

Ahlan wa Sahlan

Letters and Sounds of the Arabic Language

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Revised with Allen Clark

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Unit 3

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Introduction

Ahlan wa Sahlan Second Edition Script Workbook

Letters and Sounds of the Arabic Language is designed to simultaneously introduce the learner to Arabic orthography, basic words and phrases, and culture. This workbook begins with the introduction of basic conversation to achieve a threefold objective: establishing a communicative classroom, honing learner listening and speaking skills, and whetting the student's desire to hold authentic conversations outside of class. DVD scenes support all of the workbook's communicative activities and offer a window into how the phrases are used in context. After viewing the DVD scenes, the students are provided with communicative exercises not only to learn the phrases, but to foster a sense of community through authentic interaction with their classroom peers.

The Arabic script is introduced letter-by-letter with groupings dependent on the shape of the shell. Each letter progresses through a six-phase introduction: providing a chart that illustrates the letter's four positions (initial, medial, final, and independent), presenting a diagram of how the letter is drawn using arrows for guidance, tracing the letter in all of its positions accompanied by representative pictures, practicing the letter in all of its positions, tracing full words, and then writing those words. Listening exercises, such as word recognition and dictation, are then provided to reinforce the relationship between the letters introduced in that unit and their associated sounds. Units conclude with recognition exercises in which the letters are used within an authentic context such as maps, newspaper clippings, or advertisements.

Letters and Sounds of the Arabic Language is merely one component of the *Ahlan wa Sahlan* educational package that presents the learner with multiple avenues to explore Arabic: this workbook, the textbook, the DVD dramatic and non-dramatic scenes, digitized MP3 files for the audio materials, digitized MP4 files for the video materials, an online interactive computer program, and an online website. We provide the instructor with an annotated instructor's edition of the textbook and an online database storing lesson plans, handouts, exercises, texts, and examinations to facilitate the use of the textbook and its periphery materials.

It was our intention that the overall feel of this workbook was to convey the voice of a master teacher directly to the learner. A secondary goal in the development of these materials was to produce a workbook that not only engaged the student, but was visually appealing as well. The concept of producing an attractive learning/teaching environment was the driving force behind publishing a two-tone color workbook. The colors are used to provide an enhanced overall appeal to whet the learner's desire to spend additional hours engrossed in the materials and to pique curiosity about Arabic. But the use of colors also allowed us to highlight certain points and to create areas for grammatical summaries and cultural notes.

A Note to the Student

What is the key to learning a foreign language well? Before you embark on your journey in learning Arabic using this instructional package, you may wish to take some time to reflect on this pertinent question. Over the past decade, students have offered nearly every conceivable answer after I pose it on the first day of my Arabic classes. The answer that I

have become convinced as ‘correct’ is: *to think in the language*. No matter what your original answer may have been, thinking in the language is central to learning a language well by practicing it on a minute by minute basis. This is possible even at the very beginning of your Arabic studies by containing your thoughts in Arabic using an internal banter as practice and gradually widening the scope of language use by introducing new words to your idiolect. Make this language your own by actively seeking out those vocabulary words that you use in your mother tongue. These are the words by which you will be expressing yourself that, in turn, will create an Arabic persona. The more you practice, the more permanent your learning becomes and the stronger your individuality will become in Arabic. We encourage you to actively surround yourself with the language as much as possible, and we have made this quite easy for you in fact. Simply by visiting our website, you can download all of *Letters and Sounds of the Arabic Language’s* video and audio materials to your MP3 and MP4 players so that you may listen/watch them wherever you are and whenever you wish.

Much has been said about the difficulty of learning Arabic—in fact, the US government lists Arabic as a category four language—among the most difficult for an American to learn. You may view the notion of difficulty in one of two ways: as an obstacle or a challenge. We tend to think that Arabic is not as difficult for the western learner as it is different. According to recent studies completed in 2006 in which Arabic grammar was compared to other world languages, it was found that verb conjugation in Arabic is logical (less complex than Spanish), its tense is easier than English, and being that Arabic is a root-derivational language, it is quite mathematical and elegant in its dexterity—meaning that it is able to accommodate new concepts using its derivational qualities. What this means for you is that not only can you learn Arabic, but learn it well.

We designed this workbook to guide you along on a most direct learning path to achieve functional language goals and proficiency. In the book, we present memory enhancing devices to accelerate the learning curve and allow for permanent retention by providing a cognitive ‘cheat sheet’ for the learner. It is our hope that this workbook serves not only to anticipate pitfalls, but allows you to experience the joy of learning one of the oldest living languages on the planet and the riches that it has to offer.

A Note to the Instructor

Purpose and Approach

Letters and Sounds of the Arabic Language introduces learners of Arabic to the language’s sound and writing systems and provides them with basic structural and lexical knowledge to enable them to function completely in Arabic. The ability to perform language functions such as greeting others, thanking someone, introducing oneself, describing one’s background, seeking and providing information, etc., in real-life or life-like situations is developed by engaging the learner in structured, practical activities and grammatical exercises. In every unit, a variety of such activities are designed to build up overall language proficiency systematically. In this fashion, learners will be able take part in communicating with their classmates and their instructor by employing all five language skills in Arabic (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and culture). The focus, therefore, is on performing language functions by using the language forms learned, not on analyzing them grammatically. This does not mean, however, that grammar is not important. On the contrary, grammar enables learners to use language forms appropriately and correctly—

read 'enabling' here to mean putting grammatical structures and explanations in the service of language use.

In addition, presenting and practicing the Arabic language from functional and structural perspectives accommodates the needs and learning styles of most learners. Learners learn differently; some benefit primarily from a functional presentation and practice, others find structural information useful. A functional presentation normally activates inductive cognitive processes while structural presentations activate deductive processes. Research tells us that the human mind, regardless of how it acquires knowledge, assimilates, modifies, and reconstructs this knowledge and then uses it in appropriate, yet specific ways. The aim, in both modes of presentation, is developing overall proficiency and competency in using Arabic.

This workbook, along with the peripheral material that accompanies it, attempts to provide a learning environment conducive to effective acquisition of specific language abilities. These abilities, in their totality, create a measure of proficiency in Arabic. Upon completing this course, the average learner may achieve a proficiency level within the Intermediate mid range by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Naturally, results vary with respect to individual learner differences and may range between higher or lower proficiency levels.

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