

Dear language helper,

Whether or not you liked studying MSA in school, you are an expert in your local dialect. No one can speak your dialect better than you can! Your abilities make you a valuable resource for our students. They will be excited to start meeting with you!

If you are new to helping language students, you may be starting a hobby that you will treasure for the rest of your life. We hope that your time as a language helper will bring you laughter, new friendships, and good memories.

Below are some tips written by some of our former students who have benefited from their time with local language helpers. We hope it is useful for you!

Sincerely,

The Gulf Arabic Program

### **Your role as helper**

- Always speak in your local dialect, unless asked to use MSA by the student
- Do not alter your natural grammar or speak “broken” Arabic with the student.
- If the student asks a question that you can’t answer (for example, a grammar question, or why the use of a word in a certain context is “wrong”), encourage them to write it down to ask their teacher. Do not try to answer a question if you do not know the answer. This will only confuse the student!
- If the student’s fluency level permits, ask questions to draw out their opinions and ideas. Ask questions that begin with “how” and “why.”
- Provide them with equal opportunity for both listening AND speaking.
- The student may ask to record your voice on their phone. This is for practice and learning purposes only, but it may be shared with other students and/or teachers, so other learners can benefit. If you are not comfortable with the audio being shared, please tell the student.
- Students of very low level learn well by doing and touching. Showing students physical objects, using pictures, or acting things out can really help the student learn.
- Do not try to correct every mistake the student makes. This can overwhelm the student.

Instead, focus on:

- Mistakes that the student makes repeatedly
- Mistakes that hinder the student’s communication (i.e. change the meaning of what he/she is trying to say, using the wrong word)
- Mistakes that make the student hard to understand (e.g. grammar or pronunciation mistakes)

### Characteristics of great language helpers

- Consistency. Because our students have to study for a set number of hours each week, they need language helpers who are consistent in meeting with them. If you have to cancel a meeting, please let your student know as far in advance as possible.
- Patience. The best language helper is patient and does not blame students for their mistakes.
- Flexibility. Let your student set the agenda for each session.
- Respect. If a student is “paying” for your services using language lesson swaps, please be careful about honoring the time restrictions for each session.
- Open to change. If you are not sure if something you are doing is helpful, ask the student, “Does \_\_\_\_\_ help you? Should I do it a different way?”
- Adaptable. Depending on their level and the topic of conversation, the student may understand only 10% of the words you are saying (or less!). Be ready to repeat, rephrase, or slow down.

### Language learning is difficult!

- Remember, the student is not stupid. He or she may be educated and intelligent but has limited vocabulary and grammar to express complex feelings and ideas. The student may feel frustrated at their lack of ability to communicate.
- The student may feel overwhelmed by the differences they are experiencing, especially if they are new to your culture and language.
- Speaking another language is stressful and tiring, especially if the student is shy. Try to encourage them. You are key to their confidence!
- The student is learning about your culture as well as your language. Sometimes a student who is learning about your culture may ask questions that you are uncomfortable answering, because they do not know what is “socially acceptable” to ask. If that happens, please tell them honestly that you are uncomfortable talking about that. Advise them that it is not a good question to ask in your culture. Your student will be happy that you told them!
- If you have more than one student, do not compare them to each other in their hearing. This can damage their confidence.