



Arabic Transliteration PDF

Complete Guide, Alphabet & Romanization Table

Arabic Romanizer

An accessible reference to Arabic transliteration, romanization conventions, diacritics, major transliteration systems, and practical examples.

Free reference guide

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Online version: <https://www.arabicromanizer.com/arabic-transliteration>

Arabic Romanizer <https://www.arabicromanizer.com/>

Quick Reference

Arabic → Latin, at a glance:

ا = a	ب = b	ت = t	ث = th	ج = j	ح = ḥ	خ = kh
د = d	ذ = dh	ر = r	ز = z	س = s	ش = sh	ص = ṣ
ض = ḍ	ط = ṭ	ظ = ṭ	ع = ʿ	غ = gh	ف = f	ق = q
ك = k	ل = l	م = m	ن = n	ه = h	و = w/ū	ي = y/ī

Key symbols

ʿ = ayn · ʾ = hamza · ā = long a · ī = long i · ū = long u · ḥ, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ṣ = emphatic consonants

Remember

3 and 7 are commonly used in Arabizi, but they are not part of the formal romanization systems discussed in this guide.

1. What Is Arabic Transliteration?

Arabic transliteration is the process of representing Arabic writing with Latin characters. It is useful when Arabic script is unavailable, when readers do not know Arabic letters, or when a consistent Latin representation is needed for linguistic, academic, cataloguing, geographical, or practical purposes.

Transliteration is not the same as translation. A translation changes the language and meaning into another language; transliteration primarily changes the writing system. Different romanization systems may therefore produce different Latin spellings for the same Arabic word.

Transliteration, romanization, and transcription

- **Transliteration:** A systematic representation of characters from one writing system using characters from another.
- **Romanization:** Representation of a non-Latin script in the Latin/Roman alphabet. In Arabic contexts, it often refers to formal systems with defined conventions.
- **Transcription:** A representation intended to reflect pronunciation. It may be less strictly tied to a one-to-one character mapping.
- **Translation:** Conversion of meaning from Arabic into another language; it does not simply replace Arabic letters with Latin letters.

2. Arabic Transliteration Alphabet

Arabic has 28 basic letters. The table below gives a practical Latin representation used by Arabic Romanizer and highlights common alternatives or conventions found in formal romanization systems. Exact conventions can vary by standard and purpose.

Arabic	Latin representation	Notes
ا	ā / a	alif; long ā in many contexts
ب	b	bā'
ت	t	tā'
ث	th	thā'
ج	j	jīm; pronunciation varies by dialect
ح	ḥ	ḥā'; pharyngeal/"emphatic" h-like sound
خ	kh	khā'
د	d	dāl
ذ	dh	dhāl
ر	r	rā'
ز	z	zāy
س	s	sīn
ش	sh	shīn
ص	ṣ	ṣād
ض	ḍ	ḍād
ط	ṭ	ṭā'
ظ	ẓ	ẓā'
ع	ʿ	ʿayn; convention varies across systems
غ	gh	ghayn

ف	f	fā'
ق	q	qāf
ك	k	kāf
ل	l	lām
م	m	mīm
ن	n	nūn
ه	h	hā'
و	w / ū	wāw; consonantal w or long ū
ي	y / ī	yā'; consonantal y or long ī

3. Transliteration Diacritics

Formal Arabic romanization often uses diacritics to distinguish sounds that cannot be represented precisely with ordinary English letters. This is one reason academic romanization can look different from informal spellings.

Arabic	Romanization	Purpose
ح	ḥ	A dot below h distinguishes ḥ from o (h).
ص	ṣ	Dot below s marks the emphatic consonant.
ض	ḍ	Dot below d marks the emphatic consonant.
ط	ṭ	Dot below t marks the emphatic consonant.
ظ	ẓ	Dot below z marks the emphatic consonant.
ع	‘	A left-turned apostrophe-like character commonly represents ‘ayn in formal systems.
ء	’	A right-turned apostrophe-like character commonly represents hamza.

Important: these symbols are conventions, not universal spellings. A system designed for scholarly publishing may make distinctions that a simplified practical converter does not, while Arabizi may replace sounds with numbers.

4. Short and Long Vowels

Arabic vowel representation depends on context and on whether the goal is strict transliteration, readable romanization, or pronunciation guidance. In many formal systems, long vowels are represented with macrons.

Latin	Type	Typical Arabic association
a	short a	often associated with fatha
i	short i	often associated with kasra
u	short u	often associated with damma
ā	long ā	commonly associated with alif
ī	long ī	commonly associated with yā'
ū	long ū	commonly associated with wāw

5. Common Digraphs

Some Arabic consonants are commonly represented by two Latin letters. These combinations are especially useful in practical romanization because they avoid requiring a special Latin character for every consonant.

Arabic	Common Latin form
ث	th
ذ	dh
ش	sh
خ	kh
غ	gh

6. Formal Transliteration vs. Arabizi

Arabizi (also called Arabish or Franco-Arabic in some contexts) is an informal way of writing Arabic using Latin letters, often combined with numbers. It is common in digital communication and should not be confused with formal romanization standards.

Arabic	Formal-style romanization	Arabizi example
ع	ʿ	3
ح	ḥ	7
خ	kh	5 / 7' (varies by community)

Arabizi is not governed by one universal standard. Number conventions vary by country, community, and writer. For this reason, Arabizi should be treated as a separate writing practice rather than as an alternative official transliteration standard.

7. Major Arabic Transliteration Systems

There is no single Latin spelling system that is appropriate for every Arabic transliteration task. Different standards were designed for different audiences and purposes.

System	Primary use	Description
Arabic Romanizer	Practical online conversion	Designed to provide readable Latin-script representations for users converting Arabic text.
IJMES	Academic publishing	A scholarly system associated with the International Journal of Middle East Studies and commonly used in Middle East studies.
ALA-LC	Library cataloguing	A formal romanization standard used in library and bibliographic contexts.
UNGEGN Standard Arabic System for Transliteration of Geographical Names	Geographical names	An institutional system developed for the romanization of Arabic geographical names; it should not be treated as a universal system for all Arabic text.

How the Systems Compare

Values below reflect each system's own published conventions for the same set of Arabic letters; they are not estimates.

Feature	Arabic Romanizer	IJMES	ALA-LC	UNGEGN
Purpose	Practical online conversion	Academic / Middle East studies	Library cataloging	Geographical names / maps
ع (ayn)	3 / '	‘	‘	‘
ء (hamza)	2	’	’	’ (not romanized word-initially)
ح (ḥā’)	h	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ
ص (ṣād)	s (emphatic)	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ
Long vowels	a / i / u (simplified)	ā ī ū	ā ī ū	ā ī ū
Arabizi numbers (3, 7, 9...)	Yes	No	No	No
Main use case	General reference & conversion	Scholarly publishing	Bibliographic records	Maps & toponymy

Arabic Romanizer favors readability for everyday use; IJMES, ALA-LC, and UNGEGN prioritize precision and reversibility for their respective academic, cataloguing, and cartographic contexts.

8. UNGEGN and Geographical Names

The United Nations system is particularly important as an example of how romanization standards can be tied to a specific domain. The document titled “Standard Arabic System for Transliteration of Geographical Names” was presented at the 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2017.

This system defines romanization specifically for geographical names used in mapping and official documentation; it is not intended as a general-purpose transliteration standard for arbitrary Arabic words, personal names, or everyday text. For details, see the official UNGEGN documentation cited in the References section.

9. Which Arabic Romanization System Should I Use?

- **General Arabic-to-Latin conversion:** Arabic Romanizer.
- **Academic writing / Middle East studies:** IJMES.
- **Library cataloging / bibliographic records:** ALA-LC.
- **Geographical names / cartography:** UNGEGN.
- **Informal online Arabic / chat:** Arabizi.

These systems are not interchangeable. The appropriate romanization depends on the purpose and context, not on which one seems most familiar.

10. Common Sources of Variation

Even within a single system, romanized Arabic can vary for several recurring reasons:

- ع: commonly rendered ‘, ’, or 3 depending on the system or convention.

- ء: rendered ' , ' , or omitted, especially word-initially.
- ج: j or g depending on dialect and system (e.g., Egyptian Arabic).
- ق: q, g, or a glottal stop depending on dialect and convention.
- ة (**tā' marbūṭah**): ah, a, or at depending on grammatical context.
- ال (**the definite article**): al-, el-, or assimilated to the following consonant (see sun and moon letters).
- **Proper names**: often follow a conventional spelling rather than a strict system (e.g., "Mohammed" instead of "Muḥammad").
- **Geographical names**: may follow official national forms rather than any single academic system.

11. Practical Arabic Transliteration Examples

Arabic	Romanized example	English meaning / conventional name
العربية	al-ʿarabiyya	Arabic
محمد	Muḥammad	Muhammad
علي	ʿAlī	Ali
بيروت	Bayrūt	Beirut
القاهرة	al-Qāhirah	Cairo
مرحبا بالعالم	marḥaban bi-l-ʿālam	Hello world

Examples above are illustrative. A published name may follow an established conventional spelling rather than a strict character-by-character transliteration. Place names in particular may follow national, cartographic, or institutional standards.

12. Transliteration Is Not Pronunciation

Transliteration represents Arabic script, letter by letter; it does not necessarily represent how a word is pronounced in every dialect. Muḥammad, written the same way across formal systems, is pronounced differently in Cairo, Beirut, or Riyadh.

A romanized spelling should not be read as a phonetic guide. For dialect-aware pronunciation guidance, see our Arabic Pronunciation guide on ArabicRomanizer.com.

13. Using Arabic Romanizer

Arabic Romanizer is an online Arabic transliteration tool designed to make Arabic-to-Latin conversion accessible in a practical web interface. Its pages also provide supporting information about Arabic letters, names, transliteration, pronunciation, and related writing conventions.

Try the tool: www.arabicromanizer.com/arabic-transliteration

Because transliteration conventions differ by purpose, users should treat a generated romanization as a practical representation rather than automatically assuming that it matches every academic, library, cartographic, or governmental standard.

14. Sources & References

- **United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN).** Standard Arabic System for Transliteration of Geographical Names. 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 2017.
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/docs/11th-uncsgn-docs/E_Conf.105_137_CRP.137_14_Romanization_System_ENGLISH.pdf (Accessed July 2026)
- **International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) / Cambridge University Press.** IJMES Transliteration System for Arabic, Persian and Turkish.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-file-manager/file/575c7e1c0e8f0e2c3e8e4b3c> (Accessed July 2026)
- **Library of Congress.** Arabic Romanization Table.
<https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/arabic.pdf> (Accessed July 2026)

Reference note: The United Nations document cited above concerns geographical-name romanization specifically. It is included as an institutional reference and should not be interpreted as a universal standard for every form of Arabic transliteration.

How These Sources Are Used

Arabic Romanizer does not reproduce any one of these standards in full. They are consulted as reference points when explaining differences between established romanization conventions, and to keep this guide's own simplified conventions consistent with recognized practice where relevant.

Suggested Citation

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About Arabic Romanizer

Arabic Romanizer provides practical tools and reference material for representing Arabic in Latin script. The project draws on established linguistic, academic, library, and institutional references while recognizing that different contexts require different romanization conventions.

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