

CHART 2: Guttural and Emphatic Sounds

Practice Sheet

The 9 Hardest Arabic Letters — Articulation Guide + Word Practice

SECTION 1: THE 5 GUTTURAL SOUNDS

These sounds are produced in the throat and pharynx — they have no equivalent in English.

ح — Haa (Voiceless Pharyngeal Fricative)

How to produce it:

Place your hand in front of your mouth. Breathe out as if fogging a mirror or warming your hands. Now produce that same breathy sound — but from deeper in the throat, not the mouth. The airflow comes from the pharynx.

Common mistake: Using the regular English "H" sound (which comes from the mouth). Haa must feel like it comes from lower.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning	Focus
حَبِيب	Habeeb	Beloved / Dear	H at the start
رَحِيم	Raheem	Merciful	H in the middle
صَالِح	Saalih	Righteous	H at the end
حَمْد	Hamd	Praise	H before consonant
فَاتِحَة	Faatiha	Opening (Surah name)	H in the middle

Practice sentences:

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ (Al-Hamdu lillah) — All praise is for Allah

رَحْمَةُ اللّٰهِ (Rahmatullahi) — The mercy of Allah

ع — Ayn (Voiced Pharyngeal Fricative)

How to produce it:

This is the most distinctive Arabic sound. Start by making a very gentle gagging motion — the muscles at the back of your throat constrict. Now add your voice (vocal cords vibrating) while that constriction is happening. The result is a voiced, deep, open sound.

A common description: imagine you are about to say "A" but squeeze the sound from deep in your throat before releasing it.

Common mistake: Treating it as a glottal stop (like the Cockney English "T" in "butter") or skipping it entirely. Ayn must be voiced and sustained.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning	Focus
عَلِيم	Aleem	All-Knowing	Ayn at the start
مَعَ	Ma'a	With	Ayn in the middle
رَكَعَ	Raka'a	He bowed	Ayn at the end
عَرَبِيّ	'Arabi	Arabic	Ayn at the start
سَمِعَ	Sami'a	He heard	Ayn at the end

Practice sentences:

اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ (Allahu A'lam) — Allah knows best
عَبْدُ اللَّهِ ('Abdullahi) — Servant of Allah

غ — Ghayn (Voiced Uvular Fricative)

How to produce it:

This sound is similar to the French "R" in "Paris" or "rouge." The back of your tongue rises toward the uvula (the small dangling tissue at the back of your throat) and vibrates. Think of a very gentle gargle — with your voice on.

Common mistake: Replacing it with a regular "G" sound. Ghayn comes from the back of the throat, not the front of the mouth.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning	Focus
عَفُور	Ghafoor	Most Forgiving	Ghayn at the start
بَغْدَاد	Baghdad	Baghdad (city)	Ghayn in the middle
بَلَّغَ	Ballagh	He conveyed	Ghayn at the end
غَيْب	Ghayb	The unseen	Ghayn at the start
مُبَلِّغ	Muballigh	One who conveys	Ghayn at the end

خ — Khaa (Voiceless Velar Fricative)**How to produce it:**

Similar to Ghayn but without voice (vocal cords not vibrating). It is the "Ch" in Scottish "loch," the "J" in Spanish "José," or the "Ch" in German "Bach." The back of the tongue rises toward the soft palate and creates friction as air passes through.

Common mistake: Replacing with "K." Khaa involves friction — K does not. You should hear the airflow.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning	Focus
خَالِق	Khaaliq	Creator	Kh at the start
أَخ	Akh	Brother	Kh at the end
دُخُول	Dukhool	Entry	Kh in the middle
خَيْر	Khayr	Goodness	Kh at the start
رَخِيص	Rakheess	Cheap	Kh in the middle

ق — Qaaf (Voiceless Uvular Stop)

How to produce it:

Like the English "K" — but produced much further back in the throat, at the uvula rather than the soft palate. Open your mouth slightly wider than for "K" and produce the stop sound from the very back of your throat. It should feel noticeably deeper than "K."

Common mistake: Replacing with "K." The difference is subtle but important — Qaaf is deeper and the stop is felt at the very back of the throat.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning	Focus
قُرْآن	Qur'an	The Quran	Q at the start
قَلْب	Qalb	Heart	Q at the start
حَقّ	Haqq	Truth / Right	Q at the end
طَرِيق	Tareeq	Road / Path	Q at the end
قَدَر	Qadar	Divine decree	Q at the start

SECTION 2: THE 4 EMPHATIC SOUNDS

These sounds use the same tongue position as their non-emphatic partners — but heavier, with the tongue pressed down and back. Surrounding vowels sound darker and deeper

ص — Saad (Emphatic S)

Non-emphatic partner: س (Seen) — regular /s/

How to produce it:

Make the English "S" sound. Now, without changing the tongue tip position, press the back of your tongue downward and backward. The sound becomes darker and fuller — like the difference between the "S" in "sat" (light) and the "S" in "saw" (darker, with lips rounded).

Minimal pair practice (same word, different meaning with ص vs س):

With س (Seen)	Meaning	With ص (Saad)	Meaning
سَبَرَ	He was patient	صَبَرَ	He endured / was patient
سَدَّ	He blocked	صَدَّ	He turned away

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning
صَلَاة	Salaah	Prayer
صِيَام	Siyaam	Fasting
نَصْر	Nasr	Victory
قَصَدَ	Qasad	He intended
صَادِق	Saadiq	Truthful

ض — Daad (Emphatic D — Unique to Arabic)

Non-emphatic partner: د (Daal) — regular /d/

How to produce it:

This is the letter Arabic is uniquely famous for — classical Arabic was called "Lughat al-Daad" (the language of Daad). The sides of the tongue press against the upper molar teeth, creating a thick, emphatic "D" sound. It is unlike any sound in English and requires patient audio practice.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning
رَمَضَانَ	Ramadhan	Ramadan
فَرِيضَةً	Fareedha	Obligation
أَرْض	Ardh	Earth / Land

حَرِيصٌ	Hareedhun	Keen / Eager
ضَيْفٌ	Dhayf	Guest

ط — Taa (Emphatic T)

Non-emphatic partner: ت (Taa) — regular /t/

How to produce it:

Make the English "T" sound. Now press the full surface of your tongue's tip against the roof of your mouth (not just the tip) and add the dark, backed quality. The result is a fuller, rounder T — the vowels around it will sound deeper.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning
طَرِيقٌ	Tareeq	Road
مُعَلِّمٌ	Mu'allim	Teacher
طَاهِرٌ	Taahir	Pure
خَطٌّ	Khatt	Handwriting / Line
سُلْطَانٌ	Sultan	Sultan / Authority

ظ — Dhaa (Emphatic Dh)

Non-emphatic partner: ذ (Dhaal) — regular /ð/ (like "Th" in "this")

How to produce it:

Produce the "Th" in "this" (voiced, tongue between teeth). Now apply the emphatic quality — press the tongue slightly further and make the sound fuller and darker. The result is an emphatic "Th" — the rarest and most difficult of the four emphatic consonants.

Practice words:

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning
ظَالِم	Dhaalim	Oppressor
عَظِيم	'Adheem	Great / Magnificent
نَظَرَ	Nadhar	He looked
حَافِظ	Hafeeth	Guardian
وَضِيفَة	Wadheefa	Job / Function

SELF-ASSESSMENT SECTION:

Practice Test: Without looking at the chart, write the Arabic letter that matches each description:

1. Voiceless pharyngeal — like fogging a mirror from the throat → ____
2. Voiced pharyngeal — no English equivalent — deep voiced A → ____
3. Like the French "R" — voiced uvular → ____
4. Like "K" from the very back of the throat → ____
5. Like Scottish "Loch" — voiceless velar → ____
6. Emphatic S — unique to Arabic → ____
7. "The letter of the Arabs" — emphatic D → ____
8. Emphatic T — full tongue to roof → ____
9. Emphatic Dh — rarest emphatic → ____

Answers: ح, ع-2, غ-3, ق-4, خ-5, ص-6, ض-7, ط-8, ظ-9