

# GAP Student Handbook

2026

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## Introduction

Welcome to the Student Handbook! The purpose of this handbook is to provide students with the information they need to get the most out of their learning experience in the Gulf Arabic Program. Much of this material has come from GAP graduates. Although we suggest you read through this information at the beginning of your course, you may want to review parts of the handbook periodically.

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# Chapter 1: Learning Arabic

## 1.1 Dialect vs. Modern Standard Arabic

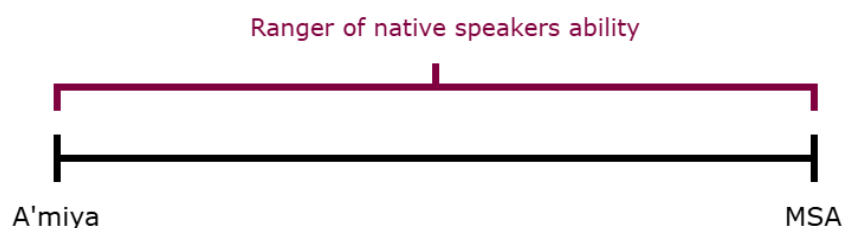
Different forms of the Arabic language are used in different contexts. In everyday situations, most native speakers speak their local dialect of Arabic at home, with friends, and in informal situations. There are many spoken dialects of Arabic, sometimes even within the same country! Differences in dialect affect grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This type of “local” Arabic is called *a'miya* (عامية).

Another form of Arabic is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This is the standardized Arabic commonly used for reading, writing, and formal communications like political speeches, TV news, newspapers and books throughout the Arab world. A variation of MSA, Classical Arabic, is used for all Islamic religious instruction, because it is the dialect of the Qur'an. Whilst your local friends will speak their dialect with you and at home, MSA is the kind of Arabic that they themselves study in school. Educated Arabs from different countries will often speak MSA to one another in order to be understood. However, it is not spoken as a first language anywhere in the world. In Arabic, this formal dialect is called *al-fusHa* (الفصحى), which means “pure” or “the most eloquent.”

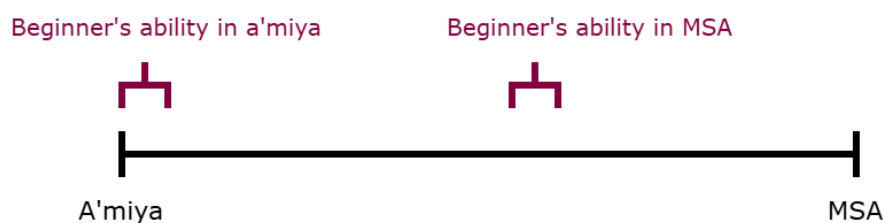
Your local friends will probably think of MSA as the educated, “purest,” and “best” kind of Arabic. However, speaking MSA with friends comes across as stilted and unnatural. You may meet native speakers who consider their local dialect to be inferior and are surprised that you want to speak it too. Many language tutors have difficulty explaining the grammar of their local dialect, because they did not study it in school.

So formal and informal Arabic are rather different and are used in different circumstances. This can be challenging for a language learner, but you will learn by experience to recognize and use *fusHa* and *a'miya* at the appropriate times. It may be helpful to imagine it as a sliding scale. Educated native speakers have full use of the scale and know automatically when to move to different parts of the scale, depending on the context.

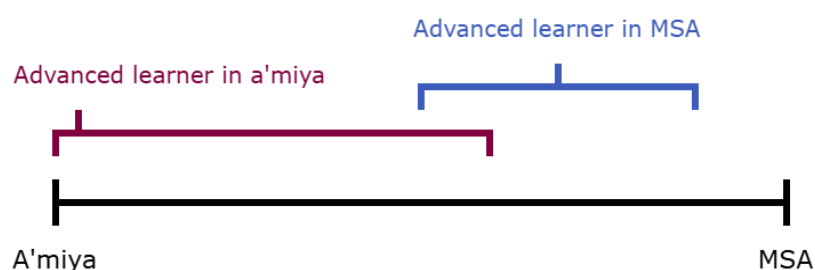




New Arabic students may feel frustrated because the most commonly used words are often the words that vary between MSA and the local dialect. At the beginning of your studies, you may feel like you are studying two separate languages.



However, as your Arabic knowledge increases, you will find greater amounts of overlap, especially in higher-level vocabulary. It will become easier to recognize when formal and informal language is being used, and you will be able to move “back and forth” on the scale more easily.



## 1.2 Differences in Spoken Dialects

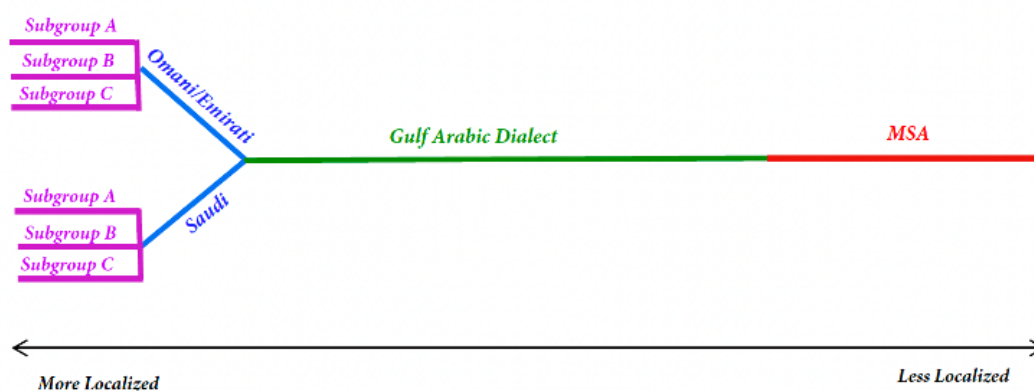
Arabic students will encounter variations of *a'miya* among speakers of Gulf Arabic. GAP students should develop the ability to understand multiple Gulf dialect variations but are not required to use more than one.

### What is Dialect Variation?

*A'miya* can vary in the following ways:

- **Pronunciation:** For example, the Arabic letter ج may be pronounced like an English “j,” “g,” or “y” in different regions. Thus the word “دجاج” (chicken) may be pronounced “dejaj,” “degag,” or “diyai.”
- **Word choice:** Dialect variations may use different words for the same thing. For example, a person from KSA may call a window شباك (*shubak*), while an Omani will say دريشة (*dareesha*). This is especially true for common words, which are often learned first.
- **Grammar:** For example, the future tense of verbs may be communicated differently. Omani/Emirati Arabic will add a ب (*b*) to the beginning of a verb, while some Saudis may use ه (*h*).

Above, we pictured *a'miya* and MSA as a sliding scale. But the further you move toward the *a'miya* side of the scale, the more local variance you will encounter.



- **Gulf Arabic (green line) can be understood by all Gulf Arabs.** At this level, speakers use less localized vocabulary and pronunciation in order to be understood by a wider audience.
- The **blue lines** represent regional variations that are **understood by speakers in a larger region, but not used by all of those speakers.** For example, the blue “Saudi” line might contain a word or grammar pattern from the local dialect of Jeddah, KSA, but most native Gulf Arabic speakers will still understand it.
- The **“subgroups” on the pink lines** represent the different dialect variations that occur at a local level. This may vary by town, province, tribe, ethnic background, religious community, level of education, etc. **Gulf Arabic speakers from outside of these specific groups or areas may not understand** when these variations are used, or they may avoid using these variations because they belong to a different social group.

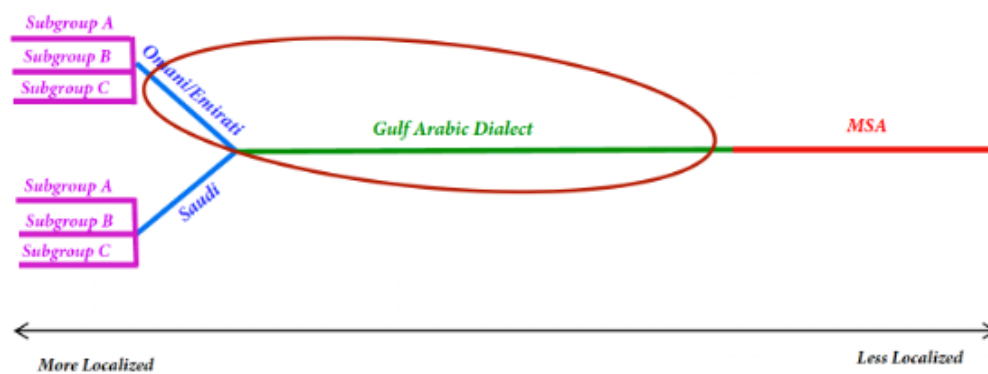


More green lines could be added for other major Arabic dialects, such as those spoken in Egypt or the Levant. More blue lines could be added to include Bahraini, Kuwaiti, etc. And many more pink lines could be added. **The main idea is that dialects branch out from each other and become increasingly localized.** The words specific to each location or cultural group carry meaning about a person's social group, family identity, and where they are from.

Remember, native speakers have the ability to move back and forth on the scale depending on the situation and who they are talking to. In general, people are able to understand more dialect variations than they can speak.

### Learning A'miya with GAP

GAP's a'miya curriculum for Class 1-3 is mainly Gulf Arabic (the green line), but also contains some vocabulary and grammar specific to either Omani/Emirati dialect, or Saudi dialect, depending on the track you choose.



Neither track of the GAP curriculum uses localized dialect variations that cannot be used in multiple cities, provinces, or social groups (in other words, we do not include dialect variations from the pink lines in the picture above). But students are encouraged to listen for these variations when with local friends.

GAP's current teachers speak one or more Gulf dialect variations, including Emirati, Omani, and Saudi. For more information about each teacher's background, please see their [teacher bio on our website](#). Our teachers can be considered experts in their own branch of local *a'miya*, but do not have complete understanding of every branch of local *a'miya*. To broaden your understanding, ask multiple native speakers what is normal in their area.

### Note for students living in Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait:

You can choose whether you study from the Oman/UAE Moodle Units, or the Saudi Moodle Units. There is a LOT of overlap between the two curriculums, and also between the

curriculums and your country's dialect. However, you will encounter some vocabulary and grammar specific to Oman, the UAE or Saudi that is not used in your country. Unfortunately, these are not labeled. This will be a little more challenging for you than for other students.

You can ask your teachers in class which vocabulary words are specific to Oman/UAE or Saudi, and which ones are more general. You may also ask if they know the words that are used in your area. Make a list of the words that are not used in your area and ask your language helpers what word they would use. We encourage you to share what you learn in class and to use your local words when you speak in class. We do not consider them incorrect just because they do not appear in our curriculum.

### **The Benefits of Exposure to Multiple Dialects**

There is significant overlap between all *a'miya* dialects and MSA. *A'miya* dialects also overlap with one another. Ultimately, this overlap means that nothing that you learn is wasted.

Having the flexibility to understand and communicate with multiple groups of people is a huge advantage. It gives you access to a wider variety of media and materials from the internet. If you change locations in the future or travel for work, that flexibility will make the transition to a new dialect easier. Even if you stay in one location for the rest of your life – other people do not! You will encounter Gulf Arabs from different areas. Developing the skill of flexibility between dialects gives you access to a greater variety of new friends.

### **Helpful Tips When Learning Dialects**

Learning a language with multiple spoken dialects is challenging, but here is GAP's best advice:

- In Classes 1-3: If you are given a list of vocabulary words that all mean the same thing, **use** the word that is common in your area, but **learn to recognize** all the words presented, rather than ignoring them. Students should understand the common dialect variations that exist in their region (the "blue line"), but do not need to be able to use them all.
- Students in Class 4 should understand the dialect variations that they encounter from multiple "blue lines" (dialects outside of their immediate region).
- It's OK initially to use bits and pieces of different Gulf Arabic dialects. This is a natural result of receiving input from users of different dialects. If you integrate into a community that uses one dialect, your dialect will shift with time.
- The ability to understand variations of Gulf Arabic comes from exposure; don't intentionally avoid dialect diversity.



- When listening to native speakers, it is important to ask yourself: what town or region is this person or their family from? Are they well educated, or not? How old are they? (Older or uneducated people often speak a very local variety of their dialect.) What tribe or religious group are they from? Do they have a parent from another country (e.g. Zanzibar, Syria) or another province? Some locals are capable of switching between multiple dialects. Ask them which one they are using with you.
- Focus on producing the dialect of your local area. You may have teachers or classmates who speak a different dialect than what you are learning from the curriculum or that is different from your local area. Use the dialect differences that you encounter in class as an opportunity to practice flexibility in listening. Ask about anything you do not understand.
- You may experience negative emotions during the slow, messy process of developing dialect flexibility. You may feel frustration, discouragement, confusion, ambiguity, or annoyance. Please remember – you are *not* stupid; you are *not* behind. Developing dialect flexibility is a major challenge of learning Arabic. It is also a learned skill, like pronunciation or reading. It gets much easier with time. When you experience frustration, take a step back and remember that the complexity of Arabic is also a part of its beauty – the beauty of a complex people group in all of their magnificent, colorful diversity.

## 1.3 Input Vs. Output

When learning any language, a student needs to think about language *input* and *output*.

- Input means *taking in* the language, through activities like reading, listening, individual study time, or computer study (e.g. I *learn* a new word/grammar concept).
- Output means *producing* the language, through activities like writing, speaking, and social interactions using the language, (e.g. I *use* the new word/grammar concept).

***Successful language learning requires both input and output (learning and using).***

## 1.4 A'miya Online: Balancing Input and Output

Language learning is a social activity—it cannot be done solely on the computer. To speak and understand a language, you must interact with native speakers. This is especially true for *a'miya*, because it is a spoken rather than a written language. Our online *a'miya* courses can provide you with a lot of input, including grammar and systematic vocabulary learning.





However, an online format is missing some of the input a student would get from a teacher in a physical classroom through informal conversation. Even more importantly, a student's opportunity for **output** (*using the language*) is reduced by the online format.

The Zoom interactions with the teachers in our *a'miya* courses are not a sufficient amount of output. We cannot overemphasize this point: you are responsible for balancing the input you receive with your own output! While studying, try to increase your use of the language (output) as much as possible – say things out loud, read out loud, repeat out loud, write notes and sentences in Arabic, repeat the lesson, etc. In addition, you must spend time outside of class talking with native Arabic speakers, to process and practice the material you receive in class.

Spending time outside of class with local people also provides a variety of learning opportunities (input) as you meet people of different regions, ages, and education levels. This will increase your listening skills and give you a broader vocabulary. When you are with local people, you experience culture learning, which is difficult to obtain in classroom settings. If you speak a language but don't know how to behave in culturally appropriate ways with native speakers, you could unintentionally be seen as rude or foolish! People are gracious with beginners because they are expected to make cultural mistakes, but those mistakes are harder to ignore if you are fluent.

Our online *a'miya* course is an incredible tool, but can only give you the skeleton of the language. To flesh out the language, you need people. Develop your own supportive community of fellow students and native speakers with whom you can practice, learn, and experience local culture and language. For more information, see [Chapter 4: Building a Language Learning Community](#).

## 1.5 MSA Online

Our MSA classes focus on reading, writing, listening, and to a lesser extent speaking. The online format is well suited for learning MSA. We do not expect our students to be able to speak MSA fluently, but we want them to be comfortable reading and writing it, to understand it when they hear it, and to be able to use it when speaking with non-Gulf Arabs if necessary. Therefore, **input** in MSA classes can come from books, online materials, or newspapers, and does not necessarily involve speaking MSA outside of class in everyday social settings. **Output** is achieved through writing and homework assignments.



## 1.6 Preparation for Online Lessons

Students are expected to prepare thoroughly before online lessons with their GAP teachers.

- Complete all homework

Assigned homework maximizes the effectiveness of your class time. Be sure to complete your homework thoroughly before class, and write down any questions to ask the teacher. The teachers love it when students come to class with questions from the homework!

- Memorize assigned vocabulary

All vocabulary should be memorized and practiced before your session. For our core courses, this can be done using Anki (see [Chapter 3](#)). You may want to print the vocabulary lists and take notes on them, as teachers will often comment on the pronunciation and usage of the words or introduce synonyms during class. Some classes do not have prepared vocabulary lists. You are responsible for choosing the words you want to learn, adding them to your vocabulary learning routine.

- Test technology and gather study materials

Test your computer equipment (microphone, speakers, wifi) before the lesson. Make sure you have a good internet connection with a low level of background sound. Gather all your study materials (notes, questions, documents, writing materials) before the session starts.

If a lesson goes poorly because you didn't prepare, it's not the teacher's fault!

## Chapter 2: Moodle

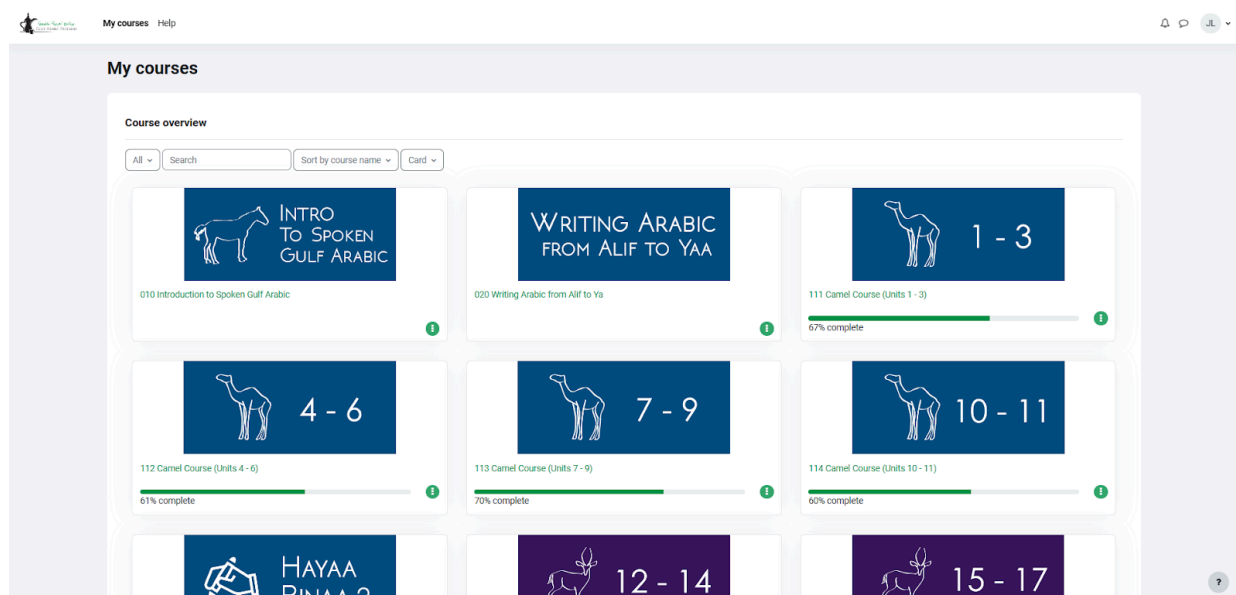
The videos linked in this section are stored on Moodle. You will have access to them after you have logged into your Moodle account.

### 2.1 What is Moodle?

Moodle is GAP's online learning platform. It contains the activities for our Core Dialect Courses, and the resources for several other courses too. Students will receive a Moodle login after the enrollment and payment process is complete.



## 2.2 Navigating Moodle



You will find your courses on the dashboard, shown above. The *Camel*, *Gazelle*, and *Falcon* courses are all a part of our Core Dialect Curriculum. Other courses, such as *Writing Arabic from Alif to Yaa* and *Hayaa Binaa 2* will also appear, depending on your level and enrollment status.

All students are enrolled in the *Help* and *Anki* courses. In the *Help* course, you will find a number of videos that help you navigate Moodle and solve problems that may arise. We will provide links to some of those videos in this handbook. The *Anki* course provides the different vocabulary decks you will need for your studies with GAP as well as helpful instructional videos on how to get started with Anki.

[This video](#) will help you learn how to navigate your Moodle dashboard.

## 2.3 “Flipped Learning” for the Core Dialect Courses

GAP's Core Dialect Courses primarily use a “flipped learning” model. This means that instead of doing homework *after* the class based on that day's lesson, you complete homework *before* the class in order to prepare for the lesson. The homework will introduce major teaching points for each upcoming lesson using a variety of videos and practice exercises on Moodle. During class, the teacher is then able to spend less time presenting the material, and more time helping you use it. You can expect to spend between 1.5-2 hours preparing for each one-hour Core Dialect class with your teacher. Watch [this video](#) to learn

how to study effectively before your class.

## 2.4 Navigating Moodle in the Core Dialect Courses



Core Dialect is divided into 3 main courses: *Camel*, *Gazelle*, and *Falcon*. Each of these courses are further divided into modules of 2-3 units. For example, in the image above, you can see Units 7-9 of the *Camel* course. The “Instruction & Practice” section contains the teaching points and activities. The ‘General’ section contains useful supplementary material. We recommend students print the PDF files in the Class Files (under General) and download the audio files for repeated listening. Learn more about these supplementary materials [here](#).

Once you have entered a unit, you will be able to see the teaching points and activities on the right (See example below). Learn more about how to navigate within a unit [here](#).

## 2.5 Core Dialect Activities

- Proverb - Each unit contains a proverb. You will discuss this with your teacher in class.
- Vocabulary - You will find the vocabulary list at the beginning of each unit. We strongly recommend that students use Anki to pre-learn the vocabulary before starting the unit ([see Chapter 3 - Anki](#)). If you do not use Anki, you can use the Arabic/English lists contained in the class files to learn the vocabulary before class.
- Greeting/Conversation/Dialogue - These are example conversations. Learn how to make the most of this activity [in this video](#). The aim of Greeting and Conversation activities is for you to become so familiar with these phrases that you could repeat them easily when you interact with native speakers. The aim of Dialogues is to expose you to new content. You are not expected to memorise the full dialogue but rather to understand the gist of what is being said.
- Grammar Videos - Watch the video as many times as necessary to understand the grammar point. If you have questions, write them down to ask during class.
- Substitution Drills - This is the most common activity. You will substitute one word for another in example sentences. Learn how to complete this activity by watching [this](#)



[video.](#)

- **Forum - Do not skip this activity!** Forums require you to record an audio or write something and post it. If you are in a group class, it is a chance to interact with others in your group. This component is very important for online learners. Even though it may feel awkward, 'speaking for an audience' helps get the language from your head out of your mouth. Learn how to [use forums here](#).
- **Live Session Preparation** - Many activities require real-time interaction. Make the most of your class time by completing the live session preparation activities thoroughly.

## 2.6 Making the Most of the Core Dialect Activities on Moodle

One benefit of Moodle is that you can work on your own schedule, in the comfort of your own home. Here are some tips for effective learning with the Moodle homework activities.

- **Complete the homework.** In a flipped learning model, this is very important. If you don't do the homework, it is equivalent to skipping 3 hours of class. You will not learn the material, you will not be prepared for the live class, and your time with the teacher will be ineffective.
- **Strive to really *learn*, not just “complete”, the homework material.** If you don't understand something, repeat until you've understood as much as you possibly can. If you got lots of questions wrong, review the grammar video and then repeat the activity.
- **Write down your questions.** It's natural to not understand everything on Moodle, or to have questions as you are doing an activity. That's why you have live sessions with the teachers! Write down all of those questions so you are prepared to ask your teacher. They will be pleased to see that you have been interacting with the material and are glad to help.
- **Study out loud.** As an online language student, you are not forced to speak out loud for hours each day. Your mouth may not become accustomed to making the new sounds as quickly as you would like and what you hear your mind say in Arabic may be quite different from what eventually comes out of your mouth! Overcome this problem by studying out loud. Repeat the sentences after the recording on Moodle. Read the conversations and stories aloud. Imitate the teacher's voice and repeat until your pronunciation is closer to theirs. This will give you the confidence and skill to say those same words to a real person when you are in class or with a friend.



## 2.7 Technical Aspects of Moodle

- Moodle Access. After enrollment, you will be given access to Moodle for the courses you are taking that semester. Please contact the Communications & Scheduling Coordinator if you do not have access to a course you enrolled in, or you have trouble accessing Moodle for the first time.
- Device and Browser Recommendations. Moodle works best on laptop or desktop computers. It is not recommended to use a phone or tablet for regular study. PC users should access Moodle through the Google Chrome or Firefox browsers. Mac users should access Moodle through a Firefox browser. When accessed through other browsers (including Safari and Chrome on Macs), some audio may be missing, some videos don't play, and the forums don't work.
- Arabic Keyboard. You will need to type in Arabic to complete some activities on Moodle. Watch [this video](#) to see one way to install an Arabic keyboard. Alternatively, google 'Arabic Keyboard' followed by the name of your device and operating system.
- Adjust Video Speed. You may want to slow the speed of some grammar or dialogue videos the first couple of times you view them. [This video](#) teaches you how to do that.
- Technical Issues. If you experience technical issues such as audio, video or text missing or not loading properly, firstly check that you are using one of the recommended browsers. If you are using a recommended browser, the majority of problems can be fixed by refreshing the page. If that doesn't work please inform the Academic Director of the issue so we can find a solution.

## Chapter 3: Anki

### 3.1 Why Anki

Learning and reviewing vocabulary is a major part of language study. Anki is a digital flashcard app that we highly recommend for this purpose. It is free on desktop and Android; if you have an iPhone, it's well worth the cost of downloading the mobile version from the App Store. Unlike paper flashcards, Anki flashcards can contain pictures and audio clips as well as text, which allows you to use multiple senses when studying a word. Viewing the text improves spelling, hearing the word and imitating the native speaker improves pronunciation, and pictures improve association and recall.



Anki relies on two learning concepts:

- Active recall testing, which involves being actively tested to see if you remember information. All flashcards work on this principle.
- Spaced repetition. Information studied only once is quickly forgotten, such as when students “cram” for a test and then forget the information the next day. But when you review and repeat the same information over time, the brain is more likely to save that information for later use. Anki uses this principle to organize flashcards for study.

In Anki, every time you answer a question, you provide feedback on whether remembering the answer was easy, good, hard, or you couldn't remember the answer. The program uses your answer to decide the best time to show you the question again. If you got it wrong, you will repeat the card until you remember it correctly. If you answer it correctly, the time between reviews gets longer and longer. For example, after answering a question correctly for the first time, you might see it again 2 days later, then 10 days later, 1 month later, and so on. The easier the answer was for you, the longer the time period will grow. Thus, although you may end up with several thousand flashcards by the end of the program, Anki automatically organizes your cards for review at the right time, and allows you to concentrate on the “hard” words. This is much more efficient than a paper flash card system, and allows you to study on the go.

[Click here](#) to go to our Anki Course in Moodle and see more on how to make the most of Anki while studying with us.

## 3.2 GAP and Personal Decks

### *GAP Vocabulary Decks*

GAP provides students with ready-made Anki “decks” that contain flashcards for all core vocabulary in their course, organized by unit. All GAP flashcard decks are available for download in the Anki course on Moodle.

Most students find that 20 new words per day, 5-6 days per week, is enough for them to keep up with the curriculum, but you can increase or decrease this number according to your preference and ability. It is best to learn the relevant vocabulary **before** it is introduced in class. Class time can then be used to practice the words while refining pronunciation and usage.

### *Personal Decks*

Students can create their own flashcard decks, using Anki to record new vocabulary encountered with their local friends and language helpers. New flashcards can be created in



seconds, even mid-conversation.

### 3.3 Getting Started

The Link below has how-to videos to help you get started with Anki. Watch both videos in the ‘Getting Started’ section if you are new to Anki. You can also find tips for using Anki on different devices.

[Anki how-to Videos](#)

\* You will need to have a Moodle account to access these videos. If you have trouble accessing the link, contact the Communications & Scheduling Coordinator.

### 3.4 Anki Tips from Former Students

- Learn to love Anki. Many of the best students from our classes have an almost emotional attachment to Anki. The people who use it frequently stand out because of their larger vocabulary and fluency, even after just one semester.
- A few students don’t like Anki or feel that it doesn’t fit their learning style. If this is true for you, then you will need to develop your own system for vocabulary review before the semester begins.
- Study regularly. The spaced repetition principle that Anki uses works well *only if you study regularly*. Most students find it works best when done 5-7 days per week. Make Anki your unbreakable habit.
- Practice with Anki everywhere – while you’re waiting in line, at a car wash, etc.
- Download the decks you need and start studying them as early as possible, even before you begin your class.
- Continue studying and adding your own decks, even after language school. Never stop being a language learner (or reviewer).
- The “browse” function in Anki can turn the app into a rough “dialect dictionary.” This is useful as most dialect words cannot be found in regular dictionary or translation apps. It’s especially helpful when you are texting and want to check your spelling.
- Request local friends and language helpers to help you record extra vocabulary. If you have a long list of words to record, ask a language helper to read the list in one long recording and then cut the audio track into individual files using audio editing



software. Then create the cards at home. Video instructions for using audio editing software are available in the Anki course in Moodle titled “Editing Audio for Anki”.

- Sync with Ankiweb each time you use Anki. If something unexpected happens to your phone, you don’t want to lose the last 2,000 reviews that you did!
- Familiarize your local friends and language helper with Anki so they can record vocabulary words for you. Explain the app and show them how it works.
- Always ask permission to record someone’s voice, and explain that it is for your personal study purposes. If your friend seems shy about being recorded, explain how much it benefits you to learn from a native speaker’s voice.
- Learn how to edit Anki card decks and make them your own. Even the GAP decks may have mistakes, or you may need to add notes about context or usage to a card.
- Use the built-in statistics page to monitor your regularity and progress over time. If you have a mentor or someone keeping you accountable for your study habits, you can send them a screenshot of the statistics or download a report from the app.

## Chapter 4: Building a Language Learning Community

Students will benefit from building a *language learning community* to support them during their learning journey. This can include supportive local friends, one or more language helpers, a language mentor, and other students of Arabic. The purpose of this community is to teach, encourage, and motivate you. All of these relationships are helpful, but it is the student’s responsibility to seek out these relationships.

### 4.1 Other Learners

Connect with other students of Arabic who are at the same learning stage. These friends are wonderful for encouraging (or commiserating with) you along the way! You might want to make a Signal group with your classmates, or meet with one or two to review what you learned in class together.



## 4.2 Language Mentors

A language mentor is another non-native Arabic speaker who is further along in the Arabic learning journey than you are. They can encourage you, help you set learning goals, and keep you accountable to those goals. They may also be able to connect you with local language helpers and friends. The Appendices section contains an introductory letter to a prospective language mentor that explains their role, which may be useful if you are trying to recruit someone to mentor you.

## 4.3 Local Friends

Relationships with local friends are a key part of bonding with a local community. These genuine friendships motivate learners to continue in their studies and provide excellent practice opportunities, as well as the chance to meet local families and experience the depth and richness of local culture.

If you are living in an Arabic-speaking context, you can meet new local friends at public locations and community events, such as local parks or beaches, salons, coffee houses, gyms, weddings, neighborhood gatherings, local classes or community groups. (This may be easier in small-town settings, which tend to be more community-oriented.) Some students have found friends by offering to share their skills or hobbies with the community through language tutoring, teaching yoga classes, etc. You may also take advantage of networking through an existing contact (“Come meet my cousin’s family!”) or you may be introduced through a mutual friend.

The Arabic-speaking world places strong emphasis on hospitality, which often leads to invitations to visit, even from strangers. Greeting people in the street may lead to a friendship! Make a habit of accepting invitations to visit and also inviting other people to visit you. Exchanging phone numbers helps facilitate visits. Many people develop relationships with their neighbors, which often involves sending and receiving gifts of food, especially around the holidays. If you move into a new neighborhood, begin these relationships by stopping by your neighbors’ houses with a gift of food and introducing yourself.

## 4.4 Language Helpers

Students are expected to find their own language helper—a native speaker who meets with you regularly to practice *a’miya* Arabic. A language helper does not have to be trained to teach Arabic, unless you wish to study MSA with them as well. A good language helper is



patient, encouraging, interested in spending time with you, and consistently available. Find *at least* one local language helper with whom you meet in person, *at least* once a week. **Students may not employ GAP teachers as private language helpers.**

Many people pay their language helpers by the hour. Others “swap” practice time by finding a tutor who wants to practice the student’s native language. However, a language helper who doesn’t speak your native language will force you to use more Arabic. Spending time with a language helper is a fantastic way to learn culture, form new friendships, and practice listening (input) and speaking (output).. Many students find that their language helpers become long-term friends.

For more practical information about working with a language helper, please see [Chapter 7: Working with a Language Helper](#).

## Chapter 5: Study Habits and Tips

### 5.1 Note Taking Strategies

- Never depend on your memory – write everything down.
- Keep organized: by subject, date, class, etc. Some students use different notebooks, or notebooks with sections. Develop a system that fits your needs. Some students organize text on the page by color, or add tabs and labels. Even the space on one page can be “organized” (e.g. right side of page to record new vocabulary, left side to take notes on grammar and usage.) Your system needs to be easy to do (in class, while a teacher is talking) and easy to study (outside of class). Keep loose papers organized in binders.
- Date and label all notes.
- Keep a running list of questions for your teachers. You may want to keep this list separate from your main notes and leave space after each question for answers.
- Write down sentences or words that you want to “test” on a native speaker.
- Annotate – The majority of your class materials will be electronic. Many students find it helpful to print these pages and take notes in the margins to ensure all relevant information is in one place.
- Electronic notes – If you choose to use screen shots, pictures, or typed notes to record

information, make sure these notes are clear, organized, dated, and labeled. Find a note managing app that works for you (e.g. Evernote, Goodnotes etc.)

- Ask your teacher to pause if you need more time to take good notes.
- Whenever possible, it is best to take notes in Arabic rather than your first language. In grammar you will quickly find it easier to take notes *only* in Arabic. However, when recording vocabulary, all but the most advanced students will find it helpful to write the word in Arabic *and* the closest equivalent in their mother tongue, along with notes on context and nuance.

## 5.2 Vocabulary Review

Arabic has a large, rich vocabulary, and successful language students will make vocabulary study a major part of their study routine. Vocabulary should be reviewed and expanded *every day*. We strongly recommend using Anki for this purpose. In addition, vocabulary should be learned with **context** (*When* do I use this word? *With whom* do I use this word? Why can I use it in *this* situation but not *that* situation? etc.) Anki is useful for vocabulary **input**, but studying vocabulary also involves **output** (e.g., using the word in conversation, saying it out loud, writing an example sentence, playing a game or telling a story with the word).

## 5.3 Creating Dedicated Study Time and Space

Practice is key to effective language study, so take time to create systems that encourage this habit. Intentionally set aside a time for study *only*. Schedule this time into your calendar and let others (especially those in your household) know that you are unavailable then. Most people also find it helpful to have a dedicated space for studying. This place should be comfortable, well-lit, clean, quiet, and have all the materials you will need to study. Coming back to this special place helps your brain switch to “study mode.”

## 5.4 Setting and Tracking Language Goals

### *Why Set Goals?*

When studying language long-term, motivation can sometimes wane and study time becomes random and unfocused. In addition, students often overestimate the amount of time they actually spend on studying. To fix these problems, we suggest using goal-setting and tracking to enhance your language study. Tracking goals and reviewing the amount of time you spend on language study is very motivating, and a great way to monitor your progress.



Study goals look different for each student, and they change over time. If you have struggled with setting or keeping goals in the past, don't be discouraged! You will learn by experience what kind of goals work for you.

### *Specific Goals vs. Focus Goals*

A "specific goal" can be a particular activity that you want to achieve (e.g. "meet with my language helper twice a week"). It usually has boundaries of time (20 minutes), or repetition (3 times a week), or both (do Anki for an hour, six times a week). Because of the boundaries, a specific goal can be achieved and easily "checked off" a list. If you are the type of person who is easily discouraged by unmet specific goals, then start slowly with goals in this category!

A "focus goal" is more about choosing a focus or theme to guide your study time and activities (e.g. "focus on fluency during the month of August"). These goals can't be checked off a list as easily, but they help you focus on the *type* of activity that you want to use. This can make your study time more efficient and focused.

These are not rigid categories, and they are not mutually exclusive. You can set both kinds of goals for yourself! Experiment and find what works for you.

### *Long-term vs. Short-term Goals*

A few of your language goals can be long-term (e.g. "study vocabulary one hour per day, six days a week, for a year"). But the majority of study goals are more effective in the short-term ("practice pronunciation of the alphabet every day for 1 week").

Setting a short-term goal may be especially helpful for people who feel discouraged by goal setting, because it is more achievable.

### *How to Set & Track Goals*

- Set your goals weekly. Take time at the start of each week to revise and set your goals. Schedule visits with local friends and study time into your calendar. Decide what kind of activities you want to focus on.
- Track your goals daily. Record what you did and for how long. There are many ways to log your study time, such as using a habit or goal tracking app. For specific goals, you might make your own weekly checklist.
- Review your study log from the previous week when setting the next week's goals. We suggest reviewing your log with your language mentor, or someone else who can provide accountability. Your mentor may have helpful advice about your study habits



and goals.

### *Using Personal Strengths and Weaknesses to Set Goals*

Each language student has unique strengths and weaknesses. Some students easily remember new vocabulary words but have difficulty with pronunciation. Others may speak with natural fluency and confidence, but their grammatical accuracy is poor. Learn to identify your personal strengths and weaknesses. Knowing your strengths will help you exploit them. Knowing your weaknesses will help you set goals and allocate your study time where it is most needed. We naturally tend to gravitate towards our strengths because it is easier, but greater progress will be made by focusing on areas where we are weak.

## Chapter 6: Language Learning Tips

### 6.1 Tips and Strategies

- Avoid using your native language in the classroom. Use the Arabic that you have. This feels awkward and limiting at the beginning, but is an important habit to establish for long term success.
- Take breaks when you seem to have plateaued in your language learning. This means short breaks (10-15 minutes) while you are studying, and also longer breaks (an occasional long weekend, or a month-long break during summer). Taking a break may help new information “sink in.”
- Beware of “broken Arabic.” Gulf Arabic speakers often use a simplified, “broken” form of Arabic to communicate with foreigners, especially people from Southeast Asia and the Indian Subcontinent. For example, they may not conjugate verbs, or they may only use the pronoun “he.” Do not mistake this “broken Arabic” for a new dialect of Arabic. You may want to respectfully ask them to speak to you the same way they would speak to other friends rather than trying to simplify the language for you, because you want to learn their language correctly.
- Communication strategies with limited language: “Talk around it.” If you don’t know or can’t remember a word, use the other words you know to describe it. For example, if you can’t remember the word for “coffee pot” you can say, “The thing coffee is in.” This may also be useful for communicating ideas or concepts that you don’t have enough vocabulary to express. For example, you may want to say, “I really appreciate your patience and generosity.” But because of your low language level, you might have to express that as, “Thank you for sitting with me. You sat with me for a long

time today. Thank you for the nice gifts, I will use them every day. Thank you very much.”

- **Fluency strategies:** If you are struggling with fluency because of a tendency to self correct or second-guess yourself, you may have a strong inner “correctness monitor.” This is a common issue. Try some of these activities:
  - Practice speaking quickly and incorrectly. Forget about saying it “correctly.” Rate yourself on a scale of five stars for speaking quickly and fluidly, repeating yourself until you get to five stars. Study grammar separately.
  - Record yourself for short talks. You can then listen to it later to analyze and correct your mistakes. It brings a kind of freedom from the tyranny of your inner monitor. Some students find this extremely helpful! Or, listen to it with a language helper and let them become your monitor.
  - Time yourself talking. How long can you go without hesitating or correcting yourself? Use pictures or written notes to tell a story, going faster and faster each time you repeat it. Don’t get sloppy with your pronunciation, but you can be sloppy with your grammar.
  - Time yourself repeating familiar dialogues from your course materials. Practice them repeatedly with your language helper, switching roles.
- **Memory Recall Strategies:** Good memory recall of new words and structures is extremely important. One way to improve recall is to connect a word with another sense, memory, emotion, or picture. Involve your whole body, your emotions, and your artistic talents. This means your studying habits can be very creative! **Language learning is not the time for dignity. It is the time for fun!**
  - The five senses: bite down on a lemon when you study the word for “sour.” Draw pictures of two words that you always get confused and hang them up on the wall for a few days. Spell a word in the air with your finger. Write the words in big, colorful letters. As you learn the features of your face, touch your eyes and nose and ears every time you say the words. The list is endless. Get creative!
  - Emotions: Funny, embarrassing, and dramatic experiences stick with us in a powerful way. The more you use language with other people, the more your emotions will be involved. Even awkward experiences are learning gold! You will never forget the time you told your teacher about how several of your toes





went on holiday, nor will you forget how similar “toes” and “weeks” sound in Arabic.

- Movement: Great for practicing verbs. Act it out, play Simon Says. Touching or feeling physical objects (for nouns and adjectives) also falls into this category. Act out daily life scenes with a language helper to practice polite phrases and responses. Come up with gestures or sign language for new words.
- Drama: Use the word or phrase in a story and tell the story to someone. Imagine a dramatic situation where you could use the word. Use the word in a sentence, but not a boring sentence! Strange sentences stick in the mind better. Say difficult words aloud— angry, romantically, fearfully, etc. It’s probably best to do this alone so no one will hear you and think you’ve lost your mind.
- Mnemonic devices or funny pictures/associations: One student learned the word for hungry (*ju’an*) by picturing a fellow student named “Joanne” eating a big piece of cake. Another student sang Disney’s “I Can Go the Distance” in Arabic to remember the word “distance.” These devices help with the “problem” vocabulary words that we always forget. *The point is to build connections in the brain.*

## 6.2 Managing Emotions, Expectations, and Health

- Do not compare yourself with others if you are learning with a group of students. Everyone’s language learning journey is unique. People learn at different paces and have different amounts of time and resources. If you are worried about your progress, ask a teacher, the Academic Director, or your mentor how you are doing. If you are learning faster than your classmates, be kind and understanding towards them and help them where you can.
- “Smart people don’t learn Arabic. Stubborn people learn Arabic.” Don’t give up.
- Celebrate milestones: your first text, your first 30-minute conversation, your first visit to a local friend’s house, your first joke in Arabic, etc.
- Think of Arabic as your fun new hobby that you will pursue for the next 20 years.
- When listening, aim for an understanding of general meaning rather than every word. You are not going to understand every word spoken in class or on the Moodle videos. You will not always understand the person talking to you. You will sometimes lose



control of a situation or conversation. You will feel like you have missed something. You probably have, but this is normal, especially at the beginning of your study! Some things you do not understand at the beginning will become clearer later on. If your teacher says you don't need to understand a concept right now, please listen to them and don't worry about it.

- Expect language learning to be an emotional rollercoaster. Some days you will feel great about your progress, and other days you may feel depressed or upset. This is normal. Acknowledge your feelings but also remember that they won't last forever, and they are not the best indicator of your real progress. Don't take out your negative emotions on your classmates or teachers.
- Expect to sleep more. Many students find they need to sleep or nap more when studying language full time. Sleep, rest, and proper breaks give your brain time to process and store the new information flooding in.
- Set aside time for things you need to do to keep healthy. Language learning in a new culture is physically and emotionally stressful. Prioritize the things that keep you healthy and combat stress: sleeping, socializing, making and eating healthy food, exercising, and maintaining relationships with loved ones. You will be a better student for it!

## Chapter 7: Working with a Language Helper

### 7.1 Setting Expectations

A language helper is a native speaker (usually not a trained teacher) who meets with you regularly to practice *a'miya*. When you begin working with a new language helper, clarify expectations early in the relationship. The language helper may not know what you expect from them, or if they were referred to you by someone else, they may already have expectations that have been set by other students. Let them know what *you* want and expect. Some important issues to clarify are:

- Time & Regularity – How long do you want each session to be, and how many sessions do you want each week? How important is dependability to you? (This is a frequent issue among language helpers.)



- Payment – How much are you willing to pay your language helper? Past students have paid between 3-8 OMR per hour, depending on their location and the level of training of the language helper. If you agree to a “language swap,” where you agree to tutor each other in your first languages, divide the time spent in each language equally and *set a timer*. Insist that ONLY the language being studied be spoken during that time.
- Agenda – The student prepares all materials and comes with an agenda to each session. The student is responsible for organizing the activities and communicating what they want the language helper to do. Clarify early on that you will need to record their voice, and possibly listen to it with others.
- Dialect – With a few exceptions, language helpers are primarily useful for studying *a'miya* (dialect). A language helper should always be a native speaker of the local dialect. Let the language helper know that you are trying to learn their dialect rather than MSA, and that you would like them to speak with you as they would to friends and family. Ask them where their family is from and which local version (or versions) of dialect they speak. Note that it may be slightly different than the input you get from your teachers and textbook.
- Training - Expect a “training” period where you get used to working with each other. During this time, you must give clear directions and leadership on what your language helper’s role is. Your level of preparedness before lessons will help communicate this.

## 7.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of a Language Helper

### *Weaknesses*

Language helpers are not trained teachers. As such, they have two major weaknesses:

- Grammar - As native speakers, they will always know whether something “sounds right,” but they often cannot tell you why. Even well-educated individuals don’t know the grammar rules of their local dialect, because it is not taught in schools. Uneducated helpers may be unfamiliar with even simple grammatical terms. Some people, who are trying to be helpful, may even give you a wrong grammatical explanation or wrong spelling. Save complex grammar questions for your GAP teachers.
- Lack of teaching experience – Untrained helpers cannot give targeted and methodical lessons. They do not have access to systematic curricula. They are not trained to give feedback in helpful ways. They may need time to adjust their speaking to the level of the student. They may have difficulty anticipating student needs and difficulties. In short, they cannot be responsible for guiding a lesson. Unlike classroom learning, the



*student* will need to lead at all times.

### *Strengths — Reasons to pay a language helper*

- Learning with a language helper is done in the context of a real-life situation: at their house, with their kids, asking how their day went. These interactions can make a language helper a “cultural guide” who helps you understand the local culture better.
- As a native speaker, he/she has perfect production of local dialect and pronunciation, which provides a wonderful source of new vocabulary and local phrases. They are also a source of verbal material that you can record and study for listening and pronunciation practice.
- Their time is much cheaper than paying tuition for a trained teacher.
- They are a great outlet for “output.” Talking and texting with locals is key to synthesizing new information.
- They are an informal source of feedback – you can ask them a quick question, or use them to help you practice grammar and vocabulary from class.

## 7.3 Preparation

Because you are leading each language helper session, you need to always have a plan. Planning may take time, but it will make your sessions more productive. Preparation is a form of studying.

- Prepare a list of activities. At the beginning it is better to have more than you need, in case one or two of the activities do not go well. The first few minutes of the meeting should be spent in proper greetings and catching up on your language helper’s news.
- Determine the learning objective of each activity – what do you want to learn from it? What skill or concept do you want to practice? What specifically do you want your helper to correct?
- Prepare clear instructions for your helper – think through what you want to do, and how you will explain it to them. You may need to demonstrate it for them. Before starting a new activity, a language helper should understand: 1) What you will do 2) what they should do 3) what you want to gain from the activity.
- Gather any materials you will need for the lesson. This might include pictures or

cartoons, lists of vocabulary to record, lists of conversation questions, or props.

## 7.4 Eliciting Helpful Feedback

Feedback can be positive (“Good job, you pronounced that very well!”) or it can be negative (“No, you didn’t say that right.”) We learn much more from negative feedback, of course, because it helps us correct our mistakes. But language helpers sometimes do not know the best ways to give correction. It is the student’s job to tell the helper *when* and *how* they want to be corrected. A language helper can produce perfect language and identify all the mistakes you make, but you will have to teach them to do this in a way that is helpful to you.

### *Ways to elicit feedback*

- Ask for multiple example sentences. “I am confused about how to use this word. Can you use it in 3 different sentences?” Then look for patterns in the examples (e.g., a verb is always followed by a specific pronoun, or is used in specific circumstances).
- Use your own sample sentences to elicit specific grammar information. This may be helpful if your helper has little knowledge of grammar.
  - Use time-marking words and pronouns to clarify verb conjugations. For example, if your helper gives you a new verb, and you want to know what it is in the past tense, you might ask: “*He run to the store yesterday*. Is that correct?” Saying “yesterday” allows the helper to correct you: “No, he *ran* to the store yesterday.” This is easier for the helper than asking, “Can you say it in past tense for me?”
  - Let them fill in the blank: “I have one pencil, but you have five \_\_\_\_.” The helper can then say, “pencils.” This is easier than asking, “What is the plural of *pencil*?”
- Use contrasting sentences: “Which is better: *I like tomatoes*, or *they please me the tomatoes*?”
- Ask about context: Ask questions to clarify when it is *appropriate* to use a new word or phrase. Can I say that word/phrase to my boss? Can I say it to my parents? Can I say it to my friends? Can I say it to a stranger? Would I read it in a book?

### *Focusing feedback*

People who are not trained as teachers often over-correct (they correct every mistake you make) or under-correct (they ignore almost all of your mistakes as long as they can understand



you). Neither is helpful. Instead, tell your helper *exactly* what you want them to correct before each activity. For example: “I will tell you a story. I want you to listen to my verbs. If I don’t conjugate (change) the verb correctly [give example], then I want you to say “stop!” Then I will correct the verb, and keep telling the story.” Or, you may ask the teacher to write down up to 5 mistakes that they hear while you talk. When you finish speaking, you correct all the errors that they listed.

### *Integrating feedback into your language use*

After receiving feedback, try to use it immediately. This helps you synthesize the information. For example, you try to answer a question, but you answer very badly because you lack vocabulary. Your helper then gives you several new words, which you write down and discuss. You practice pronouncing the words together. Then you tell your helper, ask me the same question again. This time you give the same answer but use all the new vocabulary words. You may need to do this more than once. Similarly, if you learn a new phrase, use the new phrase in an example sentence immediately. Try to re-use it several times over the next few days.

## 7.5 Language Helper (LH) Activities

Activities with asterisks (\*) are suitable for beginners and near-beginners. For more ideas to use when working with your language helper see: <https://gulfarabicresources.com>

### Repeat Activities from Class or from Moodle\*

Practice activities from classes or from Moodle in person with someone. This is especially good for beginners and helps with any concepts or vocabulary that you find difficult.

### Questions

*Objectives: listening, speaking, new vocabulary, cultural learning*

Types of questions:

#### Open-ended Questions

Ask open-ended questions to extend a conversation. Ask your LH to also ask open ended questions. Record yourself and your LH. Time yourself to see how long you can keep talking. Let your LH know that you are trying to extend your speaking time. Listen to recordings with your LH to find new words and phrases. Try to self-correct your recording, then let your LH correct your recording. When you finish correcting and have practice new words, repeat your answers and try to incorporate what you learned.

#### Cultural Questions

Use the booklet “Learning Language Through Cultural Research: Questions & Conversation Starters” to generate discussion. The booklet is available on Moodle within the Help > Language Learning section. Ask the questions, and then let your LH ask you the same questions. Follow the directions above. Make sure you re-answer the question to incorporate new vocabulary and structures.

### Conversational Questions

Google “ESL conversation questions.” You will find many lists of discussion questions originally intended for English language learners. Pick some questions that are appropriate, or use the lists to get ideas for writing your own questions. Translate the questions to Arabic and write them down. With your LH, check that your questions are written correctly. Then take turns asking each other the questions. Follow the directions above. Make sure you re-answer the question to incorporate new vocabulary and structures.

Other sources of conversation: Local news, YouTube videos, local Twitter or Instagram feeds. Ask “What do you think about...”

### Asking Dumb Questions\*

Ask your LH a question that you already know the answer to. For example: What does a doctor do? What lives in the ocean? How do you use WhatsApp? What can I buy at the vegetable souq? Record your LH and review for new vocabulary.

### “How do you ...?” Questions

Ask your LH about tips for living in their country. How do you...find something on sale? Pay an electricity bill? Donate old clothes? Make karak tea? Get clothes tailored? Bargain at the souq?

### Everyday Scenarios (functional language)\*

*Objectives: Learning functional language for specific situations, speaking, listening, culture learning*

Start with an everyday scenario, such as: how to greet people at a wedding or funeral, how to order at a restaurant, how to start or end a conversation on the telephone, how to ask for a haircut, what to say to your host when you can't eat any more food, how to thank a host at the end of a meal or a visit, how to welcome a guest, how to tell your host that you need to leave now, etc. These situations often have common or formulaic phrases and sayings (functional language). First ask your LH for phrases and words you can use. Then role play together (record the role play). Then switch roles (record again). Listen to the recordings and write out any new words/phrases. Then role play again and keep switching roles, until you can use the new vocabulary comfortably.

Extra credit: At home, use the new phrases to write a funny short skit. Show the script for the skit to your helper, and let them correct it. Act it out with a friend, if possible. Act it out with your LH.

### Recording vocabulary lists\*

*Objective: memorizing new vocabulary*

Write out a list of words from your last study session or LH session. Give the list to your LH to read and record (either in person, or on WhatsApp). If you have any questions about the words, write them in a separate list to discuss before recording. Use the recordings to create new cards in Anki.

For more advanced students: ask your LH what each word in the list means (to them). They'll often come up with a slightly different meaning from the meaning or context you heard it in. Ask your LH to use it in a couple of sentences their way, then ask about the original meaning you learnt (Was it incorrect? What is the correct usage?). A good LH may then add in a third & fourth way to use the word, or a proverb. Try to make sentences for all the usages you've learned before moving on to the next word.

### Learning topical vocabulary by picture\*

*Objectives: new vocabulary, simple conversation*

Download pictures from the internet that show the kind of words you want to learn (e.g. fruits, clothes, animals or office supplies). With your LH, pull up the pictures on your phone or computer, asking, "What is this?" for each object. At beginning levels, you can try to ask simple questions: "Do you like \_\_\_\_\_? Do you have \_\_\_\_\_ in your country/at your house?"

Alternatives: Use a magazine that has lots of pictures, or buy a picture dictionary.

### Using props\*

*Objectives: new vocabulary*

Bring physical props that you can discuss with your LH (e.g. bring all the spices in your spice rack to learn their names, a box of colored pencils to learn colors, a collection of different clothes, etc.) You can also touch or point to objects in different rooms of the house. (If it's not your house, be sure you know the person very well before asking permission to do this!!).

Take turns describing an object. (e.g. You give your helper a shirt. They say, "It is soft, it is striped, it is made of cotton, it is a man's shirt, it smells like cologne, there is a hole in the sleeve." To make it fun, you may want to take turns doing this blindfolded and try to guess what the object is.

### Picture stories\*

*Objectives: Listening, speaking, new vocabulary*





On your computer, find wordless cartoon pictures that tell a story. With your LH, point to objects in the picture that you don't know the vocabulary for. Record your LH telling you the story. Listen to the recording together and write down new words. Then record yourself telling the story to your LH, using the new words. Listen to the recording together, and let the LH correct you. Tell the story again. Make it dramatic!

Alternate: record the LH telling a story (from a wordless book, GAP picture stories book, or from a short wordless video, such as a Pixar short film, Wallace and Gromit, or Shaun the Sheep. Ask about unknown words. At home, listen again, recording natural phrases or words that you understand but wouldn't have necessarily used. Practice retelling the story using those phrases and the new vocabulary. During the following session, retell the story to the LH while recording it. Listen to it together and have him/her correct your mistakes.

#### Reading aloud with dialect translation

*Objectives: Reading fluency, pronunciation, dialect vocabulary, speaking* Find a simple book in MSA that you can read with your helper (such as children's books). Read the story aloud, sentence by sentence. Let the LH correct your pronunciation. Then ask the LH to translate the sentences from MSA to dialect. Take note of new vocabulary and different words or grammar constructions. After you finish a section, page, or short story, retell the story in dialect to your LH. Let them make corrections.

#### Sentence correction\*

*Objectives: grammar practice*

When you learn a new grammar concept, write practice sentences that use the new concept. Leave a couple of blank lines in between each sentence. Ask your LH to circle mistakes with a coloured pen. Try to correct the sentences. Then either you (or your LH) can write the correct sentence in the blank space.

#### Use "...” in a sentence\*

*Objectives: Checking grammar constructions / vocabulary in context*

If you know a word or phrase but are not sure how it is used in a sentence, ask your LH to write down at least 5 examples of that word or phrase in a sentence. Then discuss the sentences together.

#### Prepare and tell a story

*Objectives: Speaking, listening, new vocabulary*

Think of a story that you know in your language—a fairy tale, parable, personal anecdote, historical story, etc. Create notes or an outline, writing out the major points or events in the story. Using your notes, practice telling the story, taking note of vocabulary words that you need. During your next session, tell your LH the story, asking them to take notes about any

mistakes you make as you speak. Correct the mistakes together, then tell the story again. Record the LH telling the story back to you. Ask the LH if they have any similar stories in their culture/history/family, and then record them telling their story.

### Family Tree Activity\*

*Objectives: Family vocabulary, relationship vocabulary*

Make a family tree for your family. Show your LH and practice the vocabulary of family relationships together. The LH can ask you questions: Who is your sister? Who is John's nephew? Then switch roles and ask your LH those questions.

Tape multiple sheets of paper together to form a large sheet of paper. Ask your LH to describe their family to you, while you draw his/her family tree (use pencil!). Ask questions about the tree again.

### Go on an outing/do an activity together

*Objectives: Listening, speaking, cultural learning, new vocabulary*

Make coffee, buy or order local clothes, or visit a shop together. Run an errand together. Go to the souq together. Along the way, ask your LH to explain what he/she is doing or seeing. Take notes. Point out objects that you don't know the vocabulary for. Take pictures of the objects. When you return home again, organize your notes, vocabulary, and pictures. Write down "instructions" for the activity in order, in as much detail as possible. Ask your LH to check your notes and instructions to see if they are correct.

Alternative: on your outing or during your activity, take photos, immediately jotting down all the new vocabulary and phrases you learnt. Afterward, write up the activity like a diary - include photos, quotes of what your LH said, new vocabulary. Review the diary with your LH, correcting and adding further detail. If you are techy, make a blog!

### Ask the expert

*Objectives: Listening, new vocabulary*

Ask your LH, "What are you an expert in? What subject do you know a lot about?" Ask them to talk about their "expert topic" for as long as they can, while you record them. As they talk, write down questions. Go over the questions together to make sure they are written correctly. Then hit record again and ask the extra questions you have as if it's an interview.

### Interview your Language Helper

*Objectives: Listening, new vocabulary, asking questions, cultural learning* Ask a list of prepared questions about their childhood experiences, their job, or their experience in a certain field. Record.

Extra credit: Interview multiple people on the same topic and use their answers to write an



essay or journal entry...in Arabic. Let your LH correct it, and discuss.

### Listening to a song with lyrics

*Objectives: Listening, new vocabulary*

Make sure your LH is comfortable listening to music before doing this activity. Find an Arabic song you like. Look up the lyrics online and try to translate them and understand what they mean. Write down what you think the song is about, and what kind of person is singing it. Write down how you think the song is supposed to make you feel. Listen to the song with your LH. Ask them what they think the song is about, and what kind of person is singing it. Ask them how the song made them feel, and why. If their answers are different from yours, talk about it. Go through the lyrics line by line together. Ask your LH for suggestions for another song to discuss. (Helpful vocabulary word: تشبيه = *metaphor*)

### YouTube/Social Media Videos or other listening activities

*Objectives: Listening (for general comprehension & details), new vocabulary, summarizing*

1. Find a YouTube video or clip that you want to go over with your LH.
  2. Prepare extensively: First, watch the video without stopping it, two or three times. Write down what you think the “overall message” or topic of the video is. Then listen to tiny clips of the video over and over again, trying to figure out each word (as much as possible). For advanced students, try to transcribe the audio. Look up words that you don’t know. Make note of words or sections in the video that you don’t understand.
  3. With a LH: Before watching, tell them what you think the “overall message” is. Watch it together. Ask if you were correct. Ask them what they think the overall message is. Then go through the video together in tiny clips. Ask them to explain the parts that you couldn’t figure out, making note of new words and phrases.
- At the end, summarize the video in only 2-5 sentences for your LH, record your summary. Then ask the LH to summarize and record their summary.

### Show & Tell\*

*Objectives: speaking, listening*

Prepare an outline for a short presentation (30 seconds to 2 minutes) about an object that is special to you or that tells a story. Practice your presentation at home, then present it to your LH. Let them ask questions about your object. Record them telling you about an object that is special to them.

### Verbal games/activities

*Objectives: speaking, listening, having fun*

- 20 Questions
- 2 truths and a lie\*
- “Would you rather ...”



### Field Recordings

*Objectives: Listening, vocabulary*

**ALWAYS ASK FOR PERMISSION BEFORE YOU RECORD SOMEONE.** Record people talking about things! All sorts of things...things you're really interested in, things they're passionate about, their childhood memories, their opinions on freedom or the economy. Record them doing a monologue, or if you are listening to a conversation, ask if you can record them. Then listen to the recording later. Don't write down everything, but take notes, with a timestamp (minute and second), on the vocabulary you understand but don't use in that way, natural phrases you'd like to incorporate into your speech, interesting ways of putting things, really fast or slurred speech, a sentence where you didn't understand the grammatical construction, and of course new vocabulary and phrases. Work through the recording with a LH using your notes to focus on the important parts. Once you've understood everything, make up your own examples of sentences using the new vocabulary or phrases. Let your LH check them. Record and memorize new vocabulary and phrases.

Alternative: Have the LH record a short story or explanation. Listen to the recording, stopping every few words or after a phrase, and identify EACH WORD that is there. This helps with catching little words that can get lost or "absorbed" by other words when speaking quickly. It also helps the learner know what the words and phrases sound like at a normal rate of speech.

### Record yourself talking\*

*Objectives: speaking, identifying mistakes*

You can do this by yourself, or as you are talking to someone else in a conversation, or using a WhatsApp voice message that you sent. With a LH, listen through the recording the first time so they get the meaning. Then go through again and let the LH stop the audio after a mistake. Train them to ask you, "Can you tell me what the mistake is?" If you can't self-correct, ask them to explain it to you. This is also a chance for you to check if certain words and phrases that you use commonly are being used correctly. After the discussion, write paragraphs to try to articulate your original meaning more clearly. During your next session with your LH, try to express the same thing again.

Alternative: Record something spontaneously (without preparation). As the LH listens to it, stop after each phrase or sentence and ask, "Is it clear what I mean? Is there a better (local dialect) way to say it? Would a local person ever say this?" Have the LH write it out. By the end of the activity, you have a paragraph. Record the paragraph with the LH. Listen to the recording multiple times on your own.

This activity is good for topics of conversation that come up often (e.g. why did you move here? What do you do?), or stories and anecdotes that you want to be able to tell.

### Review new vocabulary\*

*Objectives: vocabulary practice*

Bring a set of objects or pictures based on new vocabulary learnt (e.g. family members, kitchen items, animals). Spread them out in front of you. Have the helper say each item twice and you repeat it. Ask them to hand you the item. Ask where the item is. Then describe the item. Reverse roles with the LH.

### Directions\*

*Objectives: speaking, listening, practicing direction vocabulary*

Use a map to practice giving and following directions. Trace the route with your finger or a small item (game piece from a board game, etc.) as your practice. Describe places on a local map, or let your LH describe them. Talk about what you might do there. Plan an imaginary trip with your language helper. This also works with interior maps of local malls (sometimes available on the internet), or search “ESL maps” on the internet and use those.

## Appendices

### 1. Online Resources

This is a list of online study resources that previous students have found useful. For additional online resources and apps see: <https://gulfarabicresources.com>

#### *Listening*

- Freej (old Emirati dialect, family cartoon)  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/LammtaraStudio>
- Khuth ya naseeb (نسيب يا خط / Emirati dialect? Villagey drama series) – do a search on youtube for episodes.
- Mansour (Emirati dialect, kids’ cartoon)  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/mansourcartoon>
- Tawasel (Omani Dialect, cartoons and PSAs)  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxelptz\\_zkfvjjSw\\_G8qIaA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxelptz_zkfvjjSw_G8qIaA)
- Qahwat Al Sabah (الصباح قهوة) MSA/Omani dialect, morning talk show with guests  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLl0InO0VpYbHjZ0Dd3N0QnUsjdFLGw3Us>
- La Yekthar Show (Saudi dialect, a comedy show directed at current issues, but several years old now.) <https://www.youtube.com/user/layektharshow>
- Telfaz11 (Saudi dialect, produces a variety of shows, films, comedy, music, Youtubers, etc.) <https://www.youtube.com/user/telfaz11>
- Local Instagram or other social media stars (ask your friends who they follow)



*Reading:*

- Al Jazeera news page for Arabic learners: (graded MSA reading and listening, with comprehension and vocabulary activities) <https://learning.aljazeera.net/en>
- Free children's books in Arabic (MSA):  
<http://www.childrenslibrary.org/library/lang1.html>
- National Foreign Language Center E-Learning Portal: Create an account and study the lessons for free. Also has listening. Lessons can sort by dialect and difficulty.  
<https://portal.nflc.umd.edu/lessons>
- Wikipedia in Arabic: [https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/الرئيسية\\_الصفحة](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/الرئيسية_الصفحة)
- Local newspapers (advanced, MSA)

*Helpful Apps:*

- Aratools Arabic-English dictionary
- Hans Wehr (dictionary)
- Reverso (good for looking things up in context)

## 2. Letter to Prospective Language Mentor

*This letter is available as a separate, printable document on the GAP website under [Resources](#).*

Dear prospective language mentor,

So you have been asked to mentor an Arabic learner in their language journey.  
Congratulations!

Before you say yes or no, you may want to know more about what being a mentor means for a student in our program.

**About our program:**

The Gulf Arabic Program is an Arabic study program that teaches both MSA and Gulf Dialect. Our classes are taught online and usually combine online activities and videos with live sessions with teachers. However, we emphasize that a vital part of a student's learning experience is getting out into the community and practicing with native speakers and local language helpers. Our program aims to provide a systematic framework for learning vocabulary and grammar, but we recognize that the "bare bones" of the language must be fleshed out in social interactions in the student's community. We believe that a language mentor is an important part of our students' learning journey. The goal of the relationship is to help the student build their learning community, set goals, stay focused, and find



encouragement on the hard days. And we believe mentors will enjoy the process as much as their mentees do!

### **What do you need to bring to this arrangement?**

Required:

- Arabic should not be your first language
- You should be further along in your Arabic studies than your mentee

### **What does the student need from you?**

- A sounding board for some simple language and culture questions
- Accountability for weekly goals and monthly discussion of progress
- Support in making local connections, visiting, and forming initial friendships
- Assistance with finding a language helper
- Encouragement to use Arabic regularly in real life situations
- Emotional support and encouragement
- Language learning tips from someone who has “been there before”

You may also ask the student if they have any other needs not listed here.

### **Can you commit to this?**

A mentoring relationship requires you to be consistent in your meetings and relatively available to your mentee, for however long you commit to mentor them. Make sure you have the time and energy available to enter the relationship. If not, or if you have any other personal reasons for not wanting to be involved, feel free to tell them no!

If you do want to be involved, *please establish how long you want the mentoring relationship to last, and how often you are available to meet.*

### **First steps and suggested mentor actions**

- Establish what the student wants out of the relationship and how you can help them.
- Eventually the mentee should handle the task of setting the agenda, but initially you might want to do that together.
- Ask about their learning styles and what works for them.
- Offer encouragement.
- Review and set language goals together. Encourage the student to track their progress, study time, and goals. Go over their study logs together for accountability.
- Inquire about:
  - how they are feeling about the language journey



- how much they are getting out into the community
- their personal study time
- their language helper interactions
- their language strengths and weaknesses
- if they are getting sufficient rest

We hope you enjoy the journey together!

Sincerely,

The Gulf Arabic Program

### 3. Letter to Prospective Language Helper

*Both the Arabic and English versions of this letter are available as separate, printable documents on the GAP website under “Resources: Handbook.”*

#### English

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.

### Arabic

،تحياتنا الطيبة لمن يقوم بمساعدة متعلم اللغة العربية كلغة ثانية

سواء - كنت تحب دراسة فصحي في مدرستك أو ال، فإنك خبير في لهجتك المحلية. فال أحد يستطيع أن يتكلم لهجتك أحسن منك! قدراتك تجعلك موردا ثمينا لطلبتنا وسيشناقون اللقاءك!

إن لم يكن لديك خبرة في مساعدة متعلمي اللغة العربية، فقد تكون على وشك اكتساب هواية جديدة قد تحبها بقية عمرك. نتمنى أن يكسبك دورك كمساعد لمتعلمي اللغة العربية سعادة وأصدقاء جدد وذكريات طيبة.

نقدم لك ما أدن مهم اللهجة

اه نصائح كتبها بعض طلبتنا السابقين الذين استفادوا من أوقاتهم مع مساعدين مثلك لتعلم العربية العامية. نتمنى أن تفيدك هذه النصائح

،المخلصون

برنامج تعليم اللغة العربية باللهجة الخليجية

### دورك كمساعد للمتعلم

- تكلم بلهجتك العامية دائما، إل إذا طلب منك الطالب التكلم بالفصحى
- ال تعدل طريقتك الطبيعية في الكلام (أي القواعد أو المفردات أو النطق) وال تتكلم بلغة عربية ركيكة مع الطالب.
- إن سألك الطالب سؤال ال تستطيع الجواب عليه (عن القواعد مثال أو لماذا يكون استخدام كلمة صحيحا في محتوى ما وخطأ في محتوى آخر)، فشجعه على تدوين السؤال وطرحه على معلمه. ال تحاول الجواب على سؤال ال تعلم إجابته حتى ال يتشوش الطالب
- اسأل الطالب أسئلة تشجعه على التعبير عن آرائه وأفكاره إن سمح مستوى طلاقة الطالب لذلك • أسأل "أسئلة تبدأ ب "كيف" و "لماذا"
- أعطه فرصة متساوية بين سماع اللغة وتكلمها •
- قد يطلب الطالب منك تسجيل صوتك، بغرض الممارسة والتعلم فقط، لكن قد يشارك الطالب زملاءه •



- ومعلميه ليستفيد المتعلمون. إن لم تشعر بالراحة تجاه مشاركته صوتك، فأخبر الطالب بذلك. ● يتعلم الطلبة المبتدئون جيدا عن طريق جميع الحواس مثل الحركة واللمس لذلك سوف تساعده كثيرا إن لت الأفعال بالحركات الجسدية. أريته أشياء مادية أو استخدمت الصور أو مث
- ال تقم بتصحيح كل خطأ يرتكبه الطالب لأنه ربما يتضايق من ذلك. لكن قم بتصحيح
- الأخطاء التي يكررها الطالب
  - الأخطاء التي تعيق تواصله وتعبيره (إذا استخدم كلمة خطأ تغير معنى ما يريد قوله
  - الأخطاء التي تُصعب من استيعاب الطالب) مثل الأخطاء الخاصة بالنطق أو (مثال
  - (القواعد

### صفات مشتركة بين المساعدين المتمكنين في مساعدة متعلمي لغة جديدة

- الثبات والاستمرارية. يجب على طلبتنا قضاء ساعات محددة في الدراسة كل أسبوع، لذلك فهم يحتاجون إلى مساعد يمكن الاعتماد عليه للنجاح في تحقيق ذلك. إن اضطرتك الظروف إلى إلغاء موعد، اقدر المكان. فيرجى إخبار الطالب الذي تتابعه مسبقاً
- الصبر. المساعد الفعال لديه القدرة على الصبر وعدم تأنيب الطالب على أخطائه.
- المرونة. اسمح للطالب أن يحدد محتوى كل جلسة حسب حاجته
- الاحترام. إن كان أسلوب التعلم يعتمد على المقايضة (أي أن الطالب يساعدك أن تتعلم لغته بالمقابل)، فالرجاء الانتباه وتكرير الوقت المخصص لكل حصة
- الاستعداد للتغيير. إن شككت في فعالية شيء تعمله، فاسأل الطالب، "هل يفيدك \_\_\_\_\_؟ هل كنت "تفضل أن أعلمه لك بطريقة مختلفة؟
- قابل للتكيف. حسب مستوى الطالب وموضوع المحادثة، ربما ال يفهم الطالب إل 10% أو أقل! (من الكلمات التي تقولها. كن مستعداً لتكرارها أو قولها بأسلوب آخر أو إبطاء كالمك

### تعلم لغة جديدة صعب

س أن الطالب ليس بليداً أو أحمق بل ربما يكون دارساً وذكياً ولكن قدرته على التعبير عن المشاعر ● ال

تند الأفكار المعقدة محدودة بسبب قلة معرفته للمفردات الضرورية والقواعد لربطها في اللغة الجديدة التي يتعلمها. قد يشعر الطالب بالإحباط بسبب عجزه عن التواصل

- قد تشعر الطالب بالإرهاق بسبب كثرة التغيرات والاختلافات التي يختبرها لأول مرة، خصوصاً إن كانت لغتك وثقافتك جديدة عليه
- تكلم لغة جديدة متعب والحياة في ثقافة جديدة مليئة بالضغوط خصوصاً إن كان الطالب خجولاً. حاول أن تشجعه فأنت تلعب دوراً أساسياً في بناء ثقته بنفسه
- يتعلم الطالب عن ثقافتك مثلما يتعلم لغتك. قد يسألك الطالب أسئلة عن ثقافتك دون أن يدرك أنها غير معه وأخبره بأنك ثقافة اجتماعياً ولذلك قد تشعر بعدم الارتياح لإجابة عليها. إن حدث ذلك، فكن صادقاً لتراتح للحديث في الموضوع وأوضح له أن مثل هذه الأسئلة مرحجة وال يستحسن طرحها في مجتمعك. سوف يسعد بأنك أخبرته وساعدته على تفادي وضع محرج
- إن كنت تساعد أكثر من طالب، فال تقارنهم ببعضهم البعض على مسمع منهم ألن هذا سيضر ثقتههم بأنفسهم



سهم.

