

Arabic: A Guide for Educators



Where in the world?

Arabic is the official language in 22 countries around the world. More than 290 million people on Earth speak Arabic, and it is the liturgical language of Muslims worldwide.

Arabic Script

- Arabic script goes from right to left in direction. The front of the book would look like the back of the book to English readers. Numerals, however, are written left to right.
- Arabic is a joined, cursive script that is written in horizontal lines.
- There are 28 letters in Arabic, but they change form based on placement at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. Three letters are long vowels, the rest are consonants.
- The Arabic alphabet was adopted for use in several other languages' written form, such as Persian and Urdu - but don't get confused! These languages are read and pronounced differently - much like Spanish and English's shared foundation of the Roman alphabet.
- Arabic has punctuation just as English does (periods, commas, question marks) but they may look "backwards" to English readers.
- Arabic has no case distinction (capital letters).
- Modern Arabic is usually written with consonants but not vowels or vowel markers. Readers use context to figure out the implied meaning of a word.

Origins

Arabic is a Semitic language, similar to Hebrew and Aramaic. It is believed to have started among nomadic tribes on the Arabian Peninsula. Written records in Arabic date earlier than the 7th century C.E.



Did You Know?

Classical Arabic, which the Quran (Muslim holy text) is written in, is different from Modern Standard Arabic, or MSA. MSA is the most widely used version today in Arabic-speaking countries, but it may differ somewhat from local dialects spoken.

Phonemes & Phonics for Arabic Speakers

- Arabic is a consonantal language. It has 28 consonant sounds, 3 long vowel sounds, and 3 short vowel sounds. This can make English vowel differentiation very difficult for Arabic speakers!
- Unlike English, Arabic has no silent letters/sounds. So an Arabic speaker may write "listen" as "lisen" because when they say the word aloud, they do not hear the /t/ sound.
- Some sounds in English don't exist in Arabic: 'p' 'v' 'g' and 'ng.' You may hear students mixing up 'p' and 'b,' or confusing 'g' and 'j' sounds.

Arabic Language Patterns

- Verbs in Arabic are very patterned and straightforward. For past tense, an -ah suffix is added. A prefix is added to form future tense.
- Sentences with actions or events are verb first. Typical sentence order in Arabic is (Verb + Subject + Object)
- All nouns have a gender, and subject-verb agreement is based on gender. When plural, nouns have a different plural ending based on whether they are masculine or feminine.

Common Errors in English

- Omitting articles, such as "the."
- If you ask a student a "when" question, you may get a "where" answer. The word "when" in Arabic means location.
- Auxiliary verb omitted ("**They going** to the store.")
- Personal pronoun restated ("My **father he** is smart.")
- Placement of adjective after a noun (**boy funny** instead of funny boy)
- Be verb omitted (**She hungry** instead of She **is** hungry.)