1

General

Before starting this lesson, be sure to read the **Introduction**/paragraphs 2, 3 and 5 (**The Arabic language**, **The Arabic alphabet**, and **How to use the media support**). These paragraphs clarify important terms used in this book.

Letters

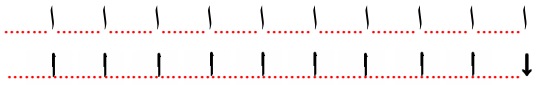
1

ا *alif*

The first and commonest letter of the alphabet is ا, called *alif*. It marks:

- at the beginning of a word: one of the *short* vowel sounds *a-*, *u-*, *i-* (like a in English 'pat', u in English 'put', and i in English 'pit', respectively).
- in the middle of a word, a *long* vowel sound which we transcribe with *-ā-*. Imagine pronouncing 'pat', in English, but drawing the vowel out: 'pa-a-at'.
- at the end of a few words: short *-a* (see above).

ا *alif* is a so-called 'disjoined' letter, that is, it is never joined to the following letter, i.e. to its left. *alif* rests on the line of writing, but is 'tall', like an English letter l. **Write** this letter several times, starting at the right of the page: .....

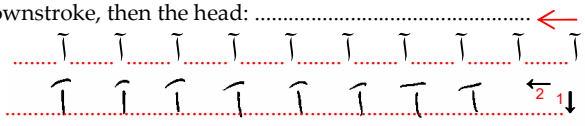


2

آ *alif madda*

alif with a stroke over it represents long *ā-* (see paragraph 1 above) at the beginning of a word. This variant of *alif* is called *alif madda*.

Write this letter several times: first the downstroke, then the head: .....



3

ب ت ث *bā* *tā* *thā*

The sounds *b*, *t* and *th* (*th* soft, like th in English 'think') are written respectively with the letters called *bā*, *tā* and *thā* (see paragraph 1 above for the pronunciation of *ā*). These letters are all 'shallow', i.e. not 'tall' like *alif*. They rest on the line of writing.

They are 'joined' letters, that is, they are joined to any letter following them in the same word. Each letter of this group has two possible forms, as shown in the box: the 'short' form ـب\ـت\ـث is written at

the beginning or in the middle of a word, and the 'full' form ب\ت\ث is written when the letter stands at the end of the word, or alone.

You will note that the three letters are identical but for the dots. These are an integral part of the letter, just as they are in the English letters i and j. The dot(s) lie respectively over or under the beginning of the short form, and respectively over or under the middle of the full form. In all dotted letters the stroke is written first (← right to left), the dot or dots later.

These are the printed and typed forms. In normal handwriting, two dots usually become a dash (–), and three dots something like a circumflex accent (^) . **Write** a line of each letter, first with the dots as in print, then as in normal handwriting:

Start at the right ..... ←

ب ب ب ب ب ب

ب ب ب ب ب ب

ت ت ت ت ت ت

ت ت ت ت ت ت

ث ث ث ث ث ث

ث ث ث ث ث ث

We can now write a few words. ا is always written downwards except in its middle or final form, i.e. when joined to a previous letter; in that position it is written upwards. Remember that it is never joined to the following letter, that is, to its left. Remember also, as was said in the Introduction, that short middle and short final vowels are not normally written. Note also the difference in height between *alif* (tall) and *bā-tā-thā* (shallow).

In writing a word, write in turn each *ligature* – that is, each isolated letter, or group of letters joined together – without its *detached forms* (the *detached forms* we have learned so far are the dot(s) and *madda*); then add the detached forms if any; then write the next ligature; and so on. (We often do something similar in English with a word like *imitate*, writing first the outline, then dotting the i's and crossing the t's.)

Double-click on the first **pin icon** to **open** ***W3.pps*** and watch the handwriting of باب *bāb*, and then on the second **pin icon** to **open** ***W4.pps*** and watch the handwriting of اثاث *athāth*, both words listed below.

Now **read and write** (starting at the right, remember)..... ←

اب اب *ab* father آب آب *āb* August

اثاث اثاث *athāth* furniture *W4* باب باب *bāb* door *W3*

ثابت ثابت *thābit* firm, solid

Double-click on the **loudspeaker icon** to **open** ***S1.wav*** and **read, listen to, and repeat** (in the pauses) these words.

There is no word for 'a' or 'an' in Arabic, so, for example, اب *ab* means either 'father' or 'a father', and باب *bāb* means either 'door' or 'a door'.

Short vowel rule: Short vowels (*a, i, u*) in the middle or at the end of a word are not normally written. In a few words final *alif* is written to mark short *-a*.

Stress

4 Think of the English word 'production'; its middle vowel is pronounced more strongly than the rest of the word. The u is said to be *stressed*. In books teaching English as a foreign language, the

stress is sometimes marked with an accent (prodúction). We shall use this device in transcription in the first five lessons of this book; you see this in *athā́th* and *thā́bit* above.

In English, the vowel of an unstressed syllable often loses its typical sound and becomes neutral; examples are the o's in 'production' and the a in 'asleep'. In Arabic, all the vowels of a word, including those in unstressed syllables, keep their typical sound. The neutral sound of a in English 'asleep' does not exist in Arabic; do not pronounce it, for example, for the initial short *a* in ***a**thā́th*.

Exercise 1 Match these words with their sound and their English meaning given in the list below. The first one is done for you:

(a) اب *ab* father (b) آب (c) اثاث (d) باب

athā́th, *āb*, *bāb*; door, furniture, August

Exercise 2 In Exercise 1, mark the *álif*s which are pronounced long, *ā*.

Exercise 3 Write the word باب *bāb* 'door'. Why is the first *bā* written differently from the last one? And why isn't the whole word joined up?

The answers to these exercises follow paragraph 6 below.

Letters

5

ن *nūn*

We write the sound *n* with the joined letter *nūn* (*n* as in English 'no', long *ū* like u in English 'truth'). This letter has a short form used at the beginning or in the middle of a word, and a full form used at the end of the word, or when the letter stands alone. The dot is an integral part of the letter. The short form differs from *bā* (paragraph 3 above) only in the position of the dot; the full form, which swings clockwise down and up again, often stands on or near the line of writing when alone (the 'isolated' form); when joined to the previous letter it stands lower. We can call it a 'deep' shape. In handwriting, the dot of full-form *nūn* often has the form of a hook on the curve itself: ں .

Write several examples of *nūn*, first as in print, i.e. with a dot on the full form; then with a hook on that form as in normal handwriting: .....←

.....ن .....ن .....ن .....ن .....ن .....ن

.....ں .....ں .....ں .....ں .....ں .....ں

Now **read and write** these words: .....←

.....ابن ابن	*ibn* son	.....بنت بنت	*bint* daughter, girl
.....انا انا	*ána* I	.....انت انت	*ánta* you (singular)
.....بنات بنات	*banā́t* daughters	.....نبات نبات	*nabā́t* vegetation

Open *S2.wav* and **read, listen to, and repeat** (in the pauses in the recording) these words.



Always *write* your words, don't draw them. Don't grip the pen tightly, and always think ahead about what you are writing, so that you anticipate which form of the coming letters you need.

6

يـ ي	*yā*

The 'joined' letter *yā* represents:

- at the beginning of a word: the consonant *y-* (like English y in 'year').
- in the middle or at the end of a word: either the consonant *y* (see above), or the long vowel *ī* (like i in English 'machine'), or the vowel-combination *ay* (like ay in English 'day').

The letter *yā* is never pronounced like the vowel-sound y in English 'my'.

Like the *bā-tā-thā* group which we learned earlier, this letter has a shallow short form used at the beginning or in the middle of a word, and a full form at the end of the word, or when the letter stands alone. The short form is identical to the short form of *tā* except that its two dots are below; its full form has a deep shape and is quite different, swinging below the line and up again. **Write** *yā* several times, first with dots and the rest in the handwritten form, with a dash:

يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ

يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ ..... يـ

More words. First **open** ***W5.pps*** to watch the handwriting of بنتين *bintáyn*, listed below.

Now **read and write** (remember that initial *yā* must be *y-*, while middle or final *yā* can be *y*, *ī* or *ay*):

بيت ..... بيت *bayt* house

اثنين ..... اثنين *ithnáyn* two

بيتين ..... بيتين *baytáyn* two houses

بنايات ..... بنايات *bināyā́t* buildings

بنتين ..... بنتين *bintáyn* two daughters ***W5***

Open ***S3.wav*** and **read, listen to, and repeat** (in the pauses in the recording) these words.

In their short form the letters بـ تـ ثـ نـ يـ are called 'toothed letters'; the form ـد is a 'tooth'. When full-form ـي is preceded by one or more toothed letters, there are special handwritten shapes, which you should always use even if they are not present in print:

tooth + final ـي: لي مي teeth + final ـي: سي شي

Read and write:

ابي ..... ابي *ábī* my father

يابا ني ..... يابا ني *yābā́nī* Japanese

ابني ..... ابني *íbnī* my son

بناتي ..... بناتي *banā́tī* my daughters

بنتي ..... بنتي *bíntī* my daughter

بيتي ..... بيتي *báytī* my house

(Remember to stress in pronunciation the vowel marked with an accent: *ábī*.)

Open ***S4.wav*** and **read, listen to, and repeat** these words.

Exercise 4 Match each of the words with its sound and its English meaning. The first one is done for you:

(a) بيت *bayt* house (b) بنتي (c) بنايات (d) ابني

bināyā́t, bíntī, íbnī; buildings, my son, my daughter

Exercise 5 Write all the Arabic words you now know which (a) begin with ا or آ, or (b) end in ـي, or (c) have ن in them. Expressions with the meaning 'my' or 'two' do not count.

The answers to these exercises are given after this paragraph.

In paragraph 2 above we learned that long *ā-* beginning a word is written with ...آ *álif mádda*. Note now that any other vowel (or vowel-*combination*) beginning a word must be introduced in writing by *álif*. So initial *ī-* or *ay-* is written ...ايـ (...يـ beginning a word is always a consonant *y-*).

Open *S5.wav* and **listen and repeat** this word. Then **read and write** it:

.....ايـن..... اين *áyna* where

Initial vowel rule: Long *ā-* beginning a word is written ...آ *(álif mádda)*. Any other initial vowel or vowel-combination must be introduced by *álif* in writing.

Answers to exercises

1 (b) آب *āb* August (c) اثاث *athā́th* furniture (d) باب *bāb* door.

2 (b) آب ,(c) اثاث ,(d) باب . The other *álif*s are short, pronounced *a*.

3 The letter *bā* has the full form ب at the end of the word, and the short form بـ at the beginning or in the middle. And the word isn't joined up completely because it has to break after ا *álif* which is a *disjoined* letter, i.e. one which is never joined to the letter following it.

4 (b) بنتي *bíntī* my daughter (c) بنايات *binā́yā́t* buildings (d) ابني *íbnī* my son.

5 The total list studied so far (in order of appearance) is:

(a) انا، انت، ابن، اثاث، اب، آب (b) يابانى

(c) يابانى، بنايات ، بنات، نبات، انا، انت، ابن، بنت

If you got more than 9 out of the whole 15, you did well. If you scored below 9, it would be wise to re-read the lists of words and note what you missed.

Tests

1 Write the letters as a word. For example, (a) تيب is بيت:

(a) تيب (b) نيتيب (c) أبني (d) اثاثي

2 Read aloud your handwritten answers to Test 1. For example, (a) is *bayt*.

3 Read aloud. For example, (a) is *banā́t*:

(a) بنات (b) اثنين (c) يابانى (d) اين (e) ابني

4 Write. For example, (a) is ابني:

(a) *íbnī* (b) *bintáyn* (c) *binā́yā́tī* (d) *bābáyn* (e) *áyna* (f) *athā́thī*

5 Read the words. What is the sound of ا in each example? Explain why. For example, in (a) ابن *ibn* it is *i*, because initial ا marks a short vowel, in this case *i*:

(a) ابن (b) باب (c) آب (d) نبات (e) اثنين

NB: The key to all the Tests is in Chapter 16.

Summing up

If you started this book as a complete beginner and have worked through to here, then you have already achieved a great deal. You have learned six letters, five of them extremely common, out of the alphabet of 28. You have read, written, heard and pronounced 23 words. You have watched three of these words being written. You will hear and see many more.

If it seems tough at this point, don't give up too soon. Think of what Robert Browning wrote:

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

Don't look for immediate perfection. Things will get clearer, and you will gain confidence, as we advance. You will get there.

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