

Short vowels and diacritics

الْحُرُوفُ الْعَرَبِيَّةُ

In this lesson you will learn:

- The names, shapes, and pronunciation of the 3 short vowels
 - Doubled forms
 - How to transliterate them into a Latin alphabet
- Two important diacritics and their function: ّ (šadda), َ (waṣla)

Prerequisite: you can identify and read the letters of the Arabic alphabet

Recap: Long vowels

Long vowel	Transliteration
ا	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

Long and short vowels

Long vowel	Transliteration	Short vowel	Name	Transliteration
ا	ā	◌َ	fathā	a
و	ū	◌ُ	ḍamma	u
ي	ī	◌ِ	kasra	i

Note: short vowels are always placed above or below a consonant that is pronounced directly before it.

Examples

- Fatha: فَتْحَةٌ، كَسْرَةٌ، مَلِكٌ
- Damma: سُكُونٌ، مُلُوكٌ، كُتُبٌ
- Kasra: فِقْهٌ، كِتَابٌ، مَلِكٌ

Doubled short vowels

- Written as two short vowels above each other (fatḥa and kasra) or next to each other (ḍamma)
- Pronounced as a short vowel followed by an “-n” sound: e.g., fatḥat^{an}, kitāb^{un}, malikⁱⁿ
- Only written at **end** of word
- Indicates indefinite nouns and adjectives; **never** used with nouns and adjectives that have the definite article –ال

فَتْحَةٌ، كِتَابٌ، مَلِكٌ

The Tā' marbūṭa ة revisited

- General rule: marks a short “a” (faṭḥa) sound at end of word, unless followed by a short vowel, in which case it is pronounced “at”+ short vowel
- E.g.:
فَتْحَةٌ vs فَتْحَةٌ
مَلِكَةٌ vs مَلِكَةٌ
- Within a sentence, tā' marbūṭa will almost always be pronounced as “at” because it will be followed by a short vowel. Out of context or at the end of a sentence, it will usually be pronounced as “a” (technically, it is silent).

Diacritics: šadda and waṣla

ّ šadda

- Written above consonant
- Indicates doubled consonant
- Can (and almost always does) take a short vowel

Examples:

شَدَّة، مَكَّة، سَيِّد

أ (waṣla)

- A small ṣād written above the alif to indicate elision
- Most often seen with the alif of the definite article (الـ) when it is not in sentence initial position

Example:

سِرُّ الْأَسْرَارِ

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حُرُوفُ عَرَبِيَّةٌ

مع سلامة!