

1 Definite and Indefinite Nouns, and the Nominal Sentence

A The Noun in Arabic

Arabic nouns are either *indefinite* or *definite*.

Indefinite nouns take a tanwīn on their final letter, and are generally translated into English using the word 'a':

a boy	وَلَدٌ
a book	كِتَابٌ
a man	رَجُلٌ

To make these nouns definite, we remove the tanwīn and fix the word **الْ** to the beginning of the word. This is generally translated using the word 'the':

the boy	الْوَلَدُ
the book	الْكِتَابُ
the man	الرَّجُلُ

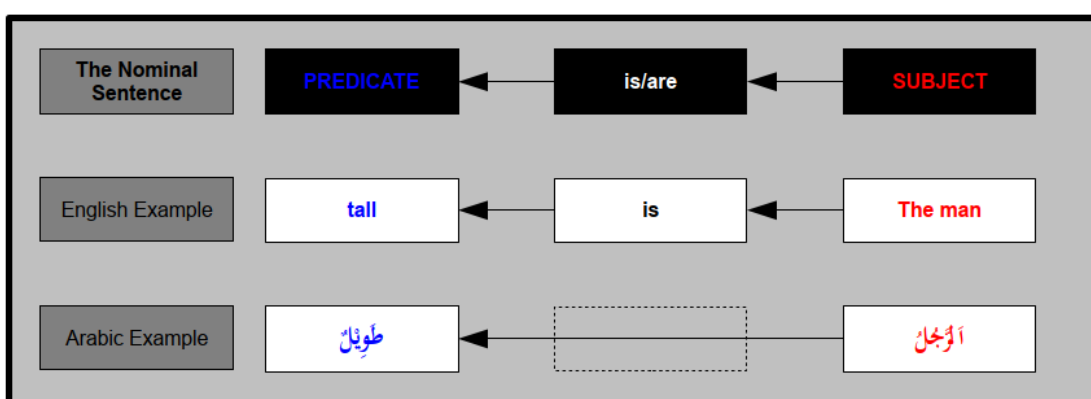
Unlike in English, adjectives in Arabic are also either definite or indefinite, just like the nouns. We'll come back to this point in the next chapter.

B The Nominal Sentence

The most basic sentence in Arabic is called the *nominal sentence*. This is of the form 'X is/are Y', such as 'The boy is tall', or 'The books are big.'

X is usually a definite noun, and is known as the *subject*. Y is usually an indefinite noun or an indefinite adjective, and is called the *predicate*.

This is illustrated below. Note that in Arabic we don't have a word for 'is/are' in the nominal sentence.



Consider the following nominal sentences:

The door	is	big	أَبَابٌ كَبِيرٌ
The man	is	a teacher	الرَّجُلُ أَسْتَاذٌ

C The Singular Detached Pronouns

We can replace the subject of a nominal sentence with a *pronoun*. For example, rather than saying 'The man is tall', we might want to say, 'He is tall'. The Arabic pronouns we use for this replacement are called the *detached pronouns*.

Detached pronouns are fully covered in Chapter 8; only the singular forms are given here. Note there are different words for 'you' in Arabic for addressing a male and a female person. We'll differentiate in English by using *SRm* (singular masculine) and *SRf* (singular feminine) in subscript.

I	أَنَا ¹
youSRm	أَنْتَ
youSRf	أَنْتِ
he/it ²	هُوَ
she/it	هِيَ

Consider the following sentences:

YouSRm are tall	أَنْتَ طَوِيلٌ
He is short	هُوَ قَصِيرٌ
I am young	أَنَا صَغِيرٌ

D Using 'And' in the Nominal Sentence

The word for 'and' in Arabic is **وَ**. Its use in the nominal sentence is very intuitive. Consider the following nominal sentences, each of which has more than one predicate (note that we write the **وَ** together with the following word, without a space between them):

The door is big and beautiful	الْبَابُ كَبِيرٌ وَجَمِيلٌ
The man is a teacher and a student	الرَّجُلُ أُسْتَاذٌ وَطَالِبٌ
The street is long and wide	الشَّارِعُ طَوِيلٌ وَوَاسِعٌ

¹The **ا** of **أَنَا** is silent, so it is pronounced as if it were: **أَنَّ**.

²Note that there is no separate pronoun for 'it'. Instead, we just use **هُوَ** or **هِيَ** depending on whether the subject being referred to is masculine or feminine respectively (see Chapter 3).

'And' can also be used to link two nominal sentences together:

The sea is big and the river is small

الْبَحْرُ كَبِيرٌ وَالنَّهْرُ صَغِيرٌ

The man is a teacher and the boy is a student

الرَّجُلُ أَسْتَاذٌ وَالْوَلَدُ طَالِبٌ

The chair is old and the door is new

الْكُرْسِيُّ قَدِيمٌ وَالْبَابُ جَدِيدٌ

Vocabulary

man PL	رَجُلٌ رِجَالٌ
boy, son PL	وَلَدٌ أَوْلَادٌ
teacher PL	أُسْتَاذٌ أَسَاتِذَةٌ
student 2PLS ³	طَالِبٌ طُلَّابٌ ، طَلَبَةٌ
river PL	نَهْرٌ أَنْهَارٌ
sea 2PLS	بَحْرٌ بَحَارٌ ، أَبْحُرٌ
book PL	كِتَابٌ كُتُبٌ
street PL	شَارِعٌ شَوَارِعٌ ⁴
chair PL	كُرْسِيٌّ كُرَاسِيٌّ
door; chapter PL	بَابٌ أَبْوَابٌ
the Nile	النَّيْلُ
big, great PL ⁵	كَبِيرٌ كِبَارٌ
small, young PL	صَغِيرٌ صِبْغَارٌ
old, ancient PL	قَدِيمٌ قَدَمَاءٌ
new 2PLS	جَدِيدٌ جُدُدٌ ، جُدُدٌ
long, tall PL	طَوِيلٌ طَوَالٌ

³A single Arabic word may have a number of plurals. This is true of a few English words too (e.g. the plurals of *antenna* are *antennas* and *antennae*, the plurals of *fungus* are *fungi* and *funguses*), but is much more common in Arabic.

⁴Notice that unlike most of the other words here, شَوَارِعٌ doesn't have a tanwīn ending. Such words are called *diptotes*, and will be covered in *Basic Arabic Grammar: Part B*. For now, treat such words like any other, except that they **must never have a tanwīn ending**. You will also encounter other odd-looking plurals in the vocabulary lists (e.g. أَرْضٌ in Chapter 3 and فُرَى in Chapter 10); these words should of course be learnt, but will be dealt with in *Basic Arabic Grammar: Part B*.

⁵Many Arabic adjectives have plurals. This is needed for agreement between nouns and adjectives (see Chapter 7).

short PL	قَصِيْرٌ قِصَاْرٌ
beautiful, handsome PL	جَمِيْلٌ جَمَالٌ
broken	مَكْسُوْرٌ
broad, wide	وَاسِعٌ

Translation Exercises

Exercise 1A

رَجُلٌ وَوَلَدٌ.	١
الْأُسْتَاذُ وَالطَّالِبُ.	٢
الْأُسْتَاذُ جَدِيدٌ.	٣
أَنَا طَوِيلٌ.	٤
النَّيْلُ قَدِيمٌ.	٥
النَّيْلُ تَهْرٌ.	٦
الْبَحْرُ كَبِيرٌ.	٧
الْبَابُ قَدِيمٌ وَمَكْسُورٌ.	٨
الْكِتَابُ قَدِيمٌ وَجَمِيلٌ.	٩
الطَّالِبُ صَغِيرٌ. هُوَ قَصِيرٌ.	١٠
الْكُرْسِيُّ طَوِيلٌ. هُوَ جَمِيلٌ.	١١
الْوَلَدُ صَغِيرٌ وَجَمِيلٌ.	١٢
الْبَابُ كَبِيرٌ وَوَاسِعٌ وَجَمِيلٌ.	١٣
أَنْتَ رَجُلٌ وَأَنَا وَلَدٌ.	١٤
السَّارِعُ جَدِيدٌ وَقَصِيرٌ وَالنَّهْرُ قَدِيمٌ وَطَوِيلٌ.	١٥

Exercise 1B

1. The river and the sea.
2. A book and a chair.
3. The street is long.
4. He is a boy.
5. The Nile is ancient.
6. I am a student and you_{SRm} are a teacher.

7. The door is tall.
8. The sea is small and beautiful.
9. The door is beautiful. It is big.
10. The boy is young and short.
11. The man is big and the boy is tall.
12. YouSRm are tall and he is short.
13. The chair is big, old and broken⁶.
14. The teacher is tall and the student is short.
15. The book is small and new, and the chapter is short and beautiful.

⁶This should be translated as if it were: 'The chair is big **and** old **and** broken.' As a general rule, in Arabic we use و to separate items in a list like the three predicates in this example, where in English we would use commas.

Answer Key

Exercise 1A

1. A man and a boy.
2. The teacher and the student.
3. The teacher is new.
4. I am tall.
5. The Nile is ancient.
6. The Nile is a river.
7. The sea is big.
8. The door is old and broken.
9. The book is old and beautiful.
10. The student is young. He is short.
11. The chair is tall. It is beautiful.
12. The boy is small and beautiful.
13. The door is big and wide and beautiful.
14. You_{SRm} are a man and I am a boy.
15. The street is new and short, and the river is old and long.

Exercise 1B

- ١ النَّهْرُ وَالْبَحْرُ.
- ٢ كِتَابٌ وَكُرْسِيٌّ.
- ٣ الشَّارِعُ طَوِيلٌ.
- ٤ هُوَ وَوَلَدٌ.
- ٥ الْبَيْتُ قَدِيمٌ.
- ٦ أَنَا طَالِبٌ وَأَنْتَ أَسْتَاذٌ.
- ٧ الْبَابُ طَوِيلٌ.
- ٨ الْبَحْرُ صَغِيرٌ وَجَمِيلٌ.
- ٩ الْبَابُ جَمِيلٌ. هُوَ كَبِيرٌ.
- ١٠ الْوَلَدُ صَغِيرٌ وَقَصِيرٌ.
- ١١ الرَّجُلُ كَبِيرٌ وَالْوَلَدُ طَوِيلٌ.

- ١٢ أَنْتَ طَوِيلٌ وَهُوَ قَصِيرٌ.
- ١٣ الْكُرْسِيُّ كَبِيرٌ وَقَدِيمٌ وَمَكْسُورٌ.
- ١٤ الْأُسْتَاذُ طَوِيلٌ وَالطَّالِبُ قَصِيرٌ.
- ١٥ الْكِتَابُ صَغِيرٌ وَجَدِيدٌ وَالْبَابُ قَصِيرٌ وَجَمِيلٌ.