

Standard for transcription from modern Arabic into Norwegian

عربي – نرويجي

Introduction

This standard applies to the transcription of place names and personal names from modern Arabic into Norwegian. It may also have other usages, however, such as transcribing Arabic words and terms. The standard adheres to the norm for Standard Arabic, which is common to all countries where Arabic is used as an official language.

Arabic is the most widespread of the Semitic languages and is spoken in most countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In addition, it is used and studied throughout the Islamic world. There is considerable variation among the dialects in the Arabic-speaking world, but the area as a whole has one common written standard – Standard Arabic (in Arabic: *al-arabiyya al-fusha* العربية الفصحى). This means that written texts follow the same standard, even though the different variants of spoken Arabic differ to such an extent that Arabic speakers do not necessarily understand each other.

The users' dialectal backgrounds will influence their pronunciation when speaking Standard Arabic, not only in spontaneous speech but also when reading text aloud. However, this very rarely has consequences for transcriptions of texts, with the exception of names of people and place names, where it is more common to allow dialectal pronunciation to prevail, including in more formal contexts. This standard has nonetheless chosen to follow Standard Arabic, with a certain amount of leeway in clearly specified cases.

The standard has been developed by Geir Skogseth, country advisor at Landinfo, and Gunvor Mejdell, Professor of Arabic at the University of Oslo.

General principles

Transcriptions of Arabic using Latin script are often rendered in a haphazard and inconsistent manner. This standard is intended to introduce some fairly simple principles that should be easy to implement in practice when rendering Arabic words and names in Norwegian.

Unlike in most Western European languages, there is a one-to-one relationship between written characters and their sounds in Standard Arabic. Written Arabic does not therefore use combinations of characters to produce a single sound. However, the pronunciation of some characters varies regionally. This variation is normally not indicated in Arabic script, in the same way that *r* is written in Norwegian even though some of us use an uvular trill (guttural *r*), while others do not.

The Latin characters used for transcribing Arabic into Norwegian are all present on a standard Norwegian keyboard. In order to produce a transcription that is closest to the standard form of written Norwegian, diacritics or letters that are not part of the Norwegian alphabet should not be used.

It is a prerequisite that the names of people rendered by the standard are recognisable to those they concern. This consideration suggests that special Nordic spellings should be avoided, both in terms of vowels and fricatives. The fact that names, when transcribed into Norwegian, should be recognisable to our European partners and to authorities in the applicants' home country supports the same approach. At the same time, it is important that names transcribed according to the standard work as well as possible in the Norwegian language community.

More advanced transcription follows a reversible system, meaning that it should be possible to transcribe each individual character back to the original script without modification. The Latin set of characters is therefore expanded using various diacritics to indicate precisely which Arabic character is referenced. Since this standard is a tool to be used by the Norwegian public administration when transcribing from Arabic into Norwegian, i.e. only in one direction, these characters are not used in this standard.

Consonants

In transcription, some Latin characters are used for more than one Arabic character (and sound), but this only applies to phonemic distinctions that do not exist in Norwegian:

Arabic characters rendered using the same characters in Latin script:

d	د - ض
dh	ذ - ظ - ض
g	ج - ق
h	ه - ح
s	س - ص - ث
t	ت - ط
z	ذ - ظ - ض - ز

Some Arabic characters are rendered using a combination of two letters in Latin script, the second always being *h*. ش is represented using *sh*, which is also found in a number of loanwords in Norwegian (*sherry, shipping, shoppe, shorts, show*). Otherwise, *th* is pronounced as in the English word *thing*, *dh* as in *this*, *kh* as in the German *ach* and *gh* as a uvular trill (guttural *r*).¹

Arabic characters rendered using two letters in Latin script:

th	ث
sh	ش
kh	خ
gh	غ
dh	ذ - ظ - ض

¹ Since it is not possible to use diacritics when transcribing into Norwegian, non-Arabic speakers may in some cases be uncertain about whether such combinations should be read as one or two sounds. When it comes to names, Fathi will tell us that the name is pronounced with a distinct *t* and *h*, while the *dh* in the name Kadhim is pronounced as one sound, as in the English word *this*.

In the transcription of Arabic (just as with Persian/Dari and Kurdish), *j* is used to render ج, because *j* has already been established with that pronunciation in several loanwords in Norwegian (such as *jeans* and *jersey* from English, and *jihad* from Arabic).

It is worth mentioning that Arabic, and other languages written in Arabic script, use double consonants. The practice is distinct from languages that use Latin script, as instead of writing two consonants consecutively, the symbol ّ (*tashdid*) is used above the letter that is to be pronounced as a double consonant. For example in the names عبد الله (Abdallah) and محمد (Muhammad). Consequently, letters with a *tashdid* must be transcribed as a double consonant, with the exception of *dh*, *gh*, *kh*, *sh*, *th* – i.e. consonants that are already transcribed using two characters in Norwegian.

Vowels

When it comes to vowels, only the vowel system found in Classical Arabic is used, i.e. the vowels *a*, *i* and *u* and the diphthongs *ay* and *aw*. The distinction in Arabic between long and short vowels is not indicated. Note that the diphthong *ay* should not be rendered as *ei*, to ensure that *i* always remains a pure vowel, while *y* is used only as a consonant. The vowel patterns should generally follow the Standard Arabic practice for names, other than where it becomes markedly different from ordinary pronunciation.²

Double vowels are not used in modern Norwegian, which means that long vowels cannot be expressed by doubling the same vowel. An example would be the name خلود, which is sometimes seen written *Khulood*, but becomes *Khulud* when transcribed into Norwegian, and محمود, which you will sometimes see written as *Mahmood*, but which becomes *Mahmud* in Norwegian.

The definite article

In standalone words and names that use the Arabic definite article, ال is generally transcribed as *al-*. The article is in lowercase, except when the word/name is the first element of a sentence. In Arabic pronunciation, *l* is assimilated in the definite article *al-* with the subsequent consonant sound, when the first consonant of the word with the definite article is *d*, *dh*, *n*, *r*, *s*, *sh*, *t*, *th* or *z*. It is then recommended that the transcription reflects the assimilation in pronunciation, i.e. *as-Saqi* for الساقي and *ad-Dariri* for الدريري.³

The vowel in the definite article should be transcribed as *a*, regardless of variations in pronunciation influenced by the Standard Arabic case system or dialectal pronunciation.

Proper names

When it comes to proper names, you will sometimes find significant variation in the way Arabic speakers choose to transcribe them.

² An example would be متولي, where it would be possible to choose the dialectal variant *Mitwalli* to replace the standard Arabic *Mutawalli*.

³ The variants *al-Saqi* and *al-Dariri* can also be used.

Transcribed names should reflect the written form in Standard Arabic, using the person's own name as registered in their Arabic-language ID papers. This also applies when the registered form of the name is a dialectal variant. Some examples include:

- Larbi for لعربي, but al-Arabi for العربي
- Brahim for براهم, but Ibrahim for ابراهيم
- Butaflia for بوتفليقة, but Abu Tafliqa for أبو تفليقة
- Binjallun for نجلون, but Ibn Jallun for ابن جلون
- Diyab for دياب, but Dhiab for ذئاب

When it comes to names, however, many Arabic speakers want the transcription of their names to reflect their own pronunciation, allowing for two to three alternatives for six Arabic consonant characters when transcribing names.⁴

Alternative transcriptions when adapting to the dialectal pronunciation of names:

Usually transcribed	Alternatively transcribed	Arabic character
th	t / s	ث
j	g (for Egyptians)	ج
dh	d / z	ذ
d	dh / z	ض
dh	d / z	ظ
q	g / k	ق

Thus, جمال from Iraq can be registered as *Jamal*, while his Egyptian namesake can be registered as *Gamal*. Likewise, ثريا can register her name as *Surayya*, if she points out that no one where she is from pronounces it *Thurayya*.

Arabic first names consisting of two parts, where the second part is preceded by the definite article in Arabic, should be transcribed as one word to indicate that it is a single and not multiple names. Examples include عبد الله (Abdallah), نور الدين (Nuraddin), عبد المسيح (Abdalmasih), عبد الرحمن (Abdarrahman) and صلاح الدين (Salahaddin).

A number of minority groups in Arab countries, particularly Christian and ethnic minorities (such as Kurds, Armenians, Persians, Turkmen, Berbers etc.), use names of non-Arab origin. In the case of bilingual ethnic minorities, such names may be transcribed in accordance with Arabic pronunciation (as above), or in accordance with the norms of the language in which they originate. Names originating from European languages (which is widespread among Christians in Arab countries) should follow the spelling in the European language from which it is borrowed, which means that جورج should be transcribed as *George* and not **Jurj*, بولة as *Paula* and not **Bawla* etc.

⁴ Less common variants, such as *y* for ج and *ch* as in the English word *champion* for ك, are not included as alternatives, because Arabic speakers who use these variants in their dialect usually pronounce them as *j* and *k* when talking to Arabic speakers with other dialects.

Standard for transcription

Consonants⁵

Norwegian character	Example		Arabic character
Not indicated	Usama	أسامة	ء
b	Badriyya	بدرية	ب
t	Tawfiq	توفيق	ت
th (s / t)	Thurayya (Surayya)	ثرية	ث
j (g)	Jamal (Gamal)	جمال	ج
h	Hasan	حسن	ح
kh	Khalid	خالد	خ
d	Daliya	داليا	د
dh (d / z)	Dhiyyab (Diyyab)	ذياب	ذ
r	Rashid	رشيد	ر
z	Zayn	زين	ز
s	Salwa	سلوى	س
sh	Shayma	شيماء	ش
s	Salih	صالح	ص
d (dh / z)	Diya (Dhiya/Ziya)	ضياء	ض
t	Tariq	طارق	ط
dh (d / z)	Dhahir (Dahir/Zahir)	ظاهر	ظ
Not indicated	Abdallah	عبد الله	ع
gh	Ghassan	غسان	غ
f	Fawziyya	فوزية	ف
q (g)	Qasim (Gasim)	قاسم	ق
k	Karim	كريم	ك
l	Latifa	لطيفة	ل
m	Manal	منال	م
n	Nabil	نبيل	ن
h	Hisham	هشام	ه
w – transcribed as <i>w</i> before a vowel or as part of the diphthong <i>aw</i>	Warda Fawzi	وردة فوزي	و
y – transcribed as <i>y</i> before a vowel or as part of the diphthong <i>ay</i>	Yusuf Suhayr	يوسف سهير	ي

⁵ Consonants should preferably be transcribed using the Norwegian character that is not in brackets (in line with Standard Arabic pronunciation), but the character in brackets may also be used when it better matches the common regional pronunciation. Where there are no brackets, there is no room for variation. Common regional pronunciation means the pronunciation that is widespread locally where the applicant originates from.

Vowels

Norwegian character	Example		Arabic character
a	Hasan	حَسَن	ـَ
i	Salih	صَالِح	ـِ
u	Umar	عُمَر	ـُ
a	Adil	عَادِل	ـَا
a	Musa	مُوسَى	ـَى
i	Shirin	شِيرِين	ـِي
u	Mahmud	مَحْمُود	ـُو
aw	Tawfiq	تَوَفِيق	ـَو
ay	Husayn	حُسَيْن	ـَي
a / u	Ashraf Usama	أَشْرَف أَسَامَةَ	أ
i	Ibrahim	إِبْرَاهِيم	إ
a	Adam	آدَم	آ
i	Aisha	عَائِشَةَ	ئ
u / a	Daud Fuad	دَاوُد فُوَاد	ؤ
a (e) ⁶	Fathiyya (Fathiyye)	فَتْحِيَّة	ة

The pronunciation of the Arabic *a* is somewhat brighter, i.e. more frontal (towards *æ*), than Norwegian *a*, but *e* should nonetheless be avoided in transcription. This also applies to *e* and *ee* for *i* (both unstressed and stressed) and similarly *o* and *ou* for *u*. The diphthong *ay* should not be transcribed as *ei*.

Other characters

Norwegian character	Example		Arabic character
	Hind	هِنْد	ـِ
Double consonant	Muhammad	مَحْمَد	ـِ

⁶ The transcription depends on the person's dialectal pronunciation, which means that *e* should only be used when the person has a regional dialect that uses *imala* (إمالة). This is primarily used in Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian dialects.

The 100 most widely used Arabic male names

In the order of the Norwegian alphabet

Abbas عباس (21)	Habib حبيب (91)	Muhammad محمّد (1)
Abdalaziz عبد العزيز (12)	Hamad حمد (69)	Muhsin محسن (48)
Abdalfatah عبد الفتاح (27)	Hamd حمد (69)	Musa موسى (41)
Abdalghani عبد الغني (86)	Hamdi حمدي (71)	Mustafa مصطفى (9)
Abdalhadi عبد الهادي (90)	Hamid حامد (30)	Nabil نبيل (89)
Abdalhalim عبد الحليم (100)	Hamid حميد (55)	Nasir ناصر (31)
Abdalhamid عبد الحميد (18)	Hammud حمّود (94)	Qasim قاسم (59)
Abdalkarim عبد الكريم (37)	Hamud حمود (94)	Ramadan رمضان (57)
Abdallah عبد الله (7)	Hasan حسن (5)	Rashid رشيد (99)
Abdallatif عبد اللطيف (39)	Hashim هاشم (80)	Sad سعد (23)
Abdalmajid عبد المجيد (51)	Hilmi حلمي (98)	Sadiq صادق (84)
Abdalmunim عبد المنعم (35)	Hisham هشام (81)	Said سعيد (11)
Abdalqadir عبد القادر (32)	Husayn حسين (8)	Salah صلاح (61)
Abdalwahhab عبد الوهاب (46)	Ibrahim ابراهيم (4)	Salih صالح (10)
Abdarrahim عبد الرحيم (75)	Id عيد (97)	Salim سالم (19)
Abdarrahman عبد الرحمن (13)	Isa عيسى (66)	Salim سليم (74)
Abdarrazzaq عبد الرزاق (79)	Isam عصام (87)	Salman سلمان (60)
Abdassalam عبد السلام (38)	Ismail إسماعيل (15)	Sami سامي (72)
Abduh عبده (29)	Jabir جابر (83)	Samir سمير (56)
Adil عادل (34)	Jafar جعفر (95)	Sayyid سيّد (20)
Ahmad أحمد (2)	Jamal جمال (43)	Shaban شعبان (96)
Ali علي (3)	Jamil جميل (65)	Sharif شريف (93)
Amin أمين (33)	Jasim جاسم (25)	Sulayman سليمان (17)
Ashraf أشرف (28)	Jawad جواد (76)	Taha طه (58)
Atiyya عطية (45)	Juma جمعة (73)	Tariq طارق (50)
Aziz عزيز (88)	Kadhim كاظم (52)	Tawfiq توفيق (53)
Awd عوض (62)	Kamal كمال (44)	Umar عمر (22)
Ayman أيمن (63)	Kamil كامل (42)	Usama أسامة (77)
Daud داود (78)	Khalaf خلف (92)	Uthman عثمان (40)
Fahmi فهمي (82)	Khalid خالد (16)	Yahya يحيى (26)
Faraj فرج (70)	Khalf خلف (92)	Yasir ياسر (85)
Faruq فاروق (64)	Khalil خليل (24)	Yusuf يوسف (14)
Fathi فتحي (36)	Mahdi مهدي (54)	Zaki زكي (68)
Fawzi فوزي (67)	Mahmud محمود (6)	
Fuad فؤاد (49)	Mansur منصور (47)	

In the order of the Arabic alphabet

Ibrahim إبراهيم	Sad سعد	Uthman عثمان
Ahmad أحمد	Said سعيد	Aziz عزيز
Usama أسامة	Salman سلمان	Isam عصام
Ismail إسماعيل	Salim سليم	Atiyya عطية
Ashraf أشرف	Sulayman سليمان	Ali علي
Amin أمين	Samir سمير	Umar عمر
Ayman أيمن	Sayyid سيّد	Awd عوض
Tawfiq توفيق	Sharif شريف	Id عيد
Jabir جابر	Shaban شعبان	Isa عيسى
Jasim جاسم	Sadiq صادق	Faruq فاروق
Jafar جعفر	Salih صالح	Fathi فتحي
Jamal جمال	Salah صلاح	Faraj فرج
Juma جمعة	Tariq طارق	Fahmi فهمي
Jamil جميل	Taha طه	Fuad فؤاد
Jawad جواد	Adil عادل	Fawzi فوزي
Hamid حامد	Abbas عباس	Qasim قاسم
Habib حبيب	Abdhalim عبد الحليم	Kadhim كاظم
Hasan حسن	Abdalhamid عبد الحميد	Kamil كامل
Husayn حسين	Abdarrahman عبد الرحمن	Kamal كمال
Hilmi حلمي	Abdarrahim عبد الرحيم	Muhsin محسن
Hamad / Hamd حمد	Abdarrazzaq عبد الرزّاق	Muhammad محمد
Hamdi حمدي	Abdassalam عبد السلام	Mahmud محمود
Hamud حمود	Abdalaziz عبد العزيز	Mustafa مصطفى
Hammud حمّود	Abdalghani عبد الغني	Mansur منصور
Hamid حميد	Abdalfatah عبد الفتاح	Mahdi مهدي
Khalid خالد	Abdalkarim عبد الكريم	Musa موسى
Khalaf / Khalf خلف	Abdallah عبد الله	Nabil نبيل
Khalil خليل	Abdallatif عبد اللطيف	Nasir ناصر
Daud داود	Abdalqadir عبد القادر	Hashim هاشم
Rashid رشيد	Abdalmajid عبد المجيد	Hisham هشام
Ramadan رمضان	Abdalmunim عبد المنعم	Yasir ياسر
Zaki زكي	Abdalahdi عبد الهادي	Yahya يحيى
Salim سالم	Abdalwahhab عبد الوهاب	Yusuf يوسف
Sami سامي	Abduh عبده	

The 100 most widely used Arabic women's names

In the order of the Norwegian alphabet

Abir عبير (10)	Huyam هيام (66)	Nabila نبيلة (63)
Afaf عفاف (43)	Ibtisam ابتسام (35)	Nadiya نادية (13)
Ahlam أحلام (62)	Ihsan إحسان (85)	Nadya نادية (13)
Aida عائدة (68)	Ilham إلهام (41)	Nahid ناهد (32)
Aisha عائشة (40)	Iman إيمان (2)	Nahla نهلة (53)
Amal أمل (1)	Inas إيناس (42)	Naima نعيمة (69)
Amal آمال (12)	Intisar انتصار (48)	Naja نجا (58)
Amani أماني (14)	Ismat عصمت (100)	Najah نجاح (77)
Amina أمينة (45)	Izza عزة (9)	Najla نجلاء (21)
Amira أميرة (39)	Jamila جميلة (51)	Najwa نجوى (38)
Amna أمنة (81)	Jihan جيهان (16)	Nasrin نسرين (95)
Asma أسماء (50)	Karima كريمة (55)	Nawal نوال (54)
Awatif عواطف (75)	Khadija خديجة (59)	Nevin ⁹ نيفين (47)
Aziza عزيزة (56)	Lamya لمياء (80)	Nifin نيفين (47)
Azza عزة (9)	Latifa لطيفة (73)	Nima نعمة (90)
Badriyya بدرية (65)	Layla ليلي (30)	Nura نورة (67)
Daliya داليا (83)	Madiha مديحة (88)	Raja رجاء (74)
Dua دعاء (87)	Maha مها (26)	Rida رضا (20)
Fathiyya فتحية (52)	Majda ماجدة (29)	Sabah صباح (25)
Fatima فاطمة (5)	Majida ماجدة (29)	Sadiyya سعدية (97)
Fatin فاتن (49)	Manal منال (6)	Safa صفاء (23)
Fatma فاطمة (5)	Mari ماري (86)	Sahar سحر (7)
Fawziyya فوزية (44)	Mary ⁷ ماري (86)	Salwa سلوى (22)
Fayiza فايضة (61)	Maryam مريم (31)	Samah سماح (94)
Fayza فايضة (61)	Mervat ⁸ ميرفت (17)	Samar سمر (89)
Ghada غادة (27)	Mirfat ميرفت (17)	Samira سميرة (37)
Hala هالة (8)	Muna منى (4)	Samiya سامية (24)
Hamida حميدة (99)	Munira منيرة (71)	Samiyya سمية (72)
Hana هناء (18)		Samya سامية (24)
Hanan حنان (3)	<hr/> ⁷ The name is borrowed from English and can therefore be rendered as both <i>Mari</i> (Arabic pronunciation and close to the Norwegian form) and <i>Mary</i> (English spelling).	Sana سناء (36)
Hanim هانم (92)		Saniyya سنية (91)
Haya حياة (96)	⁸ The name is borrowed from Turkish and can therefore be rendered as both <i>Mirfat</i> (Arabic pronunciation) and <i>Mervat</i> (Turkish pronunciation and spelling).	Sawsan سوسن (60)
Hiba هبة (57)		
Hikmat حكمت (98)		<hr/> ⁹ The name is borrowed from Persian and can therefore be rendered as both <i>Nifin</i> (Arabic pronunciation) and <i>Nevin</i> (approximate Persian pronunciation).
Hind هند (78)		
Huda هدى (11)		
Huwayda هويدا (76)		

Shirin شيرين (64)
Siham سهام (34)
Suad سعاد (28)
Suhayr سهير (33)
Sumayya سمية (72)

Suniyya سنوية (91)
Suzan سوزان (70)
Thana ثناء (82)
Thurayya ثريا (84)
Ula علا (79)

Umayma أميمة (46)
Wafa وفاء (15)
Zahra زهرة (93)
Zaynab زينب (19)

In the order of the Arabic alphabet

Ibtisam ابتسام	Sadiyya سعديّة	Majida / Majda ماجدة
Ihsan إحسان	Salwa سلوى	Mari / Mary ماري
Ahlam أحلام	Samah سماح	Madiha مديحة
Asma أسماء	Samar سمر	Maryam مريم
Ilham إلهام	Samira سميرة	Muna منى
Amal آمال	Samiyya / Sumayya سمية	Manal منال
Amani أماني	Sana سناء	Munira منيرة
Amal أمل	Saniyya / Suniyya سنوية	Maha مها
Amna أمنة	Siham سهام	Mirfat / Mervat ميرفت
Amira أميرة	Suhayr سهير	Nadiya / Nadya نادية
Umayma أميمة	Suzan سوزان	Nahid ناهد
Amina أمينة	Sawsan سوسن	Nabila نبيلة
Intisar انتصار	Shirin شيرين	Najah نجاح
Iman إيمان	Sabah صباح	Naja نجاة
Inas إيناس	Safa صفاء	Najla نجلاء
Badriyya بدريّة	Aida عائدة	Najwa نجوى
Thurayya ثريا	Aisha عائشة	Nasrin نسرين
Thana ثناء	Abir عبير	Nima نعمة
Jamila جميلة	Aziza عزيزة	Naima نعيمة
Jihan جيهان	Azza / Izza عزة	Nahla نهلة
Hikmat حكمت	Ismat عصمت	Nawal نوال
Hamida حميدة	Afaf عفاف	Nura نورة
Hanan حنان	Ula علا	Nifin / Nevin نيفين
Haya حياة	Awatif عواطف	Hala هالة
Khadija خديجة	Ghada غادة	Hanim هانم
Daliya داليا	Fatin فاتن	Hiba هبة
Dua دعاء	Fatima / Fatma فاطمة	Huda هدى
Raja رجا	Fayiza / Fayza فايزة	Hana هناء
Rida رضا	Fathiyya فتحيّة	Hind هند
Zahra زهرة	Fawziyya فوزيّة	Huwayda هويدا
Zaynab زينب	Karima كريمة	Huyam هيام
Samiya / Samya سامية	Latifa لطيفة	Wafa وفاء
Sahar سحر	Lamyia لمياء	
Suad سعاد	Layla ليلي	