

Bismillah walhamdulillah was Salaatu was Salaamu 'alaa Rasoolillaah,

NOW is the Time to Learn Arabic!

DISCLAIMER: *'I know this article is super long, and I tried to condense it as much as possible so I'd like to mention here that this is a simple and basic road map for how someone in the west can BEGIN studying Arabic.*

We need to remember that just because one knows grammar and has some vocab, doesn't mean they can understand the Qur'an... There are many other factors involved, which is why I mention tafseer and literary research. When studying the Qur'an, we have to travel back in time because it is an ancient language and we have to understand the CONTEXT of these words. An example of what I mean by context is the English word 'site'. 60 yrs ago, 'site' meant like a construction site or something of that nature. Nowadays, 'site' most of the time refers to a website. When studying the Qur'an, a usage of classical texts is important because just as 'site' meant something different 60 yrs ago, if we use a modern dictionary to look up a word from the Qur'an, most likely we won't get the right meaning and context.

*So studying the Qur'an is **not** just black and white, there are many intricate details that we have to factor in inshaAllah. The study of sarf for example is very important, and tafseer is also critical.*

The article is meant to inshaAllah help those brothers and sisters who don't know the language yet, and don't know where to start. Learning Arabic is the gateway to understanding the Qur'an, but it is not the final step, rather it's just the beginning. When we inshaAllah reach these more advanced levels that were mentioned, the resources will become available to us and you'll know where to go from there bi'ithnillahi ta'ala.'

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'On the Day of Judgment, the Qur'an and its people who used to act by it in the world shall be brought, being lead by Surat ul-Baqarah and Al-e-Imraan, which shall be arguing on behalf of their companions.' (Reported by Muslim)
We all strive to become a companion of the Qur'an, but who are its true companions? The companions of the Qur'an are those who studied it, memorized it, implemented it and lived by it. It is not possible, in the least bit, for one to become a companion of the Qur'an and not know Arabic. Learning the language is the starting point of a life long journey with the Qur'an. Allah ta'ala chose this blessed language, as He states 11 times throughout the Qur'an: **'A Book, whereof the verses are explained in detail as an Arabic Qur'an, for people who know.'** (41:3), **'An Arabic Qur'an, without any crookedness, so that they may have Taqwa.'** (39:28), **'We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an, in order that you may gain understanding.'** (12:2).

For those who do not know the language of the Qur'an, they will be deprived of its true sweetness, of its blessings and most importantly, understanding the words of Allah ta'ala. It is a cause of much grief and sadness to know that the majority of our ummah has lost the connection with the Book of Allah because the language has been lost, as the Prophet sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam said: **'Allah raises up peoples by this Book, and puts down by it others.'** (Saheeh Muslim)
We have abandoned this book, and the Prophet sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam will testify to Allah ta'ala on the day of judgment: **'And the Messenger will say, O my Rabb, indeed my people deserted this Qur'an!'** (25:30)

The righteous companions and scholars of the past have testified to the importance of learning this language and they themselves, who were native Arab speakers, were concerned with studying this language. Umar radi Allahu anhu said, *'Learn Arabic for it is a part of your deen.'* (Iqtidaa' al-Siraat al-Mustaqeem, 2/207) It is also reported that Ubay ibn Ka'b radi Allahu anhu said, *'Learn Arabic just as you learn to memorize the Qur'an.'* (Ibn Abi Shaybah, *Al-Musannaf* Vol.7 p150)

Many of us want to take the proper steps to learn Arabic, but do not know where to start. What is the solution? Where do we begin? The best option is to study overseas, however many of us do not have that option to learn Arabic, so inshaAllah we'll cover in this article some easy steps one can take to begin the process of learning Qur'anic Arabic if they cannot travel to do so.

Before these steps are mentioned, a few points need to be raised:

1. First and foremost, we have to purify our intentions for the sake of Allah ta'ala. We learned from Imam Suhaib in Sacred Scrolls that ibn Qayyim rahimahullah said the scholars and righteous of the past would always ask themselves two questions before doing a deed, one of them was 'li ma?', 'for what/why?'. So ask yourself: why do you want to learn Arabic? Is it to be known by the people, to be called a student of knowledge, to speak Arabic in the masjid lobby, or is it for the sake of Allah, to understand His words and implement them? Remember that the first person thrown in hell-fire will be the scholar.
2. Seek help from Allah ta'ala Alone. Not even the greatest Arabic book or teacher can help you if Allah ta'ala does not will it for you. The believers have been given the most powerful weapon of duaa, so use it and ask Allah for assistance. **'When you ask, then ask Allah, and when you seek help, then seek help in Allah.'** (Tirmidhi)
3. You must remove from your mind the notion that learning Arabic is difficult...because guess what, if you think it's difficult then it will be! Allah ta'ala states FOUR times in surah Qamar that He has made this Qur'an easy. Learning this language is indeed something great and tedious, and will need a lot of time and effort put into it, but do not set yourself up with having negative thoughts. Whenever we intend to do an action for the sake of Allah azza wa jal, we are immediately tested. Why? Because it is a purification process; fitnah literally means the act of purifying gold with fire. So these tests purify the fools gold from the real stuff. Do not get discouraged if you face difficulties, but rather remind yourself of how the gold will look after it is put through the burning flames: pure, clean and shining. Remind yourself of how sweet it will be to finally understand everything that is being recited in prayer, instead of counting how many patterns are on the masjid carpet. 😊
4. Understand your goal, and have a clear vision. *Why* do you want to learn Arabic? If your goal is just to learn Arabic to speak in a modern dialect, then the Qur'an will not assist you. But if your goal is to understand the Qur'an and increase in your attachment, then learning Arabic will greatly assist you inshaAllah. We have to realize that different intentions require different approaches. Our goal for this article is to focus on **Qur'anic Arabic only**. The best recommendation any teacher can give you is to limit yourself to the Qur'an first. By focusing on the Qur'an, you will be able to reinforce what you have learned during salah, memorization, reviewing and reading.
5. Constantly make tawbah and refrain from sins. In the famous poem of Imam Shafi'i rahimahullah, we learn that knowledge is a light and Allah does not give this light to sinners. The Qur'an is a pure book and can only be carried in a pure container, so always purify yourself and refrain from sins so that you can retain this knowledge and increase in it.

Where do I start?

Everyone has different opinions on where to begin the journey of learning the language, so I will only mention what has helped myself and others I know and inshaAllah the discussion can continue in the comments. Learning Arabic has two main steps. Firstly, **learning grammar** and secondly, **learning vocabulary**. A student can either begin with grammar first, and then move on to vocabulary or study both at the same time.

Grammar in any language is a huge subject, and in Arabic, grammar is definitely the foundation, so it is best to study grammar with a teacher. Once a student receives a good hold of grammar, they can continue studying by themselves. If there is absolutely no way they can study with a teacher, inshaAllah I will be listing some books and resources that can be used instead. Many books that teach grammar use some hard core terminology that most of us have never even heard of, like transitive, superlative, or imperative, which can be hard for some beginner students to follow. On the bright side, once you have grammar down, everything else is easier. By learning grammar, one will be able to break down a sentence before understand what is being said...just by looking at it! This may seem odd for us English speakers, because we don't have this in our language. Grammar, with dedication and effort, can take as little as a few months to really grasp.

Vocabulary on the other hand is long term and takes memorization, reading and researching. Realize this fact: no matter how much we study, we can never learn all the words of the Arabic language. It is next to impossible. Gaining vocabulary can be done in several ways, but the most helpful way is to read and study the Qur'an itself, and use some supplementary resources to guide you.

So now we know where to start: grammar and vocabulary.

How?

Grammar

If one is able to take local classes for grammar, then this would be the best. If not, alhamdulillah we have many resources

that one can use for self-study. There is no excuse nowadays to NOT learn the Qur'an or Arabic. Even if you're in Antarctica, if you have an internet connection, you can learn. So here are some online institutes that are available to students:

[Foundation for Knowledge and Development](#) - Institute based in New York

[Institute of the Language of the Qur'an](#) - Institute based in Toronto (these videos are based on the first two books of the Madinah Arabic series, see next section)

[Shaykh Jamaal Zarabozo's Classes](#) - based in California

[Bayyinah Institute](#) - Classes taught by Brother Nouman Ali Khan. MashaAllah Bayyinah is an awesome institute because brother Nouman will come to your community for 10 days and teach a crash course in 40 hours worth of basic grammar. Although he doesn't offer beginner classes online, I strongly recommend bidding for him to come to your community if he hasn't already inshaAllah.

Grammar Books and Resources

Books that are easy to follow that one can use for self study include (but are not limited too):

[Qur'anic Language made Easy](#) - Iffath Hasan. This book is amazingly easy to follow. It is the perfect book for everyone, especially someone who may not have a strong command in English, or for younger students. This book can definitely be used by someone who is engaging in self-study. I really love the exercises she uses because it teaches students how to use the Qur'an as their ultimate textbook. It is a great beginner book for someone who has no knowledge whatsoever of Arabic.

[Access to Qur'anic Arabic](#) - AbdulWahid Hamid. These books are used for the sister's classes at my masjid and they are great for students of all ages. The best part is that it comes complete with audio tapes/CDs as well as workbooks.

[Madinah Arabic Books](#) - Dr. V Abdur Rahman. Personally, I have not studied from these books but I know many people who have and mashaAllah they're very good. The only point about these books is that these books were not *designed* for self-study but to be taught with a teacher, so alhamdulillah the videos above are a great help to follow along with these books. There are many places where these books can be bought as well as downloaded.

[Modern Standard Arabic](#) - Peter Abboud. This is the book that is used throughout universities in America, and this is the book that Shaykh Jamaal Zarabozo uses as well. It comes in two volumes, and takes students through the ins and outs of grammar and has many exercises. However, this book has some seriously hard core vocabulary that can be difficult to follow, so a dictionary will come in handy if one decides to use these books.

A very nice website that breaks grammar down in simple terms is [Arabic Tree](#), mashaAllah it's awesome and is based on classes by a graduate of Madinah university.

Many students like to begin their Arabic studies with the classic texts of Arabic such as Ajarumiyah, although they are great, they are too heavy for the modern beginner student who doesn't have any knowledge of Arabic. InshaAllah when a student becomes more advanced in their studies, they can use these classical texts to gain more understanding.

I would encourage students to check out these books listed above, and pick ONE that they would like to use and go through it thoroughly, instead of buying all of them and not being able to really focus. Each author/teacher has their own style of teaching, so find the style that caters to you the best and use it as your main source.

Vocabulary

Arabic vocabulary is very overwhelming, and it is important for us as students to change our mindset: instead of thinking 'I'm going to master the whole language', a better approach would be to have tunnel vision when it comes to vocab. Limit the amount of vocabulary you study and set realistic goals.

Remember: the Qur'an is our number one textbook, and the best one at that. Although we know there are about 2000 words in the Qur'an, the vocabulary of the Qur'an **cannot** be simplified –these words contain wisdom and gems that we can never enumerate or fully grasp. One of my teachers said that if someone said they completely understood the Qur'an, then they don't know what they're talking about. There is *always* something to learn from the Qur'an. This is a book full of Hikmah (wisdom), Allah says it is [Al-Hakeem](#). Our goal is to become *better students of the Qur'an*, because we will never be able to derive total wisdom from it, only a few specs or drops. As br Nouman Khan mentioned: quality, when it comes to the Qur'anic vocabulary far outweighs quantity.

The best surah to gain understanding of vocabulary is Suratul Baqarah. You would think it would be logical to start with the shorter surahs of Juz 'Amma, but actually, Juz 'Amma is one of the hardest sections of the Qur'an, if not the hardest,

when it comes to vocabulary and literary style. The first four ajzaa (plural of juz) in the Qur'an will be very helpful in gaining vocabulary.

So what are the resources needed for vocabulary?

Firstly: a good translation is needed. The best one out there is Saheeh International. You can purchase it [here](#) and read it online [here](#). This translation is very accurate, it flows very nicely and is easy to follow and is recommended by most shuyookh and students of knowledge.

Also, I would highly recommend purchasing a word for word translation of the Qur'an. Alhamdulillah we have many variations of these translations available. The best two word for word resources would be Mohar Ali, a three set publication which can be purchased [here](#), and even better are some free online pdfs available for download [here](#) which are also very nice, a translation of the work by Shaykh AbdulKarim Pareck. (There are even some duaas with word for word translations in this book [here](#).)

Secondly: some good dictionaries. Alhamdulillah, there are many awesome sources available to us.

- [Al-Mawrid](#) - by Roohi al-Ba'albaki. This dictionary is great for students who are used to the English way of using a dictionary.
- [The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic](#) - This is said to be the best Arabic-English dictionary out there. The only 'issue' is that the words are categorized by [root words](#), which may be hard for a beginner to use. A student will have come a long way once a student grasps the root word system.
- [Vocabulary of the Holy Qur'an](#) - Dr. Abdullah Abbas Nadawi, this book contains the words of the Qur'an in order of roots but is easy to follow and gives basic definitions. It is a very nice resource to have alongside reading the Qur'an.
- [Easy Dictionary of the Qur'an](#) - This is a translation of the work by renowned Urdu speaking shaykh Abdul Karim Pareck. This book can also be purchased for about \$10 or less, only \$8 [here](#).
- Lane's Lexicon - Awesome, probably the best lexicon in English. It was written by a non Muslim Arabic scholar back in the 1900s and it's more than a dictionary because he discusses roots in detail and cites examples for each connotation. Some roots go on for pages. It is available online [here](#), and can be purchased (it's about 8 volumes). The language is quite ancient, which can be distracting at first, but you get used to it.
- [80% of the words in the Qur'an](#) - self-explanatory 😊 Student should memorize these word slowly, or at least use it to follow along while reading the Qur'an. It is a miracle of the Qur'an that the words repeat again and again, yet we do not tire or reading them or get bored.

I would recommend that students purchase hard copy of books versus solely relying on online books (unless you print them), because for one, it's too much strain on the eyes to always learn from the computer and also with a hard copy, you can take your notes directly on the page as well as take it with you if you happen to travel. Not to mention you won't be distracted by emails or IMs. Of course this is only my personal opinion, and you should do whatever suits you best inshaAllah.

The last point that needs to be mentioned is *how* to learn Arabic. This involves two steps:

- **Analyze.** Analyzing means go over the texts thoroughly, use dictionaries to gain deeper meanings of words (literary research) and making sure you have the proper understanding ([tafseer](#)) according to the scholars of Islam and not your own interpretation, and also studying a [science of Arabic](#) known as [sarf](#) (the science of morphology). A note about tafseer: studying tafseer is a lost science just as the Arabic language, because tafseer is an integral part of studying the Qur'an and is the crux of all the sciences of the Qur'an. Iyaas ibn Mu'awiyah rahimahullah gave a beautiful parable, *'The example of a people who recite the Qur'an and do not know its explanation is like a group of people who have a written message from their king that comes to them during the night, and they do not have a lamp. Therefore, they do not know what is in the message. The example of one who knows tafseer is like a person who comes to them with a lamp and reads to them what is in the message.'*

- **Memorize.** Simple! It is important for students to continue with memorizing the Qur'an during their studies if they haven't already as it gives instant review of what they learned when they recite it. Furthermore, memorizing includes memorizing basic vocabulary words, grammar terms and rules.

MashaAllah, so there you have it, an easy guide to beginning the journey of learning Qur'anic Arabic inshaAllah! Just in case you're lost or confused, here is a short summary:

1. Work on getting a basic foundation of **grammar**, either through courses in your neighborhood or online classes or self-study.
2. Begin building your **vocabulary**. Limit yourself to the Qur'an and focus on the first four juz of the Qur'an as a starting point.
3. **Analyze and memorize.** Use dictionaries, works of tafseer, and other literally tools to analyze, and memorize words and terms you have learned.

Finally, here are two tips for *every* student of Arabic, at any level:

1- Motivation. If you lose your motivation to learn this language, then you will get nowhere. Period. It is very easy to become de-motivated when learning, so what's the remedy? Turn to the Qur'an as your source of motivation.

2- Tunnel Vision. Arabic is a massive language which can be overwhelming and there is *always* something to learn. So as a student of this language, do NOT look at what you still need to learn, but focus on your lesson at the moment. Br Nouman gave the example of a student memorizing the Qur'an: if he is only on page 5 of Suratul Baqarah, and then he starts flipping through the other 600 and some pages left in the mushaf...how will he feel? Motivation wil disappear, and he thinks he can't do it. So steer clear of these thoughts, don't worry about what you *don't* know, worry about what you *do* know. Everything else will come in due time inshaAllahu ta'ala.

InshaAllah with the help of Allah, by taking these steps, you can begin understanding the words of your Rabb and you'll never want to go back! If you follow these steps NOW, inshaAllah by next Ramadaan you will be tasting the sweetness of the Qur'an and will be crying *with* the imaam, instead of wondering what he's crying about.

As a last and final reminder for myself and you, I would like to mention the ayah that is repeated four times in surah Qamar—**FOUR** times:

الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا

We have indeed made this Qur'an an easy remembrance, so there is any to remember? (54:17) Think about it. Seriously.

Please forgive me for anything wrong I have said, and all good is from Allah and for Him is all thanks and praise.

Please feel free, if you found this beneficial, to share it with anyone inshaAllah and post it anywhere. All I ask is that you include the above 'disclaimer' as an important note. Jazakum Allahu khayran.

I ask Allah ta'ala to make us companions of the Qur'an, and to return us to learning its language, and not make us among those who abandon it. Ameen.