

17 Minute Languages: Arabic Grammar at a Glance



17 Minute Languages:

(Modern Standard) Arabic Grammar at a Glance

Information on the Arabic language and its pronunciation

The Arabic language is part of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages. Within this group it is counted a Semitic language.

Arabic is the sole official language – or one of the official languages in the following countries:

Algeria, Bahrain, Chad, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirate, Western Sahara and Yemen.

The Arabic language comes in a lot of different varieties and dialects.

You can divide them into four groups:

1. Maghrebi Arabic (found in Northern Africa)
You will encounter its varieties in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Libya.
2. Egyptian Arabic and the local variety in Sudan form another subgroup.
3. The term Gulf Arabic collects varieties of Arabic in the region around the Persian Gulf:
Part of this group are varieties from Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, Kuwait, Saudi-Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
4. Eastern Arabic Varieties
We refer to Eastern Arab when we speak of dialects spoken in Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

All these dialects and varieties are united and connected with a common script.

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Get to know the pronunciation of the Arabic language

Word stress – rule of thumb

The word stress in Modern Standard Arabic is the topic of many a linguistic debate. Therefore we would like to provide you with a first rule of thumb: Arabic words have their stress on one of the last three syllables.

Which of those last three syllables is stressed, depends on the pronunciation.

If the penultimate syllable is pronounced 'closed' – that's where you will find the stress. In all other cases, you stress the third last syllable.

Pronunciation in a shortened form

Nouns and adjectives in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) are usually pronounced in a shortened form:

This means that the case endings (-u /-i/-a) of nouns will be found in the written form – but they are not pronounced.

The same happens according to the so called principle of ['nunation'](#):

This grammatical structure marks whether a noun is specific or unspecific. This is marked in the written form, but you won't hear it pronounced.

Arabic writing system

The Arabic script is written and read **from right to left**.

This is the very first characteristic that you will encounter learning Arabic.

| Example for the Arabic writing system compared to English: | |
|---|--|
| Arabic: written & read from right to left <-----> | English: written & read from left to right -----> |
| اِنِّي مَسْرُوْرٌ بِالْتَعْرِفِ عَلَيْكَ | Translation: I am pleased to meet you. |
| | Transcription (left to right): innī masrūrūn bi-t-ta'arrufi 'alayka |

Good to know:

Arabic does not distinguish between a handwritten and a printed version of its script.

All letters are always connected with each other.

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Please note:

There is one exception to the above mentioned rule:

Numbers are **written from left to right** – as they are in English.

But Arabic does not use Roman numbers.

You will have to learn how to write [Arabic numbers](#):

٣ → 3

٤ → 4

٥ → 5

For example:

345 written in Arabic is: ٣٤٥

How to write Arabic vocals

Usually Arabic words are missing their vocals in the written form.

As an Arabic native speaker, you learn the pronunciation and thus the vocals from the beginning.

For the non-native this fact provides kind of a challenge.

Therefore we strongly advise you to learn every single word with its written form and pronunciation at the same time.

To this rule, there is an exception: the three so called '**long vowels**' (they are pronounced a bit longer) have own letters and they **appear in writing**.

Please memorize these long vowels by heart:

ā [ا], ī [ي] and ū [و]

Arabic 'short vowels' (pronounced shortly) are marked with certain signs in the written form of a word.

Please take a close look at the following table:

| Marking Arabic short vowels with certain signs: | |
|---|--|
| Sign | Description |
| َ | short a , noted above a consonant |
| ِ | short i , noted beneath a consonant |
| ُ | short u , noted as tickmark above the consonant |

Please note:

Arabic does not use the vowels 'e' and 'o'.

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The Arabic alphabet

The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 letters.
The [Arabic script](#) is written from right to left.

Arabic letters take on a different form and shape – depending on where you encounter them.

To be able to read and write the Arabic script, you have to distinguish four different types of forms for each letter:

If you search for only the letter – without the context of a word – that's what we call the isolated form of that letter.

And within the written word, each letter can take on three different forms and shapes – depending on whether you encounter the letter at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a word.

The following tables will teach you the Arabic alphabet, its letters – and all their different forms.

Please note:

At the very beginning and at the very end of the tables you encounter two letters (آ and ؤ) which are not part of the official Arabic alphabet. We added them to the tables as they are none the less widely used in Arabic words.

The Arabic alphabet – letters in their isolated form

| column 1 | | | column 2 | | |
|----------|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| name | transliteration | isolated | name | transliteration | isolated |

| | | | | | |
|--------|------------|---|-----------------|---------|---|
| hamza | ' | ء | dād | د | ض |
| alif | ā, a, i, u | ا | tā | ط | ط |
| bā | b | ب | zā | ز | ظ |
| tā | t | ت | 'ain | ' | ع |
| thā | ṭ | ث | ghain | غ | غ |
| dschīm | ğ | ج | fā | f | ف |
| hā | ḥ | ح | qaf | ق | ق |
| chā | ḫ | خ | kāf | k | ك |
| dāl | d | د | lām | ل | ل |
| dhāl | ḏ | ذ | mīm | m | م |
| rā | r | ر | nūn | n | ن |
| zāin | z | ز | hā | h | ه |
| sīn | s | س | wāw | w, ū, u | و |
| schīn | š | ش | yā | y, ī, i | ي |
| sād | ṣ | ص | ta mar- buta | (t) | ة |

The following table shows you the form of the Arabic letters as they change in different positions:

position 1 (pos1): at the beginning of a word

position 2 (pos2): in the middle of a word

position 3 (pos3): at the end of the word

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| Letters of the Arabic alphabet | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------|------|------|
| name | translit. | pos.1 | pos2 | pos3 |
| hamza | ' | (-) | (-) | (-) |
| alif | ā, a, i, u | ا | آ | أ |
| bā | b | ب | بـ | بـ |
| tā | t | ت | تـ | تـ |
| thā | ṭ | ث | ثـ | ثـ |
| dschīm | ġ | ج | جـ | جـ |
| hā | ḥ | ح | حـ | حـ |
| chā | ḫ | خ | خـ | خـ |
| dāl | d | د | دـ | دـ |
| dhāl | ḍ | ذ | ذـ | ذـ |
| rā | r | ر | رـ | رـ |
| zāin | z | ز | زـ | زـ |
| sīn | s | س | سـ | سـ |
| schīn | š | ش | شـ | شـ |
| sād | ṣ | ص | صـ | صـ |
| dād | ḍ | ض | ضـ | ضـ |
| tā | ṭ | ط | طـ | طـ |
| zā | ẓ | ظ | ظـ | ظـ |
| 'ain | ' | ع | عـ | عـ |
| ghain | ġ | غ | غـ | غـ |
| fā | f | ف | فـ | فـ |

| | | | | |
|------------|---------|-----|-----|----|
| qaf | q | ق | قـ | قـ |
| kāf | k | ك | كـ | كـ |
| lām | l | ل | لـ | لـ |
| mīm | m | م | مـ | مـ |
| nūn | n | ن | نـ | نـ |
| hā | h | هـ | هـ | هـ |
| wāw | w, ū, u | و | وـ | وـ |
| yā | y, ī, i | ي | يـ | يـ |
| ta marbuta | (t) | (-) | (-) | ة |

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Arabic word structure

The majority of Arabic words is based on a **root**.
This root or **word stem** transports the (basic) meaning of the word.
The root of a word is usually made up from **three consonants**.
The single consonants in a root are called 'radicals'.

Let's compare this phenomenon to something we know from the English language:
Think of the word 'write' as the 'stem' and then see which words are rooted in this stem: to write, written, writer, write-up, typewriter ...

In Arabic, we translate 'write' with the following word stem:
k-t-b (ب [b] - ت [t] - ك [k]):

| Example: Arabic root k-t-b (ب [b] - ت [t] - ك [k]) | | | |
|---|-------|---------|----------------|
| كَتَبَ | كتب | kataba | he has written |
| كِتَابُ | كتاب | kitābun | book |
| مَكْتُوبٌ | مكتوب | maktūb | written |
| كُتُبٌ | كتب | kutub | books (pl) |

Additional characters for combinations of letters

Certain combinations of letters occur very often in the Arabic language.
To shorten the writing process, Arabic has come up with additional characters for those combinations.

Special signs for widely used combinations of letters (some examples):

| | | | |
|-------|-----|-------|----|
| ا + ل | لا | أ + ل | لأ |
| إ + ل | لاي | ى + ف | فى |
| ي + ف | في | م + ث | ثم |
| م + ل | لم | ي + ل | لى |
| ح + ل | لمح | ى + ل | لى |
| ى + ن | نى | ي + ن | نى |
| م + ي | يم | ج + ل | لج |
| م + ن | من | ي + ن | نى |
| خ + ن | نخ | ج + ن | نح |

Examples:
لإطلاق / al-'inṭilāq
(English translation: departure)
الترتيب / attartyb
(English translation: order)

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Article in Arabic

In Arabic we have to learn only one form of the article: the **defined article**.

In English the defined article is 'the' – e.g. the tree, the car, ...

The defined article in Arabic is connected to its noun and part of the word.

It's also pronounced together with the noun.

The defined article is pronounced 'al'.

For example:

الإسم / al-'ismu

the name

الطور / al-fuṭūru

the breakfast

In some regions you will also hear 'il' or 'el'.

Written form of the defined article in Arabic – what does the defined article look like?

Please take a look at the written form of the defined article in Arabic:

ال (not vocalised form)

أل (vocalised form)

Nouns in Arabic

Gender of Arabic nouns:

When starting to learn Arabic, we first have to deal with the fact that Arabic nouns have gender. We have to distinguish female and male nouns.

We would like to advise you to learn each noun's gender from the very beginning – along with the English translation of the word.

To make this a little easier for you, we would like to introduce this little rule of thumb for recognising the gender of nouns in Arabic.

Female nouns often end in ة (respectively ةـ , the connected form / for more information, please go to the chapter on the [Arabic alphabet](#)).

Nouns without this ending are mostly masculine.

Please memorize the following examples:

Rules of thumb to distinguish male from female nouns in Arabic (some examples)

| | | | |
|--------------|--------|--------------|--------------|
| الرَّجُلُ | الرجل | ar-raġulu | man |
| الصَّدِيقُ | الصديق | aṣ-ṣadīqu | friend |
| الزَّوْجَةُ | الزوجة | az-zauġatu | wife, spouse |
| الصَّبِيَّةُ | الصبية | aṣ-ṣabiyyatu | girl |

Please note:

This is just a rule of thumb and there are exceptions that you will have to learn and memorize separately.

Definite and indefinite nouns in Arabic:

The Arabic grammar distinguishes two “states” of nouns – a definite and an indefinite form.

In the definite form, the Arabic noun stands with an article.

In the indefinite form, the noun comes without the article and adds the so called 'nunation' at the end of the word.

Nunation in Semitic languages:

Let's take a closer look at the phenomenon of “nunation” in Arabic.

This is one of the characteristics of Semitic languages – and Arabic is one of them.

It describes the process of adding a “-nun” sound at the end of a noun.

This sound marks a noun as indefinite.

Please note that the principle of nunation has vanished in all modern Arabic dialects.

Dual in Arabic:

This is a new grammatical concept for an English native speaker:

In Arabic grammar, we encounter a phenomenon called 'dual'.

This grammatical form tells us that we are dealing with two entities (persons, things).

In English we have to say “two month” - in Arabic we have one grammatical

form to catch the whole concept.

Please take a look at the following examples and you will understand that phenomenon:

الصَدِيقِ / aṣ-Ṣadīqu / **the** friend

الصَدِيقَانِ / aṣ-Ṣadīqāni / **two** friends, both friends

شَهْرٍ / schahrūn – **one** month

شَهْرَانِ / schahrāni / **two** month

ثَلَاثَةُ أَشْهُرٍ / thalāthatu 'aschhurin / **three** month

Building the dual in Arabic:

Rules for building the dual in Arabic nouns:

When building the dual form of an Arabic noun, we have to distinguish two concepts: what linguists call a 'sound' (regular) version and a 'broken' (irregular) version.

When building the dual form of an Arabic noun, you add the ending

- -āni (انِ) to form the nominative
- -ayni (يْنِ) to form genitive and accusative

Building the plural of an Arabic noun: sound and broken form

Arabic knows two versions of building the plural of a noun.

Again, we have to distinguish a **sound** (regular) and a **broken** (irregular) form of the plural.

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Do you remember? - You encountered this concept for the first time when you read about the [dual](#) in Arabic.

Plural in Arabic – sound, regular form

The sound, regular plural is built depending on the gender of a noun.

Masculine nouns in Arabic build their sound plural form...

- by adding ūna (وُنْ) to the singular of the noun (or adjective, or participle) to form the nominative case.
Pronunciation: This ending is stressed.
- by adding -īna (يِنْ) to form the genitive* and accusative case.

* If you want to know more about the [case system in Arabic](#) – please simply follow this link.

Feminine nouns in Arabic build their sound plural ...

- by adding -ātu(n) (آتْ) to form the nominative case.
Pronunciation: This ending is stressed.
- by adding āti(n) (اتِ) to form the genitive and accusative case.

Plural in Arabic – broken, irregular form

Please note:

The vast majority of Arabic nouns builds its plural with the so called

'broken' (irregular, inner) form.

This irregular plural has the same ending as the singular form, but **changes within the word.**

That's why we are talking about an irregular form of plural here.

There are approximately **30 different templates** to build the broken, irregular plural of Arabic nouns.

If you start out to learn Modern Standard Arabic (MSG), please

→ always, always, always (!) if you work on a new noun, find out whether its plural is regular or irregular.

If it is an irregular noun, learn the singular and broken plural form by heart.

→ always check whether a new [adjective](#) or participle you want to acquire is regular or irregular.

If it is irregular, always start by researching and learning both forms.

The following table presents you with some first examples of Arabic nouns with a broken plural.

(Our tip: You could prepare yourself a sheet where you collect irregular nouns.)

| Examples for Arabic nouns with a broken form in the plural: | | | | | |
|---|---------------|-------|-----------|---------------|--------|
| vocalised | not vocalised | | vocalised | not vocalised | |
| رَجُلٌ | رجل | man | رِجَالٌ | رجال | men |
| ضَيْفٌ | ضيف | guest | ضُيُوفٌ | ضيوف | guests |

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| | | | | | |
|---------|------|------|--------|-----|-------|
| كِتَابٌ | كتاب | book | كُتُبٌ | كتب | books |
|---------|------|------|--------|-----|-------|

The case system in Modern Standard Arabic (MSG):

Modern Standard Arabic (MSG) knows three cases: nominative, genitive and accusative.

Masculine nouns in Arabic build their regular cases ...

- by adding -ūna (مُؤَنَّ) to the singular of the noun (or adjective, or participle) to form the nominative case.
Pronunciation: This ending is stressed.
- by adding -īna (مِئِنَّ) to form the genitive and accusative case.

Feminine nouns in Arabic build their regular plural ...

- by adding -ātu(n) (مَاتُّ) to form the nominative case.
Pronunciation: This ending is stressed.
- by adding -āti(n) (مَاتِ) to form the genitive and accusative case.

Please note:

In spoken Arabic those case endings are left out.

They are not pronounced.

Only when reciting a religious text or in a very formal language, the endings are fully articulated.

Adjectives in Arabic

In general Arabic nouns and adjectives are not that different from each other.

For example the Arabic word **حسن** can have the meaning of 'beauty' (which is a noun) but it also can mean 'beautiful' (and that's an adjective).

Usually you can take a look at the context of an Arabic sentence and you will know whether one word is used as a noun or as an adjective.

The following information will also give you a clue for how to use an Arabic adjective:

Where will I find an Arabic adjective?

The Arabic adjective is placed behind its noun.

For example:

الكلبُ الكبيرُ

English translation: dog big

Use of Arabic adjectives in a nutshell:

When using an Arabic adjective, please keep the following distinguishing categories in mind:

- number (singular or plural?)
- dual form (referring to two beings or objects) or plural form (referring to more than two beings or things)
- plural forms: sound or broken?
- Is the adjective used as an attribute or a predicate within the Arabic sentence?
- Does the adjective refer to human beings or inanimate objects?

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Please keep in mind that the applying rules may change with the categories.

Singular form of Arabic adjectives:

The Arabic adjective adapts to its reference in ...

- gender
- definite or indefinite form
- case

| Examples for the use of Arabic adjectives in Singular: | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Arabic | transliteration | translation |
| الكلبُ الكبيرُ | al-kalbu al-kabīru | the big dog |
| الكاتبُ المشهورُ | al-kātibu al-maschhūru | the famous author |
| هذا بيتٌ جميلٌ | hādā baitun ḡamīlun | This is a beautiful house. |

If an adjective refers to a feminine noun, it has to take the feminine ending ة (connected form: **ة**).

Please compare the following example:

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| المرأةُ الحسنةُ | al-mar'atu al-ḥasana | the beautiful woman |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|

Building the dual form of Arabic adjectives:

If an Arabic adjective refers to a [noun in the dual form](#), the adjective does not take on its plural but – but it changes and builds a dual form too.

- The dual ending for adjectives is -āni (انِ) in the nominative case.
- For building the genitive and accusative case, we add -ayni (اَيْنِ) to the end of the adjective.

Examples for building the dual of Arabic adjectives:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| الرجلانِ الطيبانِ | ar-raḡulāni aṭ-ṭayy-ibāni | these (two) nice guys |
| هذه سيارَةُ الأخوينِ الشابينِ | hādhi sayyāratu l-'aḥawaini š-šābaini | That's the car of the (two) young brothers. |

Forming the plural of Arabic adjectives:

When using an Arabic adjective in its plural, you have to differentiate whether it refers to a human being or not – and whether it is used as an attribute or a predicate.

Please follow these rules to distinguish attributive and predicative form of adjectives in the plural form:

- 1) If you want to use the adjective as **attribute** to a noun (e.g. **young** woman), the adjective adapts to its noun in number, gender, case and definiteness / indefiniteness.

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2) If the adjective takes on the function of a **predicate** within the sentence (e.g. Those woman are **young**.), it only adapts in number and gender.

Use of adjectives as attribute (plural):

The following table gives you an overview of the rules that apply when building the plural of adjectives used as attribute to a noun.

| Overview: Rules for building the plural of Arabic adjectives Attributive form | | | |
|--|--------------|------------------|---------------------|
| gender | sound/broken | nominative | genitive/accusative |
| feminine | sound | -ātu(n) (آتٍ) | -āti(n) (آتٍ) |
| feminine | broken | ----- | ----- |
| masculine | sound | -ūna (ؤُنْ) | -īna (يُنْ) |
| masculine | broken | [no rules apply] | |

Use of adjectives as predicate (plural):

Please take a look at the next table:

It sums up the rules that apply when using a plural adjective as a predicate.

| Overview: Rules for building the plural of Arabic adjectives Predicative form | | |
|--|--------------|---------------------------------|
| gender | sound/broken | nominative, genitive/accusative |
| | | |

| | | |
|-----------|-------|-------------|
| feminine | sound | -ātu (آتٍ) |
| masculine | sound | -ūna (ؤُنْ) |

Rules for the use of adjectives not referring to human beings:

Now we have to take a closer look at adjectives that do not refer to human beings but inanimate objects.

In this case the adjective is used in its **feminine** form in **singular**.

Please read the following examples:

| Examples for Arabic adjectives referring to inanimate objects: | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| المُدُنُ الجميلة | al-mudunu l-ğamīlatu | the beautiful cities |
| مُدُنٌ جميلة | mudunun ġamīlatun | beautiful cities |

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Collection of the most important adverbs in Arabic

In this chapter, we would like to present you small collections of useful adverbs in Arabic, like ...

كَذَّ / kaḏā / so

جَمِيعاً / ġami'an / together

تَقْرِيْباً / taqriban / fast

رَبْمَا / rubbamā / perhaps

These and the following adverbs are commonly used.

So, please, try to learn them by heart.

Adverbs of quality in Arabic

| | | | | | |
|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------|---------|------------|
| قَلِيْلًا | qalīlan | a little | كِفَايَةً | kifāya | sufficient |
| كَثِيْرًا | kašīran | a lot, much | بِدُوْنٍ | bidūni | without |
| جَيِّدًا | ġayyidan | good | كَثِيْرًا | kašīran | very |
| رَدِيْعًا | radī' | bad | جَدًّا | ġiddan | very much |

The next table shows adverbs of time in Arabic:

Adverbs of time in Arabic

| | | | | | |
|----------------|------------|-------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| أَلَاْن | alāna | now | سَابِقًا | sābiqan | previously |
| فِيْمَا بَعْدُ | fīmā ba'du | later | مُتَأَخَّرًا | mutāhḥran | late |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| فِي كُلِّ وَقْتٍ | fī kull waqt | at any time | فَوْرًا | fauran | immediately |
| دَائِمًا | dā'imān | always | لَا ... أَبَدًا | lā ... 'abadan | never |
| أَمْسٍ | 'amsi | yesterday | غَدًا | ġadan | tomorrow |
| الْيَوْمِ | alyauma | today | بَعْدَ غَدٍ | ba'da ġadin | the day after tomorrow |
| صَبَاحًا | ṣabāḥan | in the morning | مَسَاءً | masā'an | in the evening |

Local adverbs in Arabic

| | | | | | |
|---------|-------|-------|----------------|-----------|---------|
| هُنَا | hunā | here | فِي الْخَارِجِ | fī lḥāriġ | outside |
| هُنَاكَ | hunāk | there | فِي الدَّاخِلِ | fī ddāḥil | inside |
| فَوْقُ | fauqu | up | تَحْتُ | taḥtu | down |

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Verbs in Arabic

The stem of Arabic verbs:

An important concept in the Arabic verb system is the 'stem' or the 'root' of a verb.

All Arabic words use a root which usually contains three (seldom four) **radicals**.

We have been talking about the concepts of the [root and the radicals](#) of an Arabic word in the first chapters. If you do not remember, please use the link to jump back.

The space between the radicals is filled in different manners.

Those fillings derive the (changing) meaning of the word.

And that is how we conjugate verbs in Arabic.

For someone who just starts out to learn Arabic, this concept is key – as it helps to develop a general understanding for that word.

| Examples for Arabic verb stems: | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| combinations of radicals | Arabic word | transliteration | English translation |
| R1-a-R2-a-R3-a | فَتَحَ | fataḥa | to open |
| | جَلَسَ | ġalasa | to sit |
| | نَصَرَ | naṣara | to help, to assist |

| | | | |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| R1-a-R2-i-R3-a | شَهِدَ | šahida | to witness, to see |
| | سَمِعَ | sami'a | to hear |
| | شَرِبَ | šariba | to drink |
| R1-a-R2-u-R3-a | كَبُرَ | kabura | to grow |
| | ضَعُفَ | ḍa'ufa | to become weak |
| | كَرُمَ | karuma | to be generous |

Arabic verb system in a nutshell – categories of verbs

Building tenses in Arabic:

In the Arabic language, we encounter three tenses – the present, the past and the future.

If you are a bit familiar with Slavic languages you know this concept already by heart: Spoken Arabic uses two aspects when it comes to telling tenses. It distinguishes between a [perfective aspect](#) and an [imperfective aspect](#).

Moods:

We find Arabic verbs in three moods – the **indicative** mood, the **subjunctive** mood and the so called **jussive** mood.

The jussive has three tasks in the Arabic language:

- (1) It negates actions in the past (by the use of لَمْ).
- (2) It negates an imperative (with لَا).
- (3) It forms an imperative in the third person (with لِي).

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Numbers:

As we have heard when learning about the [noun in Arabic](#), we find a **singular** form, a **plural** and a **dual** form.

This is also true for the Arabic verb system.

The voices of Arabic verbs:

Arabic verbs know an active and a passive voice.

Stems of Arabic verbs:

The Arabic verb system knows **ten** so called 'verb stems'.

Those ten stems are categorized with the Roman numbers I / II / III / IV – and so on.

Stem I marks the infinitive form of an Arabic verb.

Verb stems from II to X translate the mood or the voice of a verb.

Every stem is built following a certain rule.

Please note that not every Arabic verb has ten different stems. (Well, some of them do have ten different stems ...)

Arabic verbs in dictionaries:

If you want to look up an Arabic verb in a **dictionary**, you will find there: the **third person, singular, masculine** – in the **perfect tense**.

For example:

If you look up the verb **فَعَلَ**

... you can translate this verb form with “he did” into English.

If you have been working with a classical Arabic grammar book, you have learnt Arabic verbs first in the third person, then in the second person – followed by (last but not least) the first person.

The perfective aspect:

The perfective aspect in Arabic refers to actions that already lay in the past.

Only on rare occasions a verb in the perfective aspect refers to an action happening in the present. This is the case, when an Arabic native speaker talks about his wishes – he will use his verbs in the perfective aspect.

The following table gives you an overview over the verb **فَعَلَ** (to do) in the perfective aspect.

| Example: the perfective aspect of the Arabic verb فَعَلَ (to do) | | | | | |
|---|------------------|-----------|--------|-----------------|------------------------|
| form | personal pronoun | verb | ending | transliteration | translation |
| 3.p. sg., m.* | هُوَ (huwa) | فَعَلَ | (-) | fa'ala | he did |
| 3.p. dual, m. | هُمَا (humā) | فَعَلَا | ا | fa'alā | they (m) (both) did |
| 3.p. pl., m. | هُمْ (hum) | فَعَلُوا | وا | fa'alū (*) | they (m) did |
| 3.p. sg., f. | هِيَ (hiya) | فَعَلَتْ | تْ | fa'alat | she did |
| 3.p. dual, f. | هُمَا (humā) | فَعَلَتَا | تا | fa'alatā | they (f) (both) did |

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| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.p. pl., f. | هُنَّ (hunna) | فَعَلْنَ | نَ | fa'alna | they (f) did |
| 2.p. sg., m. | أَنْتَ ('anta) | فَعَلْتَ | نَ | fa'alta | you (m) did |
| 2.p. dual, m. | أَنْتُمَا ('antumā) | فَعَلْتُمَا | نُ | fa'altumā | you (m) (both) did |
| 2.p. pl., m. | أَنْتُمْ ('antum) | فَعَلْتُمْ | نُمْ | fa'altum | you (m) did |
| 2.p. sg., f. | أَنْتِ ('anti) | فَعَلْتِ | تِ | fa'alti | you (f) did |
| 2.p. dual, f. | أَنْتُمَا ('antumā) | فَعَلْتُمَا | تُمَا | fa'altumā | you (f) (both) did |
| 2.p. Pl., fem. | أَنْتُنَّ ('antunna) | فَعَلْتُنَّ | تُنَّ | fa'altunna | ihr (f) machtet |
| 1.p. sg., m./f. | أَنَا ('anā) | فَعَلْتُ | تُ | fa'altu | I (m/f) did |
| 1.p. pl., m./f. | نَحْنُ (nahnu) | فَعَلْنَا | نَا | fa'alnā | we (m/f) did |

* Reading assistance:

This shortens the meaning of: third person in singular, masculine form.

The next chapter gives you the opportunity to compare the perfective aspect of Arabic verbs to their imperfective aspect.

The imperfective aspect:

Arabic verbs in the imperfect aspect describe actions that happen in the present or will happen in the future.

The following table gives you an overview over the verb **فَعَلَ** (to do) in the imperfective aspect.

| Example: the imperfective aspect of the Arabic verb عَلَّ (to do) | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| form | personal pronoun | verb | ending | transliteration | translation |
| 3.p. sg., m.* | هُوَ (huwa) | يَفْعَلُ | ـُ | īa'f'alu | he does |
| 3.p. dual, m. | هُمَا (humā) | يَفْعَلَانِ | ـَانِ | īa'f'alāni | they (m) (both) do |
| 3.p. pl., . | هُمْ (hum) | يَفْعَلُونَ | ـُونَ | īa'f'alūna | they (m) do |
| 3.p. sg., f. | هِيَ (hiya) | تَفْعَلُ | ـُ | taf'alu | she does |
| 3.p. dual, f. | هُمَا (humā) | تَفْعَلَانِ | ـَانِ | taf'alāni | they (f) (both) do |
| 3.p. pl., f. | هُنَّ (hunna) | يَفْعَلْنَ | ـْنَ | īa'f'alna | they (f) do |
| 2.p. sg., m. | أَنْتَ ('anta) | تَفْعَلُ | ـُ | taf'alu | you (m) do |

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| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------------------|
| 2.p. dual, m. | أَنْتُمَا (‘antumā) | تَفْعَلَانِ | كَانَ | taf'alāni | you (m) (both) do |
| 2.p. pl., m. | أَنْتُمْ (‘antum) | تَفْعَلُونَ | كُونُوا | taf'alūna | they (m) do |
| 2.p. sg, f. | أَنْتِ (‘anti) | تَفْعَلِينَ | كُونِي | taf'alīna | you (f) do |
| 2.p. dual, f. | أَنْتُمَا (‘antumā) | تَفْعَلَانِ | كَانَ | taf'alāni | you (f) (both) do |
| 2.p. pl., f. | أَنْتُنَّ (‘antunna) | تَفْعَلْنَ | كُنَّ | taf'alna | you (f) do |
| 1.p. sg, m./f. | أَنَا (‘anā) | أَفْعَلُ | أُ | 'af'alu | I (m/f) do |
| 1.p. pl., m./f. | نَحْنُ (nahnu) | نَفْعَلُ | أُ | naf'alu | we (m/w) do |

* Reading assistance:

This shortens the meaning of: third person in singular, masculine form.

Structure of Arabic sentences

Two varieties of word order in Arabic:

Arabic grammar knows two varieties of word order – so called 'verbal phrases' following the word order **VSO** (verb – subject – object) and so called 'noun phrases' following the word order **SVO** (subject – verb – object).

The next two chapters will help you to distinguish between [verbal phrases](#) and [noun phrases](#) in Modern Standard Arabic.

Verbal phrases (VSO) in Arabic:

Verbal phrases in Arabic can only consist of a verb and omit the subject of the sentence. The reason for that is that the verb already defines the subject and provides all necessary information.

Only when you want to put emphasis on the information who does something, you use a personal pronoun together with the verb.

Please take a look at the following examples and compare the emphasis that is expressed by the use of the personal pronoun.

| Examples I: verbal phrases in Arabic | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| verbal phrase | transliteration | translation |
| شَهِدْتُ. | šahittu | I have seen. |

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| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| أَنَا شَهِدْتُ. | 'anā šahittu | I have seen. |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|

You can add a subject or an object to a verbal phrase.

The word order will follow this rule:

verb | subject | object
(VSO)

Please take a look at the next examples for VSO word order in Arabic:

| Examples II: verbal phrases in Arabic | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| verbal phrase | transliteration | translation |
| أَكَلَ مُحَمَّدٌ. | 'akala Muḥammadun | Muhammad has eaten. |
| طَبَخَ الْأَخُوَّةُ | ṭabaḥu l-'uḥwatu | The brothers have cooked. |
| يَطْبُخُ أَبِي شُورَبَةً. | yaṭbuḥu 'abī šūrabatan | My father prepares soup. |
| أَكَلَ مُحَمَّدٌ الشُّورَبَةَ | 'akala uḥammadun aš-šūrabata | Muhammad has eaten the soup. |

Noun phrases (SVO) in Arabic:

The subject of a noun phrase in Arabic is a noun or a personal pronoun or a demonstrative pronoun.

The predicate of a noun phrase is an adjective, an adverb or another noun.

A noun phrase in Arabic usually lacks a verb.

The word order follows this plan:

subject | predicate (adjective, noun, adverb or prepositional phrase)

If the subject of such a sentence is clearly defined, you put it at the very beginning of the sentence. Please take a look at the following example:

| Examples I: noun phrases in Arabic | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| noun phrase | transliteration | translation |
| نَادِيَةٌ ذَكِيَّةٌ | Nadia ḍakiyyatun | Nadia is smart. |

If the subject of such a sentence is not clearly defined (a undefined noun), you will find it at the end of the sentence as shown in the next example.

| Examples II: noun phrases in Arabic | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| noun phrase | transliteration | translation |
| هُنَاكَ فَتَاةٌ | hunāka fatātun | There is a girl. |
| هَذَا صَبِيٌّ | hunā ṣabiyyun | Here is a boy. |

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Prepositions in Arabic

Prepositions are widely used in Modern Standard Arabic.

So we thought, it might be convenient if we provide you with a tiny collection of the most commonly used prepositions.

Please use this chapter as a starting point for your own work on collecting these 'small' but very important words.

| Collection of common prepositions in Arabic | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| preposition | transliteration | translation |
| عَلَى | 'alā | to, at, in |
| فِي | fī | in |
| إِلَى | 'ilā | to |
| بِ | bi | with |
| مِنْ | min | of, from |
| لِ | li | for |
| عِنْدَ | 'inda | at |
| خَلْفَ | ḥalfa | back, behind |
| بِسَبَبِ | bisababi | because of |
| خَارِجَ | ḥāriḡa | outside, beyond |

| | | |
|------------|---------|----------------|
| فَوْقَ | fawqa | above, on |
| تَحْتَ | taḥta | below, beneath |
| ضِدَّ | ḍidda | against |
| مَعَ | ma'a | with |
| مُنْذُ | mundu | since, for |
| حَوْلَى | ḥawālī | about, nearly |
| مِثْلَ، كَ | miṭla | such as, like |
| أثناءَ | 'atnā'a | during |

If you are interested in a [collection of Arabic conjunctions](#), please go to the next chapter.

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Conjunctions in Arabic

In this chapter, we provide you with a tiny collection of commonly used conjunctions in Modern Standard Arabic.

Please use this chapter as a starting point for your own work on collecting these 'small' but very important words.

| Commonly used conjunctions in Arabic | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| conjunction | transliteration | translation |
| وَ | wa | and |
| فَ | fa | and then, thereupon |
| إِمَّا ... وَإِمَّا | 'immā ... wa-'immā | either ... or |
| أَوْ | 'aw | or |
| بَلْ | bal | but |
| أَمْ | 'am | or (used for marking alternatives) |
| لِأَنَّ | li'anna | because |
| ثُمَّ | tumma | then, hereupon |
| حَتَّى | ḥatta | until |

| | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------------------------------|
| لَكِنَّ | lākinna | however, though |
| كَذَلِكَ | kaḏālika | as well, also |
| أَنَّ | 'an | that (+ verb) |
| أَنَّ | 'anna | that (+ noun/ personal suffix) |
| عِنْدَمَا | 'indamā | as, while |
| لِ | li | so, so that |

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Learn to count from 1 to 10 in Arabic

In this short chapter we want to show you the basic numbers in Arabic.
Please note: Numbers in Arabic are written **from left to right**.

| Learn to count from 1 to 10 in Arabic | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| | masculine | | feminine | | |
| ٠ | صِفْرٌ | ṣifrun | صِفْرٌ | ṣifrun | 0, zero |
| ١ | وَاحِدَةٌ | wāḥidatun | وَاحِدٌ | wāḥidun | 1, one |
| ٢ | اِثْنَانِ | 'iṭnatāni | اِثْنَانِ | 'iṭnāni | 2, two |
| ٣ | ثَلَاثٌ | ṭalāṭun | ثَلَاثَةٌ | ṭalāṭatun | 3, three |
| ٤ | أَرْبَعٌ | 'arba'un | أَرْبَعَةٌ | 'arba'atun | 4, four |
| ٥ | خَمْسٌ | ḥamsun | خَمْسَةٌ | ḥamsatun | 5, five |
| ٦ | سِتٌّ | sittun | سِتَّةٌ | sittatun | 6, six |
| ٧ | سَبْعَةٌ | sab'un | سَبْعَةٌ | sab'atun | 7, seven |
| ٨ | ثَمَانٍ | ṭamānin | ثَمَانِيَةٌ | ṭamāniyatun | 8, eight |
| ٩ | تِسْعٌ | tis'un | تِسْعَةٌ | tis'atun | 9, nine |
| ١٠ | عَشْرٌ | 'ašrun | عَشْرَةٌ | 'ašratun | 10, ten |