

How to learn Arabic?

First of all one should clarify some misconceptions about Arabic. One should not confuse the various terms used to classify Arabic : **Literary Arabic** (which is written according to a certain norm) and **dialectical Arabic** (Oral, seldom written, and with many different varieties); **modern Arabic**, of which the evolution since the 19th century is very noticeable, exposed here and there to external influences, and **classical** or **medieval** of which there is a great variation according to time period and region; **current Arabic** (presse, media, and books) and **litterary Arabic** (research style). The terms "Qur'anic" and "Standard" do not make much sense to classify the language and are often misused. If a term is really necessary to characterize Arabic it would be "**Common Arabic**." Faced with the variety of Arabic dialects, written Arabic, and Litterary Arabic (news and books) largely spoken in the medias is a Common Arabic, with its nuances respective of where it is employed but for the most part universal.

To aspire to master all the named registers of Arabic is a lifetime endeavour, without end even for native speakers, unlike learning a dialect (a one-year stay in an Arabic country would provide the environment to advance considerably). Generally, **written modern Arabic** is quicker to learn than the Classical or Ancient, and is strongly recommended to start with before diving into ancient sources. For an English speaker, it is much easier to pick up a dialect after properly learning Litterary, while the inverse remains much more difficult.

It is essential to fix a goal in order to avoid wasting one's chances and motivation.

Two things must be avoided at all costs:

1. the use of phonetic transcription, as it immensely slows the learning process of the Arabic script, and is essential to advance ; it is to be avoided initially and throughout both for dialects and literary (to get used to reading "al-luġha al-'arabiyya" is a pedagogic fault, despite its common use in Arabic learning materials).
2. use of short vowels, as it reinforces a reliance on them and slows the natural reading process.

Both cases should be seriously avoided as they lead to a stagnation of the learning process. Unfortunately, these are common cases, tolerated because of laxity or incompetence.

On the contrary, one should trust their auditory memory, and continue to train it with daily practice like for any other language. One should familiarize his or her self in an intensive manner with the Arabic Alphabet, progressively adding reading and writing exercises (dictation, autodictation, self-recording and listening) until all the letters are clearly understood. Orthographic mistakes have no more reason to exist in Arabic than those in any other language.

The short vowels, are of no use from the start of learning process. They can be used for example, when it comes to working on classical poetry or on religious texts where the text is fully vocalised (all vowels and diacritic marks for pronunciation) however, no modern newspaper, nor internet site, nor book (a part from very rare exceptions such as certain religious works) are written in full vocalisation.

Learn by one's self, in class, with what method, at what age?

There is no specific age to learn a language. From time to time, adults progress quicker than children, thanks to certain analytic abilities and/or comparison with their mother-tongue or with other foreign languages that they know.

To learn by one's self is risky, and is often coupled with bad (self-taught) habits, difficult to correct, with fatigue on the horizon. It is recommended to join a group, even in bad conditions, just for the benefit of a teacher.

Learning methods for anglophones are numerous and although none, or almost none, are bad, no single one is perfect; each depends on the usage. The best user of a method as a teacher would be its author. As each student and each group will have different needs and different assets to work with, it will always be necessary to adapt the tools according to the progress of the learning process. These principles have inspired our on line manual :

Basic Arabic in 50 weeks (<http://www.al-hakkak.fr/arabic-for-english-speakers.html>)

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