thank you, book; 8. *'imra'a, rajul, kabiir, wa, maa?* **Exercise 1:** 1. *ash-shams* (the sun); 2. *al-kitaab* (the book); 3. *al-qaamuus* (the dictionary); 4. *al-bint* (the girl); 5. *ar-rajul* (the man); 6. *al-'ustaadh* (the male professor); 7. *aT-Taaliiba* (the female student); 8. *adh-dhahab* (the gold) **Exercise 2:** 1. masculine; 2. feminine; 3. masculine; 4. masculine; 5. feminine; 6. feminine; 7. masculine; 8. feminine **Exercise 3:** 1. the table; 2. a big (or old) man; 3. My name is Layla.; 4. And you, how are you?; 5. a small book; 6. What is your name? 7. the college; 8. a big (or old) professor

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