20 Appendix – Short vowels and other signs

General

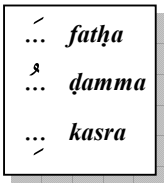
You have learned in the Introduction and from the Short vowel rule at 1/3 that the three short vowels *a*, *u* and *i* are not shown in everyday written Arabic (which is the subject of *Arabic Script for You*). Non-alphabetical signs marking these vowels exist but are hardly ever used outside educational and religious texts. We have to be able to read and write without them.

Adding the short vowel signs and/or other non-alphabetical signs such as those shown below is known as *pointing*. A word, phrase or text may be pointed *fully* (i.e. marked with all its non-alphabetical signs) or *partially* (i.e. selectively), for e.g. a critical short vowel or a doubled consonant. The examples given below are written in a mixture of full and partial pointing.

Important: if ever you do write any of these signs, remember they are *detached forms* (see 1/3). We have already learned two useful pointed detached forms (often omitted in everyday text): they are *shadda* ...ّ (2/4) and one of the the three *tanwīn*s ...ً (6/3).

Short Vowels

1



The signs called *fatḥa* and *ḍamma* show the short vowels *a* and *u* respectively. They are written above the preceding consonant in the word. The sign called *kasra* shows the short vowel *i*, and is written below the preceding consonant. Read:

خَبَر	*khabar*	وَ	*wa*	شَخص	*shakhṣ*
كُتُب	*kutub*	مُرسَل	*mursal*	جُمرُك	*jumruk*
بِنت	*bint*	خَطِر	*khaṭir*	مِصر	*miṣr*

fatḥa and *ḍamma* are written above *'alif-hamza*, and above *shadda*:

مَرَّة	*marra*	أَحمَد	*'aḥmad*	أَب	*'ab*
تَنَبُّؤ	*tanabbu'*	الأُردُنّ	*al-'urdunn*	أُسُس	*'usus*

In the combination *shadda-kasra* the *kasra* is most often written not below the consonant but below the *shadda*; with the combination *'alif-hamza* the *kasra* stands below the *hamza*, as you would expect:

إِبِل	*'ibil*	إِلاَّ	*'illa*	مُفَتِّش	*mufattish*

In the examples given above, *fatḥa/ḍamma/kasra* follow a consonant (*hamza*, although not an alphabetical letter, is a consonant). Also you will notice that *kasra* below *'alif-hamza* is in fact redundant, since even unpointed إ must be pronounced with *i*.

The letters و or ي can be clearly shown to stand as consonants (*w* or *y* respectively) if they themselves are pointed with a vowel, or *shadda*, or both:

أَيَّام	*'ayyām*	مايُو	*māyū*	أَوَّل	*'awwal*	وَزِير	*wazīr*

– but in any case, since as an initial *vowel* each would have to be introduced in writing by *'alif* (1/6, 2/3), a *wow* or *yā* written in initial position, even unpointed, must be a consonant:

يابانى	*yābānī*	يمين	*yamīn*	وطن	*waṭan*

If و or ي follow a vowel-sign *ḍamma* or *kasra* and have no vowel-sign themselves, they are pronounced as a long vowel (*ū* or *ī* respectively):

كَبِير *kabīr* إسرائِيلِي *'isrā'īlī* مَمنُون *mamnūn*

fatḥa can be pointed before medial *'alif* but the pointing is redundant, since medial *'alif* not carrying *hamza* is anyway pronounced long, *-ā-*:

عَامّ *9āmm* كَلاَم *kalām* وُزَرَاء *wuzarā'*

fatḥa pointed before final *'alif* or before *'alif maqṣūra* or *tā marbūṭa* shows, again unnecessarily, short *a*:

كَبِيرَة *kabīra* عَلَى *9ala* لَمَّا *lamma*

'alif madda (1/2) always sounds *'ā* (with glottal stop) wherever it stands, and is never pointed:

الآن *al-'ān* آلات *'ālāt*

We can point initial *'alif* with *kasra* to show an initial weak *i-*:

إبني *ibnī* إحتِجاج *iḥtijāj*

kasra or *fatḥa* can also show the difference between active and passive participles (8/1):

مُنتَخِب *muntákhib* مُنتَخَب *muntákhab*

Other signs

2

◌ْ ...	***sukūn***

The sign called *sukūn* can be written over a consonant to show that no vowel follows the consonant:

مَفتُوح *maftūḥ* أَجْر *'ajr* إسْتِخْدام *istikhdām*

– and *sukūn* can be used to distinguish *ow* from *ū*, and *ay* from *ī*. Examine the different pointing in the following pairs:

أُولَى *'ūla*	أَوْ *'ow*
بدُون *bidūn*	مَوْت *mowt*
إيرانِي *'īrānī*	أَيْنَ *'ayna*
مراسِلِين *murāsilīn*	مراسِلَيْن *murāsilayn*

3

◌ً ◌ٍ ◌ٌ	***fatḥa tanwīn***
◌ٌ ...	***ḍamma tanwīn***
◌ٍ ...	***kasra tanwīn***

fatḥa tanwīn, pronounced *-an*, is already known to you from 6/3. The two other *tanwīn*s (pronounced respectively *-un* and *-in*) are of limited use and accordingly don't occur in the Lessons. Words with *tanwīn* are indefinite in meaning. Examples:

لأمرٍ ما *li-'amrin mā* for some reason شخصٌ ما *shakhṣun mā* somebody

نوعًا ما *now9an mā* somehow, somewhat

In such set expressions the *tanwīn* is always pronounced in full, whether pointed or not in the text. The silent *'alif* shown in 6/3 occurs only after *fatḥa tanwīn*, never after *ḍamma tanwīn/kasra tanwīn*. In some texts *ḍamma tanwīn* may take the form ◌ٗ ... instead of the more usual ◌ٌ ... .

4

ٱ	***'alif waṣla***
...ٰ	small ***'alif***

These two signs are even more rarely encountered.

The sign ٱ *waṣla* can be put over a weak initial *'alif* (i.e. one with no glottal-stop *hamza*) to show that this vowel is silent after a preceding vowel in the same phrase (3/3). Examine:

بِٱليابان *bi-l-yābān** لِٱهتِمامك *li-htimāmak**

مكتبِي ٱلجديد *maktabi l-jadīd*, ***

We meet this phenomenon most often with the *'alif* of the article ...ال.

* Weak vowel rule (3/3)
** – and Final long vowel rule (9/5)

} Knowing and applying these rules, you don't need the help of the *waṣla* sign to pronounce such expressions correctly.

The sign ...ٰ ('small *'alif'*), can be added to show the medial long *-ā-* which in a very few words is not spelt with *'alif*:

اللٰه *allāh* (see 3/4)

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