Arabic CheatSheet

Sentences without Verbs

English sentences are usually of the form *Subject + Verb + Object*. Recall that a *verb* is an "action word"; the *subject* is the one doing the action; and the *object* is the one having the action done to them. Arabic sentences do not need verbs! These are known as *equational, non-verbal, sentences*.

$$\textbf{I} \text{ am } \textbf{Samir} \quad \approx \quad \text{انا سمير}$$
$$\textbf{He} \text{ is } \textbf{tall} \quad \approx \quad \text{هو طويل}$$

Each sentence above has (1) a *subject* [the topic of the sentence: A noun or pronoun] and (2) a *predicate* [information about the topic; e.g., a noun or an adjective].

◇ Notice the English has "am", which is not needed in Arabic.

◇ A *noun* is a person, place, or thing.

◇ A *pronoun* is a word such as "He, him, her, this, that, …"

Adjectives

Adjectives, "descriptive words", follow nouns and must agree with them in gender, number, definiteness, and case. *The agreement is what distinguishes a noun-adjective phrase from an equational sentence!*

$$\text{the new book} \quad \approx \quad \text{الكتابُ الجديدُ}$$
$$\text{The book is new.} \quad \approx \quad \text{الكتابُ جديدٌ.}$$

Questions

The *question marker* هَلْ is placed at the start of a statement to turn it into a question.

$$\text{You are a student.} \quad \approx \quad \text{انت طالب.}$$
$$\text{Are you a student?} \quad \approx \quad \text{هل انت طالبٌ؟}$$

◇ ما has *many uses* in Arabic, one of them being the question word "what" —*which can only be used with things, not people!*

◇ مَنْ ['men'] means "who" and is used to refer to people. − (Becareful not to confuse this with the preposition *from,* مِنْ ['min']!)

◇ أَيْنَ means "where".

$$\text{What is this?} \quad \approx \quad \text{ما هٰذا؟}$$
$$\text{Who is this?} \quad \approx \quad \text{من هذا؟}$$
$$\text{Where are you from?} \quad \approx \quad \text{مِنْ أَينَ أَنتَ؟}$$

Inflection & Conjugation

The "shape" of an Arabic word changes to tell us information about the word.

◇ "Conjugation": Verbs change with *who* is doing the action.

◇ "Case", الاعراب : Nouns, and adjectives, change to tell us whether they are doing an action, are having something done to them, or own/possess something.

For example, in English, there are 3 ways to refer to oneself: **I**, **me**, **my**.

My cat saw me, and I jumped!

The **shape** of the word depends on its **case**. Here's the rules:

◇ *(Nominative!)* When I am doing something, I say: **I did it**

◇ *(Accusative!)* When something is being done to me, I say: **It was done to me.**

◇ *(Genitive!)* When I have an item, I say: **My thing….**

So, in English, the word used to refer to *myself* changes depending on what is happening **by** me, **to** me, or **of** me / what I own.

Nominative Case

Case refers to the form a word —mostly nouns and adjectives— take depending on their function in a sentence. The subject of any sentence will always be in the *nominative case*, which is indicated by placing a ـُ at the end of the word. The only other time a word will be in the nominative is if it is the predicate of a non-verbal sentence.

$$\text{He is } the \text{ student} \quad \approx \quad \text{هو الطالبُ} \quad\quad huwa\ al\text{-}talib\text{-}u$$
$$\text{He is } a \text{ student} \quad \approx \quad \text{هو طالبٌ} \quad\quad huwa\ talib\text{-}un$$

Pronouns, such as انا and هذا , do not have case endings.

$$\text{I am the teacher} \quad \approx \quad \text{انا المدرسُ} \quad\quad ana\ al\text{-}mudaras\text{-}u$$

معرفة Definiteness

A word is considered **definite معرفة** when it refers to something specific in the world, and **indefinite نكرة** when it does not. For example, "a car" or "cars" do not refer to anything specific in the world and thus both examples are indefinite. Conversely, "my car" or "my cars" both refer to specific / known objects in the world and thus both examples are definite.

When is a word definite?

1. If it is a proper name such as احمد .

2. If it has the *definite article* ال /"the" in front of it.

3. If it is a pronoun —i.e., it already refers to something. Such as هذا or هو .

4. If it is owned by something; e.g., *book* is definite in both *John's book* (Idaafa) and *his book* (Possessive pronoun ending). *Both concepts are discussed below!*

Nunnation/Tanween

Arabic does not have an indefinite article: To make a word indefinite, we double **its** case ending; with the second instance pronounced as ن , "n". This doubling of case endings, and adding the sound "n", is known as *Tanween*. For the nominative case, the ـُ is written twice but often written in the shape ـٌ .

An indefinite adjective (usually one without ال) will have tanween:

$$\text{The student is new} \quad \approx \quad \text{الطالبُ جديدٌ} \quad\quad al\text{-}talib\text{-}u\ jadeed\text{-}un$$

Case endings of Equational Sentences

From the preceding discussions: *Both the subject and predicate of an equational sentence should be in the nominative!* Moreover, the predicate is either definite and so ends in ـُ , or is indefinite and so ends in ـٌ .

Helping Vowels for أل

1. The hamza-fatha of the definite article أَل will always be replaced by the final vowel of the preceding word; thus the two words *sound like one word*!

   | You (m) are the director | ≈ | انتَ المُدير | *antal-mudiir* |
   | You (f) are the director | ≈ | انتِ المُديرة | *antil-mudiira* |

2. When أَل follows a "sun letter" is also not pronounced.

   | You are the student | ≈ | انتَ الطّالب | *antat-talib* |

3. Most words end in vowels, since Arabic case endings are vowels. If a word does not end in a vowel, such as هَل , then we add a *helping kasra vowel*:

   | Is the director an idiot? | ≈ | هَلِ المُديرُ بليد؟ | *halil-mudiiru baled?* |

   The only exception to this rule is the word مَنْ , which gets a helping *fatha* vowel.

1. "This" هٰذا is used to refer to things that are close by, whereas "that" ذالكَ refers to objects that are distant or is used in a constrast: هٰذا طالبٌ وذلكَ مُدرّسٌ , *This is a student and that is a teacher*. The feminine forms of "this" and "that" are هٰذه and تِلكَ .

2. Whenever any of these 4 words is followed by a definite noun, we have **one unit** meaning "this noun".
   ◇ Such phrases often serve as the subjects of an equational sentence.

3. We can **seperate** this one unit into two pieces by inserting a pronoun in-the-middle, which gives us "This is the noun".

1.	This is a book.	≈	هذا كِتاب.
2a.	this book...	≈	هذا الكِتاب...
2b.	This book is heavy.	≈	هذا الكِتابُ ثقيلٌ.
3.	This is the book.	≈	هذا هو الكِتاب.

The Accusative Case

The Accusative Case is mostly used for the direct objects of verbs: It is indicated by a fatha. For example,

I studied the book.

دَرَسْتُ الكِتابَ. ≈

Notice that above we did not write أنا , "I", since verbs change shape to tell us who is doing the action! (Changes to nouns is called *case*; changes to verbs is called *conjugation!*)

There is one more rule. *To place an indefinite word not ending in ة in the accusative* —which makes the sound "an"

. E.g., *I studied a book* becomes درستُ كِتاباً .

Genitive Case

The genitive case is used for a word following a preposition or a word occuring as the second or later term in an Idaafa construction (discussed below).

Prepositions are words like عن، الى، لِ، بِ، في، على، مِن، قبل : They are written "pre"ceeding a word and tell us something about its "position".

The genitive case ending is a final kasra for a definite word and two kasras for an indefinite word, with the second kasra pronounced as ن as in the Nominative case. Let's explain the following example.

انتَ المُديرُ في هٰذا المكتب

You are the director in this office.

Here انت المدير is an equational sentence followed by a prepositional phrase. Both the subject and predicate of an equational sentence should be in the nominative, but انت is a pronoun and so does not take case. Moreover is definite, it takes a single dhamma. Finally, since هذا المكتب is a demonstrative followed by a definite it is treated grammatically as a single word, which means the (genitive) case ending goes at the very end of المكتب .

Idaafa

Idaafa means "addition", or "annexation", and it is used to indicate possesion in Arabic —just like how English uses *'s* to indicate possession.

John's book

≈   the book of John

≈   كِتابُ جون

Idaafa, possesion, is formed by putting nouns next to each other —to make a super-duper big noun, formally called a *noun-phrase*. That is all.

Noun-phrases are similar to nouns:
◇ This noun-phrase is (in)definite exactly when its *final* noun is (in)definite.
◇ This noun-phrase takes case endings on its *first* noun.
   ○ All other words in the noun-phrase must be in the genitive case.
   ○ Only the *final* noun can have nunnation.

This is an office director's car

≈   This is a car of a director of an office

≈   هذه سيارةُ مديرِ مكتبٍ

Remember that demonstratives form noun-phrases and so can be used in-place of a noun in an Idaafa.

The director of this office is stupid.

≈   مُديرُ هذا المكتبِ بليدٌ

This is an equational sentence. The subject is مدير هذا المكتب which needs to be in the nominative case, and it is definite since the last word is definite, thus only one dhamma

needs to be added (to the first noun; and the last noun gets no nunnation). The topic is بليد which must also be in the nominative indefinite.

Descriptions for Idaafa

In English, a descriptive word can come before the owned item: *John's heavy book*. In Arabic, adjectives must follow the Idaafa and cannot interrupt it: كتاب جون الثقيل . For example, here is an equational sentence whose subject is a 3-term Idaafa followed by the adjective *Arabic* (remember only the last term in an Idaafa can have ال):

<div align="center">

The study of Arabic grammar is enjoyable ≈ دراسةُ قواعدِ اللغةِ العربية مُتعةٌ

</div>

Since adjectives come after an Idaafa, how do we describe different parts of the Idaafa? Easy; adjectives must "agree" with the word they describe: They must have the same gender, number, definiteness, and case as the word being described.

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The teacher's *new book* is in the office. ≈ كتابُ المدرسِ الجديدُ في المكتبِ .

The *new teacher*'s book is in the office. ≈ كتابُ المدرسِ الجديدِ في المكتبِ .

</div>

(Usually only the last term of an Idaafa is actually modified by an adjective.)

Of-course you can modify multiple words, or use multiple modifiers on the same word!

<div align="center">

the *new* student of the *American* university ≈ طالبةُ الجامعةِ الامريكيةِ الجديدةُ

the student of the *new American* university ≈ طالبةُ الجامعةِ الامريكيةِ الجديدةِ

</div>

Sound Plurals

A *sound plural* is an ending added to a word to make it plural. The ending communicates gender, case, and definiteness.

	Nominative	Genitive & Accusative
Masculine indefinite	ـونَ	ـينَ
Masculine definite	ـي	ـو
Feminine definite	اتُ	اتٍ
Feminine definite	اتُ	اتِ

Notice that the usual small nunation symbols making the ن -sound actual become the ن -letter! **As such, the actual ن is written or not depending on the general rules of nunnation.**

In Arabic, you must learn the plural of each word when you learn its singular form. However, many words referring to *human* males have sound plurals. Likewise, many words ending in ة have a feminine plural by replacing the final ة with ات .

For example,

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I saw the directors. ≈ رَأَيْتُ المُديرينَ.

The directors are superb. ≈ المُديرونَ ممتازونَ.

The (female) directors are superb. ≈ المُديراتُ ممتازاتٌ.

I saw the newspaper reporters. ≈ شاهدتُ مراسلي الجريدةِ.

</div>

Remember: Possessive endings make words genitive & definite, and so nunnation cannot apply.

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his teacher ≈ مُدرسهُ   my teacher ≈ مُدرسي

his teachers ≈ مُدرسيهِ   my teachers ≈ مُدرسيَّ

</div>

Let's talk more about possessive endings… ;-)

Pronouns

A *pronoun* is a word that stands-in for a noun. For example, below we refer to someone in 3 different ways:

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His *cat saw **him**, and **he** jumped!*

</div>

A **personal pronoun** replaces a noun that refers to a person (e.g., Jasim ate ≈ *he* ate),

	singular		plural	
1	أنا	I	نَحْنُ	we
2m	أَنْتَ	you	انتم	you
2f	أَنْتِ	you	انتنَّ	you
3m	هُوَ	he/it	هُمْ	they
3f	هِيَ	she/it	هُنَّ	they

When **I** am talking, the speaker is the "first person" ("1"); when taking **about you**, then you are the "second person" and may be masculine ("2m") or feminine ("2f"), or a group of you ("plural"); finally, when talking about someone who is **not here** in the conversation, they are in the "third person" ("3m, 3f").

A **possessive pronoun** replaces a noun that involves ownership (e.g., Jasim's book ≈ *his* book), while an **object pronoun** replaces a noun that is having an action done to it (e.g., I saw Jasim ≈ I saw *him*.)

In Arabic, *possessive and object pronouns* are *attached pronouns*; they are **joined to the end** of a word: For example, *house* بيت becomes *my house* بيتي and from *he helped* نَصَرَ we get نَصَرَني *he helped me*. Arabic's object & possessive pronouns are the same, except for the "my/me" case:

	singular		plural	
1	ـي ;ـني	my; me	ـنَا	our/us
2m	ـكَ	your/you	ـكُمْ	your/you
2f	ـكِ	your/you	ـكُنَّ	your/you
3m	ـهُ	his/him	ـهُمْ	their/them
3f	ـهَا	hers/her	ـهُنَّ	their/them

The dhamma of the endings ـهُ ، ـهُمْ ، ـهُنَّ becomes a kasra whenver these endings come after a kasra or a ي .

<div align="center">

an office ≈ مكتبٌ

in an office ≈ في مكتبٍ

in his office ≈ في مكتبِهِ

</div>