General Rules for the Arabic Script

1. There is a great deal of conformity between the letter and its sound. Almost every word is written as it is pronounced. There is no opposition to be mentioned (while in English such opposition may occur; i.e. beard, heard, bird).

2. Each letter should be emphasized or pronounced clearly. The notion of “eating” letters does not exist in the Arabic language, example: doing  doin’.

3. There is no capital letter.

4. There is no verb “to be” in Arabic.

5. Writing is from right to left; the opposite of all Latin languages.

6. The Arabic letters are characterized by having ligatures that allow for connecting them together and therefore, from this point, there are no clear cut differences between the written words and the printed ones.

7. The occurrence of 3 consonants is not allowed by any means. Any circumstances that may result with three consonants (as in the addition of suffixes and prefixes), a vowel must be inserted right before the suffix or right after the prefix. This inserted vowel is in most cases the “i” sound, i.e. kasra.

8. Arabic language writing depends mainly on the cursive connecting system.

9. What usually appears in writing is the consonants and the long vowels. The short vowels appear only in the Qur’aan, dictionaries and primary text books.

10. Punctuation is not consistent and most writings neglect its use. The full stop appears mainly to separate paragraphs. The most commonly used ones are the full stop, comma and question mark.
Letters and Sounds

The Arabic Alphabet

The Arabic alphabet contains twenty-eight letters, including consonants and long vowels, and fourteen symbols that function as short vowels and pronunciation markers, or as markers of certain grammatical functions. Units 2 through 10 introduce these letters and symbols individually. You will work with the workbook and the interactive media in tandem, and in the text you will see this media symbol 🎧, which indicates that you should listen to or watch the interactive media. The chart below shows the twenty-eight letters. Starting in the upper right-hand corner, the chart reads across from right to left, which is the direction Arabic is written and read.

🎧 Listening Exercise 1. Arabic letters and sounds (At home)

Watch the videos to see and hear the pronunciation of these letters.

The next chart shows the fourteen extra-alphabetical symbols and their names. They include short vowels, pronunciation symbols, grammatical endings, spelling variants, and a consonant that, for historical reasons, is not represented in the alphabet chart. These symbols will be introduced in units 2 through 10 along with the alphabet.
“Final position” means that the letter is connected to the preceding letter. Most letters have a particularly distinct shape when they occur in the final position, similar to the way English uses initial uppercase letters for words that begin sentences.

The chart below gives you an idea of the extent of this variation. You will see that each letter retains a basic shape throughout, which is the core of the letter. If the letter has a dot, the number and position also remain the same. Note that the last three letters, which all connect, appear to have a “tail” in their independent and final forms that drops off when they are connected and is replaced by a connecting segment that rests on the line. Look for the core shape of each letter; its dots, if any; the connecting segments; and the final tail in the following chart.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Final position</th>
<th>Medial position</th>
<th>Initial position</th>
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As you learn each letter of the alphabet you will learn to read and write all of its various shapes. You will be surprised how quickly you master them with a little practice!

(4) Arabic script consists of two separate “layers” of writing. The basic skeleton of a word is made up of the consonants and long vowels. Short vowels and other pronunciation and grammatical markers are separated from the consonant skeleton of the word. This second layer, called vocalization or vowelling, is normally omitted in writing, and the reader recognizes words without it. Compare the following two versions of the same text, a line of poetry, the first of which represents the normal way of writing without vocalization, and the second of which has all the pronunciation markers added:

قفا نبک من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل
سِقْطُ اللَّيْوَى بِنَ الدَّخُولِ فَحَوَّلِ
(The Great Qays)

قفا نبک من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل
بِسِقْطِ اللَّيْوَى بِنَ الدَّخُولِ فَحَوَّلِ
(From the commentary of Amir al-Qays)
Texts that are normally vocalized include elementary school textbooks, some editions of classical literary texts, and religious texts such as the Qur’an and the Bible. In scripture this precision has religious significance: The extra markings on the text leave no doubt as to the exact reading intended. Thus the texts of the Qur’an and Bible show full vocalization, as you can see in the following excerpts.