


## Preface to the Student

**A** *blan wa Sablan!* Welcome to Arabic! This textbook, *Alif Baa*, represents the first in a series of textbooks aimed at teaching Arabic to English-speaking students, followed by *Al-Kitaab fii Taʿallum al-ʿarabiyya I, II, and III*. The present book aims to help you learn to pronounce the sounds of Arabic and write its letters, and to begin speaking Arabic. Unit 1 will give you an overview of Arabic, and units 2 through 10 will introduce you to the letters, sounds, and symbols that make up the Arabic writing system. In addition to the sounds and letters of Arabic, *Alif Baa* will introduce and help you master over two hundred words of basic vocabulary, including important expressions for polite interaction with speakers of Arabic.

The materials are designed for you to prepare at home and come to class ready to speak, read, and write using what you have studied outside class. Everyone learns at his or her own pace, and class time is limited, so it will be much more efficient for you to prepare the material, listen, and practice at your own speed. The textbook and accompanying media are designed to give you everything you need to study and learn the sounds, letters, and vocabulary.

*Alif Baa* is accompanied by audio, video, and interactive exercises available on a companion website ‘[www.alkitaabtextbook.com](http://www.alkitaabtextbook.com)’ to be used outside of class. We have designed the book to work best with the companion website, and we encourage you and your teachers to use it. Each book also includes a DVD with the same audio and video that is on the website and everything that is needed to complete all of the exercises, in case you do not have reliable internet access. You know to turn to the DVD or website when you see the . The website can be used by independent learners or by a class, as most of the exercises are instantly graded for immediate feedback.

In addition to audio and video exercises and activities, you will watch a calligrapher write the letters so that you have a model to follow as you work through them. The materials also contain some print examples of authentic or “real-life” Arabic from various sources, and we have included short cultural notes that explain some aspects of the situations that you will see in the scenes. You will find English–Arabic and Arabic–English glossaries at the end of the book that include all the words and expressions introduced in the book as active vocabulary. Please read the introductions to the glossaries before using them because each glossary is designed for specific purposes.

All of the listening and writing exercises in *Alif Baa* are designed as homework for you to do in preparation for class. This approach allows you to study and learn at your own pace and saves class time for interactive activities. A feature that is new in this third edition of the program are a number of interactive, autocorrecting exercises on the interactive media that give you immediate feedback. It is very important that you work through all of these exercises as thoroughly as you can, and that you tell your instructor if you are having trouble with them in the form of many missed answers, or if you feel that you are just guessing and not answering. Your instructor should collect from you and check the dictation and letter-

connection exercises to check on your progress. In this edition the dictation exercises are recorded in video rather than audio so that you can take advantage of the visual clues to help you hear and write the words correctly.

We believe that it is crucial for you to learn to recognize and produce Arabic sounds accurately from the outset for several reasons. First, you must learn to pronounce Arabic correctly in order to communicate effectively with Arabic speakers. Second, Arabic sounds are not very difficult. Many nonnative speakers have learned to pronounce Arabic sounds accurately as adults, and you should expect to do so as well. Third, it is important to learn the sounds correctly now when you have the time to concentrate on them; later you will be concentrating on other aspects of the language, such as vocabulary and grammar. Fourth, the Arabic language is structured around groups of consonant sounds that carry meaning, so the ability to recognize sounds accurately when you hear them will greatly enhance your ability to understand, learn, and remember vocabulary. Fifth, Arabic is largely phonetic, which means that if you learn the sounds correctly now, you will not suffer from spelling headaches later.

These materials include three different varieties of Arabic: The spoken Arabic of Cairo, the spoken Arabic of Damascus, and formal Arabic. Your instructor will decide which form or forms he or she wants you to activate, or learn to produce. You may want to listen to other varieties for exposure. You will notice that much of the vocabulary is shared but that some words differ from one variety or another. The key to dealing with the richness of variation in Arabic is to differentiate between what you recognize and what you use actively. Choose one form to use actively and leave the others for recognition. This is what native speakers do when they interact with people from other countries, and it is an important skill to develop.

We hope that the following principles will help you use these materials as they were designed to be used:

**(1) Study actively and interactively.** Studying actively means that you are producing something, whether you are repeating sounds and words out loud, writing words, or creating sentences. Practice speaking every chance you get, with classmates, the dog, or to yourself. Most successful language learners talk out loud to themselves regularly. Study with a classmate because you are much more likely to study actively when you study with a partner. Every lesson in this book contains activities that are best done in pairs. The book and materials give you several open-ended exercises that you can do more than once, each time differently. Prepare for active participation in class too: Anticipate what you will be doing and be ready by planning and rehearsing the things you can say and do beforehand.

**(2) Be an audiovisual learner.** Although most of your studies now are visually oriented, you learned your native language mainly through hearing and listening rather than through reading and writing. As children, most of us watched films and television programs and had the same stories read to us over and over, and this repetition helped us to learn our native language. Each time you watch and listen you can learn something new, whether it is the way a vowel sounds with this new consonant or the way words are put together in a new sentence. As adult learners we can speed up this process with visual material as well, but the more you can integrate sound and shape and associate the two together, the faster your progress to fluency in Arabic will proceed. Engage more than one faculty at the same time: Repeat aloud while you are listening, and rather than write silently, say and repeat whatever you are writing out loud.

**(3) Once is not enough.** Listen to the audio and video material and practice writing the letters many times. Whether you are pronouncing new sounds, writing new letters, or studying vocabulary, you should repeat the activity until you can produce the sound or word comfortably and be able to “hear” it in your mind or write it in a shape that you are pleased with. Remember that you are training your brain and your muscles to do new things, and this takes practice.

**(4) Own it.** Make the words you are learning relevant to your life by using them to talk about your world. Personalizing vocabulary is the fastest way to memorize it. Own the sounds too: Once you learn them, they are not foreign sounds, they belong to you.

**(5) Make the review and study of vocabulary part of your day.** Language is cumulative, and while you are learning new words and expressions, it is important to integrate them with previously learned material. Pair up each new word with an old one. Using the new to review the old will take some organization, but it will pay off in greater fluency and accuracy. When you learn new words, take the opportunity to work on previously learned sounds. When you learn new letters, go back to old vocabulary to see if you can write any of them in Arabic script.

**(6) Learning a language is a lot like learning to play a sport.** The idea is to have fun while building skills. Both entail lots of repetition and exercises that build mental and physical strength. Expect to feel tired occasionally. Being tired is a good sign—it means that you are concentrating and learning actively.

Learning language requires exposure, time, and effort. The single most important factor in your success is your belief in your ability to learn Arabic. We wish you a successful and enjoyable learning experience!