



**Tutorial Handbook of  
Early Arabic Kufic Script**  
Reading, Writing, and Calligraphy

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

WRITING KUFIC WITH THE QALAM AND THE ORDINARY PEN.	1
Calligraphic Styles	3
The Kufic Alphabet	4
GUIDE TO THE BOOK	5
CUTTING THE QALAM	6
INTRODUCTION TO WRITING KUFIC	9
WRITING KUFIC WITH AN ORDINARY PEN	10
HOLDING AND MANIPULATING THE QALAM	11
1. The Normal Position	11
2. The Shallow-Tip Position	11
3. The Steep-Tip Position	12
4. The Dipped Position	12
5. The Detail Position	12
6. The Stub Position	12
7. The Point Downwards Position	12
WRITING HABITS	12
WRITING THE LETTERS	13
LETTER TYPES	14
1- Letters with Long Horizontals	14
2- The Sub Circular Letters	14
3- The Vertical and Toothed Letters	14
Alif	15
Bā'	15
Jīm	16
Ṣād	17
Dāl	18
Rā'	19
Shīn	20
Mīm	21
'Ayn	21

Fāʾ	22
Wāw	23
Yāʾ	24
Qāf	25
Nūn	26
Kāf	27
Hāʾ	28
Ṭāʾ	29
Lām	30
Lām-Alif Ligature	31
PRONUNCIATION GUIDES (TASHKIL)	32
Short-Vowel Markers (Harakāt)	32
Tanwīn	32
Shaddah, Hamzah, Sukun, Waslah	32
GLOSSARY	34
Equipment	34
Parts of the Qalam	34
Parts of the letters	34
Diacriticals	35
EXAMPLES TO COPY	36



Decorative Kufic



Turkish Naskhi



Square Kufic

Decorative Kufic



Decorative Kufic



Thuluth



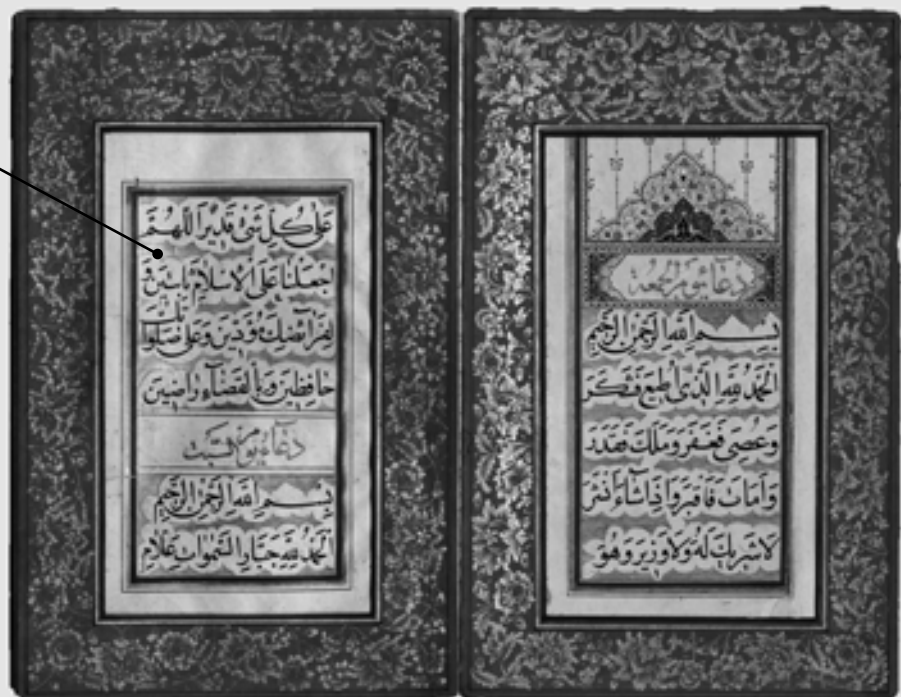
Primary Kufic

















































Turkish Naskhi


























































Farsi Naskhi



## The Kufic Alphabet

Name	Isolated	Final	Middle	Initial
Alif				
Bā'				
Tā'				
Thā'				
Jīm				
Ḥā'				
Khā'				
Dāl				
Dhāl				
Rā'				
Zāy				
Sīn				
Shīn				
Ṣād				



Name	Isolated	Final	Middle	Initial
Ḍād				
Ṭā'				
Zā'				
'Ayn				
Ghayn				
Fā'				
Qāf				
Kāf, 				
Lām				
Mīm				
Nūn				
Wāw				
Hā'				
Yā'				



# **Guide to the Book**

We are pleased to present this new book containing Master Vahid's method for learning how to write the Primary Kufic script. Primary Kufic can be written with a contemporary qalam (reed pen), and it can be written with a contemporary ordinary pen (such as ball point, felt tip or gel pen), but to achieve the most authentic and creatively relevant results it is best to write with the qalam that was designed especially for this script in the 2nd to 3rd century AH (8th to 9th century AD). The first section of the book therefore explains how to cut that qalam.

As you will see, the historic qalam is unique in that it has a sub triangular writing surface with a curved upper edge. This is what allowed the ancient calligraphers to produce the perfect curved tips at either end of many of the letter strokes. It also facilitated making clean corners, smooth outlines, and fine details, all of which are achieved by rotating and rocking the qalam into different positions. This is one of the reasons why writing Primary Kufic is a slow process. Or perhaps it is, rather, one of the ways of making sure that Primary Kufic is written slowly and carefully, as befits a sacred script developed for the accurate and respectful recording of the Qur'an.

In fact, knowledge of this cut was lost for centuries as the Primary Kufic script fell out of use and was replaced by bureaucratic book hands that ultimately gave rise to the contemporary written and printed scripts like Naskhi. It was Master Vahid who rediscovered it in 1993 and dedicated himself to researching the script, perfecting his own work in Primary Kufic, and teaching his method to others.

After the section on cutting the qalam, the book goes on to discuss the aesthetic and evaluative criteria for the Primary Kufic script and how these are connected with the use of this particular qalam. It introduces the concept of writing Kufic with an ordinary pen and the issues and resolutions associated with this. Some of these issues, such as the requirement for lavish ink use (which may not have been anticipated by western calligraphers) apply to both the qalam and the ordinary pen.

Since the nuances and details of Primary Kufic are largely achieved through a continual change in the position of the qalam, the next section identifies several useful qalam positions that can then be indicated in the instructional section without the need to describe them each time.

This is followed by the instructional section that explains how to write the letters. In the Arabic alphabet there are several "families" of similar letters that differ only by the number of i'jām (consonant markers). One example from each of these families is explained fully and the student may then easily apply the

necessary i'jām as needed. The instructions focus on the use of the qalam first, and then turn to the use of an ordinary pen. There is then a section on the short-vowel markers (also known as vowelation, or pointing) and other diacriticals, where their placement for each alphabetic letter is made clear, and one on the three letter types.

Finally, there is a short glossary in four sections. The first identifies the terms used in this text for the equipment. The second identifies the terms used in this text for the parts of a qalam. The third identifies the terms used in this text for parts of the letters. The fourth identifies the terms for the diacriticals.



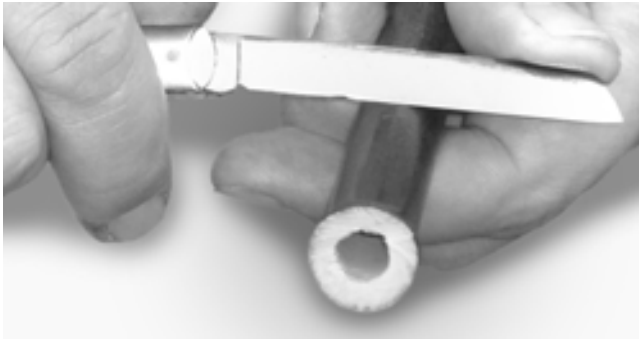
# Cutting the Qalam

Kufic can be written with an ordinary pen, as we show in the section about forming the letters. However to write this script in the most authentic and creatively relevant way, it is best to use the correct qalam, which differs from the qalam used for contemporary Arabic scripts, so it is useful to be able to cut it for yourself. Note that it has a subtriangular tip with a slightly dished upper edge (that is, the edge formed by the outside of the hollow reed). In this section we show how to cut that qalam.

1. It is important to use a well made, strong qalam, as a weak one will gradually lose its shape and spoil the quality of the calligraphy. The ideal qalam is made of hollow reed and its strength derives from the thickness of its walls. So the best and strongest qalam is made from a reed with thick walls. Qalams of this kind were certainly available in the geographic regions where Primary Kufic was developed. If reed is not available, a suitably thick wand of strong wood can be used instead, although we do not recommend this.

2. Use the pen knife to cut a curve into the end of the reed. Shave off several slices to deepen the cut. This will be the lower edge.

3. Continue until the inner surface of the wall at the tip of the reed is flat.



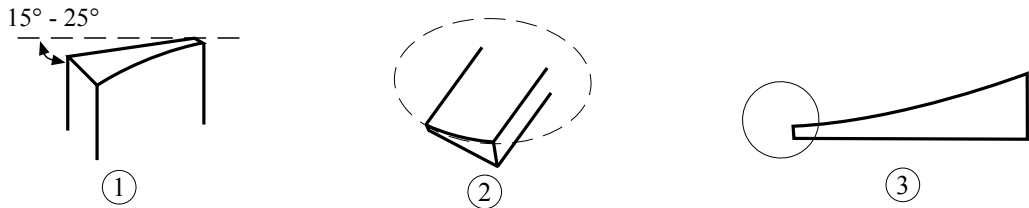


4. Now narrow the tip by shaving off slices from each side until it reaches the desired width.

5. Flatten the outer profile of the tip by shaving down the outer surface of the reed. When this has been slightly dished with sandpaper (photograph below), it will be the upper edge.

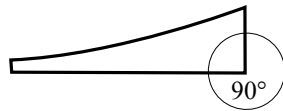
6. The tip has an almost triangular cross section, which is made by shaving down the inner edge at an angle (see diagram 1, the inner edge is to the left). That angle will vary slightly according to the calligrapher's preference and experience. However, a good rule of thumb for the novice is to shave the tip down by about  $15^\circ$  to  $25^\circ$ . Diagram 2 shows how the cross section of the qalam widens gradually (the upper or outer edge is at the top, note that it is dished), and diagram 3 emphasizes that the narrow side of the qalam does not taper to a point but keeps a little thickness for strength (again, the upper or outer edge is at the top). Take this stage slowly and work with as much precision as possible.





7. Note also that there are two important right angles on the tip of the qalam:

- The first is between the lower edge and the side at the thick end of the tip.



- The second is the angle between the tip and the page when the qalam is lying flat.



8. These right angles or near right angles have a great impact on the smoothness with which the qalam can be used and the cleanness of the outlines that can be achieved with it.

9. Dish the upper edge of the qalam tip with sandpaper, as in the middle photograph. The final photograph shows the completed qalam.

10. The qalam should now be tested by dipping it in ink and touching the page with the entire writing surface. It should produce a line that is slightly thicker at one end with a curved upper edge:



This method of cutting the qalam gives it a unique profile that facilitates the production of good Primary Kufic calligraphy. It was never an obligatory cut – a straight edged qalam could be used instead – but there is no question that this is the cut that was used to produce the best Primary Kufic manuscripts, especially during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH (8th and 9th centuries AD).

Now we are ready to think about the Primary Kufic script itself. Why it must be written slowly, how to produce the letters, and reminders for good writing habits. These are discussed in the next section.





# **Introduction to Writing Kufic**



Islam was adopted into a culture that was primarily oral, and the Arabic language is written phonetically. As a result, its spelling is remarkably consistent. This contrasts with English, for example, which has a multitude of spelling variants for similar sounds, owing to their adoption from other languages with different spelling conventions. However, written Arabic did not originally include all the sounds needed to speak it. Just as, today, westerners can infer complete words from abbreviations, so the ancient Arabs could infer the complete words from their consonant structure alone. In fact, the Arabic language uses three long vowels, which are treated as alphabetic characters so these did appear in the ancient texts. But the matching sets of short-vowels were missing, and even today they are generally not written unless the text would be unclear without them. There was a further difficulty in that the Arabic alphabet was adopted from the similarly phonetic Nabatean alphabet, which only had 22 characters. Since Arabic needs 28 characters, some letters had to be used twice or three times to represent different sounds. Originally, there was no way to tell these apart except through complete familiarity with the language.

The Primary Kufic script style was developed for recording the Qur'an with the utmost clarity while maintaining its character as an unceasing flow of mercy from the Almighty. As we have seen, it was originally written without diacriticals (short-vowel markers, consonant markers, pronunciation guides) as these were not needed in an oral society with a common language. As Islam spread, however, and new cultural groups began to recite the Qur'an, not only did varying local "accents" begin to develop but those for whom Arabic was a second or foreign language could not infer the complete words without guides to the pronunciation. It took a couple of centuries to resolve this difficulty, but by the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) a system of short-vowel markers (*harakāt*), followed by today's system of consonant markers (*i'jām*) was in place to clarify the letters. The Primary Kufic explained in this text, therefore, includes those all those later diacriticals for clarity. The *i'jām* will be explained with the letters, because they are unchanging structural parts of these letters. The short-vowel markers will have a section of their own after the alphabetic letters.

Probably because it was developed in connection with recording the Qur'an, Primary Kufic was designed to be written slowly, with full respect for the letter forms and for their mystical realities. This shows in two major ways in any Primary Kufic text. Firstly, the style itself is rectilinear. The preponderance of straight lines prevents the writer from building up speed and encourages a proper focus of attention on the act of writing. Secondly, the syllables are evenly spaced so that no reader can "skim" the text in haste. It must be properly read in order

for the reader to re-assemble the syllables into complete words. Thus, both the writer and the reader must give a proper attention and respect to the text that is written in Primary Kufic.

Complementing these two major signals of the solemnity of the text, are nuances that will only be appreciated by a reader of Arabic. The first of these is that the writer's skill is not shown by uniformity but by an appropriate creative range in the letter forms and in the distribution of the text over the page. Each letter form, therefore, has several variants in addition to those familiar from more modern Arabic scripts such as Nastealigh and Naskhi. In those scripts, of course, most letters have different forms depending on whether they appear at the beginning, middle, or end of the word, or in isolation. That is, up to four forms per letter. In the Primary Kufic script, some the letters have further variants that the scribe can use as the basis for his or her own creative variety within the text.

The second important nuance in the Primary Kufic script is the balance of curves and tapers in each letter, and to achieve these, the writer must hold the pen correctly: that is to say, at an angle of about 90° to the page. This angle is another way of ensuring that the writer adopts a properly respectful pace as he or she writes, as it forces the writer to learn to make the letters without leaning on the page. It takes focused attention to make this a habit and to develop steadiness of hand when it has almost no support.

A third crucially important nuance is that although many letters in the Primary Kufic script consist of several strokes, the well-produced script will look like the natural progress of a single stately stroke, albeit one that divides and even comes back together from time to time. This appearance is achieved through superlative qalam control so that the overlapping and meeting strokes look continuous. It is also achieved through a lavish use of ink, which makes the letters very dark and dense and encourages the pools of ink to join and blend with each other.

All these considerations – the respectful pace, the balance of the text on the page, the correct and yet creative nuancing of the text with variant letter forms, appropriate curves and tapers, smoothly flowing letter forms – are demonstrated below. They are shown as each letter is explained and in example texts that should be examined in detail until the nuancing is understood and appreciated.



**Writing Kufic with an ordinary pen**

Historically, Kufic is written with a traditional qalam, a reed pen with a sub-triangular tip that produces a thick stroke that can be nuanced for the different letters. The sub circular letters, like wāw, fā', qāf , and hā' include perfectly round pinhole spaces at the center. This is an important aspect of the letters and achieving it demonstrates the skill of the calligrapher with the qalam.

Kufic can also be written with an ordinary pen, although the visual effect is very different as the strokes are thin and uniform in thickness. This has two important results.

Firstly, the proportional system will be different. The nib or ballpoint of the pen will make a point that is too small to regulate the letter sizes. Instead, the distance between two baselines becomes the standard measure. The height of the tall letters is a full standard measure. Horizontal letters such as bā', and the horizontal parts of letters like sād, occupy one third of this standard measure, while the sub circular letters occupy one half of this standard measure. The same standard measure is used to determine the horizontal width of the letters.

Secondly, writing Kufic in this way will not produce the pinhole spaces at the center of the sub circular letters, so when writing with an ordinary pen it is important to add a dot to the center of these letters, to replace the pinhole that should, ideally, be there.

For those accustomed to writing from left to right, two further points should be noted.

1. In western writing, the pen is pulled from left to right, and the calligrapher can therefore work with a drier pen. In Primary Kufic, the qalam is pushed instead. As a result both the qalam and the ordinary pen need a greater ink flow than is usual in the west. Experiment to find the kind of pen that works with the Kufic script.

2. In western writing, the structure of each letter is made with downward and horizontal strokes. Upward strokes are generally only used for light and optional connector strokes. As a result, the pen can be held quite lightly. However, in Primary Kufic, upward strokes are also used to make the structure of the letters. As a result, both the qalam and the ordinary pen need to be pressed a little more firmly on the page in order to maintain a consistent line thickness. This is one of the reasons why a pen with freely flowing ink or gel is needed.

In this book, instructions for writing with an ordinary pen come after the instructions for writing with a qalam or brush. And there are copybook pages at the end where you can first trace the letters and then repeat them on the lines below.

The background is a grayscale abstract composition. It features several overlapping, torn-edged paper-like shapes in various shades of gray, creating a layered, collage-like effect. A prominent dark gray circle is positioned in the upper right quadrant. The overall texture is grainy and organic.

# **Holding and Manipulating the Qalam**

As we have seen, the qalam has a tip that is more or less triangular in section. Importantly, though, it is dished on its upper (or outer) edge (to the left as the calligrapher writes) and straight on the lower (or inner) edge. As a result, the calligrapher can nuance the line and its terminals by changing the angle of the qalam in relation to the page and the angle of the tip in relation to the baseline. This is achieved through a continual tilting and rotating that produce several distinct writing positions. Learning these positions now will make it far easier to follow the instructions for each letter.

### **1. The Normal Position**

This position forms the vertical and horizontal strokes, and the calligrapher returns to it after every curved stroke. It is the most commonly used position and the one that makes all the others possible. It consists of holding the qalam at an angle of approximately  $90^\circ$  to the page with its tip at about  $45^\circ$  to the baseline. In this position, the entire tip is in contact with the page and will form a triangular mark with a slightly dished upper side. This position is essential for creating the curved tips at the beginning and end of many letters.

### **2. The Shallow-Tip Position**

The full-shallow-tip position is the one that forms the clean angles on the right-hand side of the letters. It can only be achieved after the normal position has been mastered and become habitual. From that position, the calligrapher begins a downward stroke and rolls the index finger to the right so that the qalam pivots on the lower corner of its tip until it becomes parallel to the baseline. N.B: If the qalam is not held at the proper  $90^\circ$  angle, the tip will not pivot but will continue the downward stroke instead.

For the medium shallow-tip position, the qalam is rolled until it reaches an angle of about  $25^\circ$  to the baseline. This position is used for mashq', which is a distinctive feature of Primary Kufic. Mashq' is the extreme elongation and slight narrowing of the horizontal lines in some letters. This often involves creating an absolutely even, hair-fine gap between two parallel lines, which is a demonstration of the calligrapher's skill. N.B: If the qalam is not held at the proper  $90^\circ$  angle, the line will tend to thicken and wander, and it will not be possible to create the very narrow horizontal gaps that are one of the definitive features of





Primary Kufic.

### **3. The Steep-Tip Position**

This position allows the calligrapher to nuance lines by making vertical ones narrower and horizontal and curved lines wider. It is achieved by rolling the index finger to the left so that the qalam pivots on the lower corner of its tip.

### **4. The Dipped Position**

This position forms the slender diagonal diacritical marks above and below the letters. To achieve it, the calligrapher lets the qalam fall slightly towards himself or herself so that only the straight lower edge of the tip is in contact with the page.

### **5. The Detail Position**

This position is used to create the smaller diacriticals. It is achieved by rocking the qalam away from the calligrapher so that only the upper point of the tip is in contact with the page.

### **6. The Stub Position**

This position is used to create the smaller curved letters that include linear gaps or circular pinholes that would be blotted out if the full width of the tip were to be used. It is achieved by moving the

qalam into the dipped position and then rocking it towards the calligrapher so that the upper point of the tip comes upwards, leaving about half the straight edge in contact with the page.

### **7. The Point Downwards Position**

This position is most useful when the qalam is a brush, whose tendency to flip makes tight turns clumsy. It is especially useful for the small sub-circular letters like *mīm* and *fā'* that are formed around a tiny circular pinhole gap. To achieve it, rotate the qalam 180° so that the sharp corner of the tip is towards the baseline. When forming the tight circular shapes, the qalam can now be rotated clockwise on the page to form a tiny hole, ending up in the normal or shallow-tip position.





# Writing Habits

For the novice calligrapher, it is important to accept that the movements must be slow, and that the acquisition of skill will involve disappointingly clumsy work at first. Holding the qalam at about 90° to the page does not come naturally. It lifts the hand off the page and thus robs the calligrapher of a source of stability that he or she has probably taken for granted until now. To some extent, this contact can be substituted with the tips of the fourth and fifth fingers, but this is a new habit to learn and there is no substitute for developing steadiness without support.

Conscious care must also be taken to keep the elbow of the writing arm free. Although clamping it to one's side seems to provide support at first, it actually cramps the writer and thus prevents the all-important smooth manipulation of the qalam.


The western student may discover an unexpected additional problem resulting from the right to left writing direction: the pen and the hand can drag and crease the page, even when proper writing habits are maintained to reduce contact with the page. This is especially so in hot weather. It will take practice to eliminate this problem.

Learning to control the qalam and page without support and at a slow speed emphasizes to the novice calligrapher that Primary Kufic was developed to record the Qur'an accurately, respectfully, and with full spiritual attention.



# **Writing the Letters**

For those who have not engaged with Arabic reading or calligraphy before, it is necessary to point out that the Arabic alphabet includes several forms for each letter, whose use depends on their placement in the text.

In fact, this need not disturb the western student too much, since the Latin alphabet also includes different forms for capitals and cursive, and has variants appropriate to different scripts or  styles (consider the difference between a cursive Times “g” and an Arial “g”). Similarly, the Arabic alphabet has several forms for each letter that differentiate between four contextual uses:

a. Isolated – where the letter appears alone as a free-standing letter, or when its nearest neighbors are non-joining letters.

b. Initial – where the letter appears at the beginning of a word or cluster of joined letters. Note that a word may consist of several clusters of joined letters. Each cluster will begin with an initial form.

c. Medial – where the letter appears between two joining letters, so that it is connected in front and behind.

d. Final – where the letter appears at the end of a word or cluster of joined letters, and is joined only from behind. Again, note that a word may consist of several clusters of joined letters, and each cluster will end with a final form.

The reader and writer must therefore expect to become familiar with all these forms, as well as extra variants. In Primary Kufic, for example, the letter yā’ has three variants that can be used as alternatives in the isolated and final locations.

In the teaching section below, the letters are explained in the variant-order listed above, and several examples are also given to show the letters in use.



# Letter Types

Primary Kufic can be learned in the standard alphabetical order, but it is worth also noting that the letters can be grouped into three types. This helps the novice calligrapher group skill-sets and also to understand which letters can be aesthetically elongated (mashq'). This not only develops the skills more speedily, but facilitates good and authentic design on the page.



## 1- Letters with Long Horizontals

Known as long letters, these letters have single or paired horizontal strokes, which the calligrapher may extend as far as he or she wishes. This extension is known as mashq', which means "stretched". In some historic manuscripts, a single letter, such as yā', occupies the entire line. That is an example of extreme mashq'. More typically, the long letters vary in length and share the line with other letters. The calligrapher can then group the elongated letters in patterns on the page.

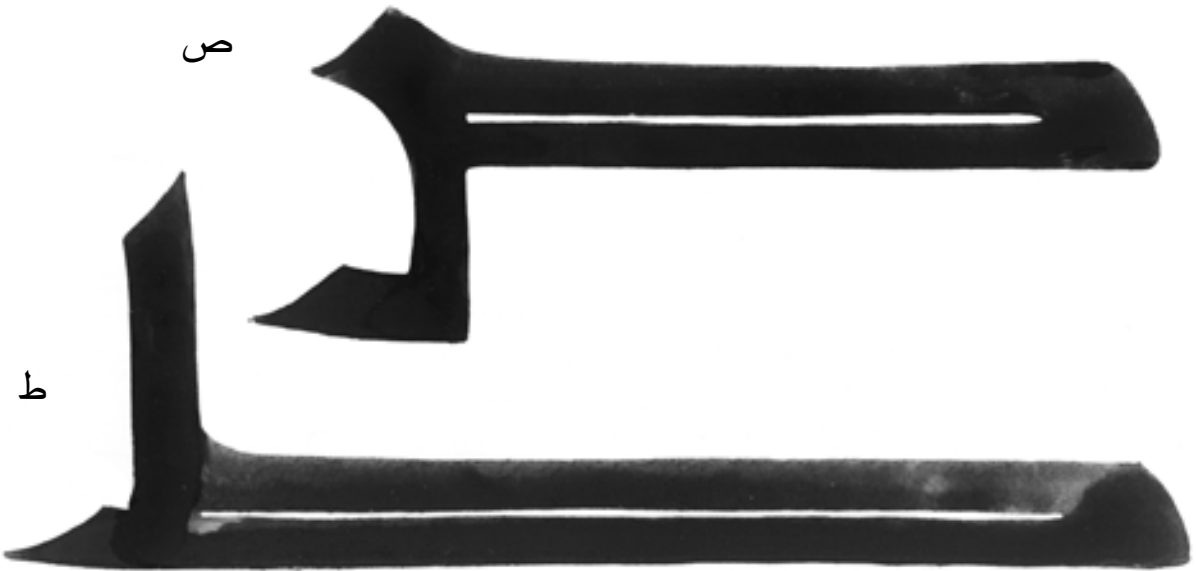
Note that although it is standard practice to elongate these letters, the presence and the extent of the elongation is decided by the calligrapher for aesthetic and interpretational reasons. It is possible, for example, that in some manuscripts mashq' is used to evoke the cadences of tajweed (Qur'anic chanting).

Note also that the horizontal strokes of the long letters are generally made with a slightly more slender stroke than is used for the verticals. This enhances the grace of the letters.

The twelve long letters are, fā', ṣād and dād, ṭā' and ḍhā', bā' and tā' and thā', dāl and dhāl, kāf, and yā'. The horizontal connectors of four other letters may also be lengthened at the calligrapher's discretion. These are, mīm, lām, 'ayn and ghayn.



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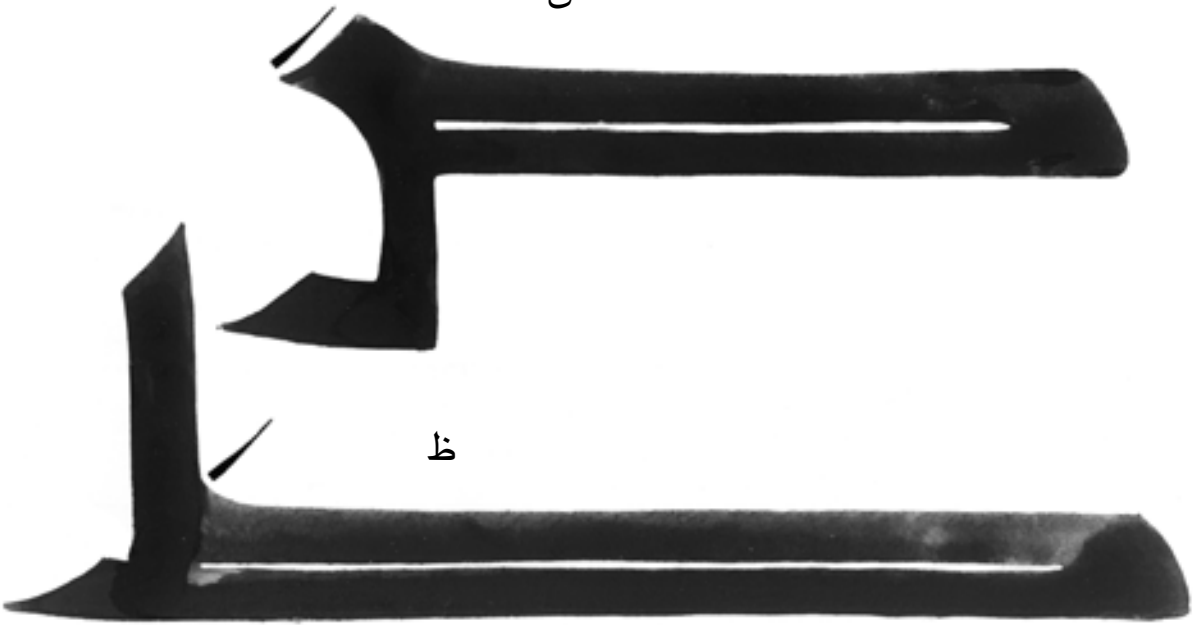
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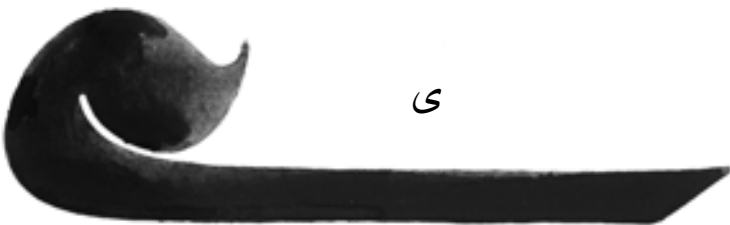
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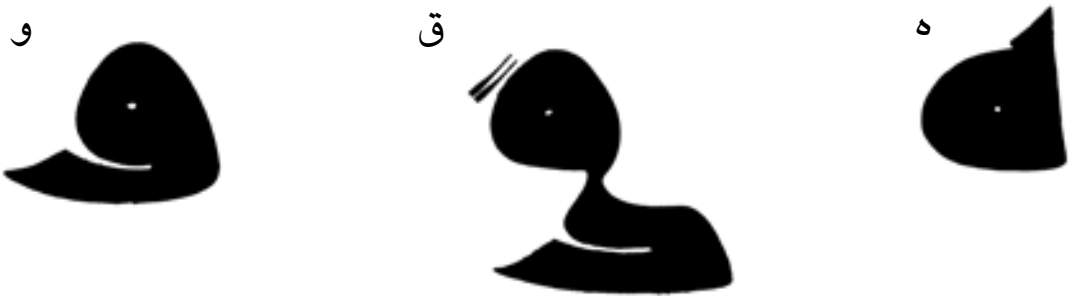
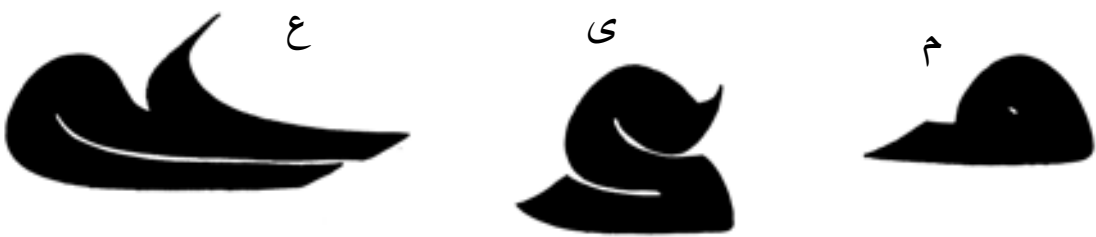
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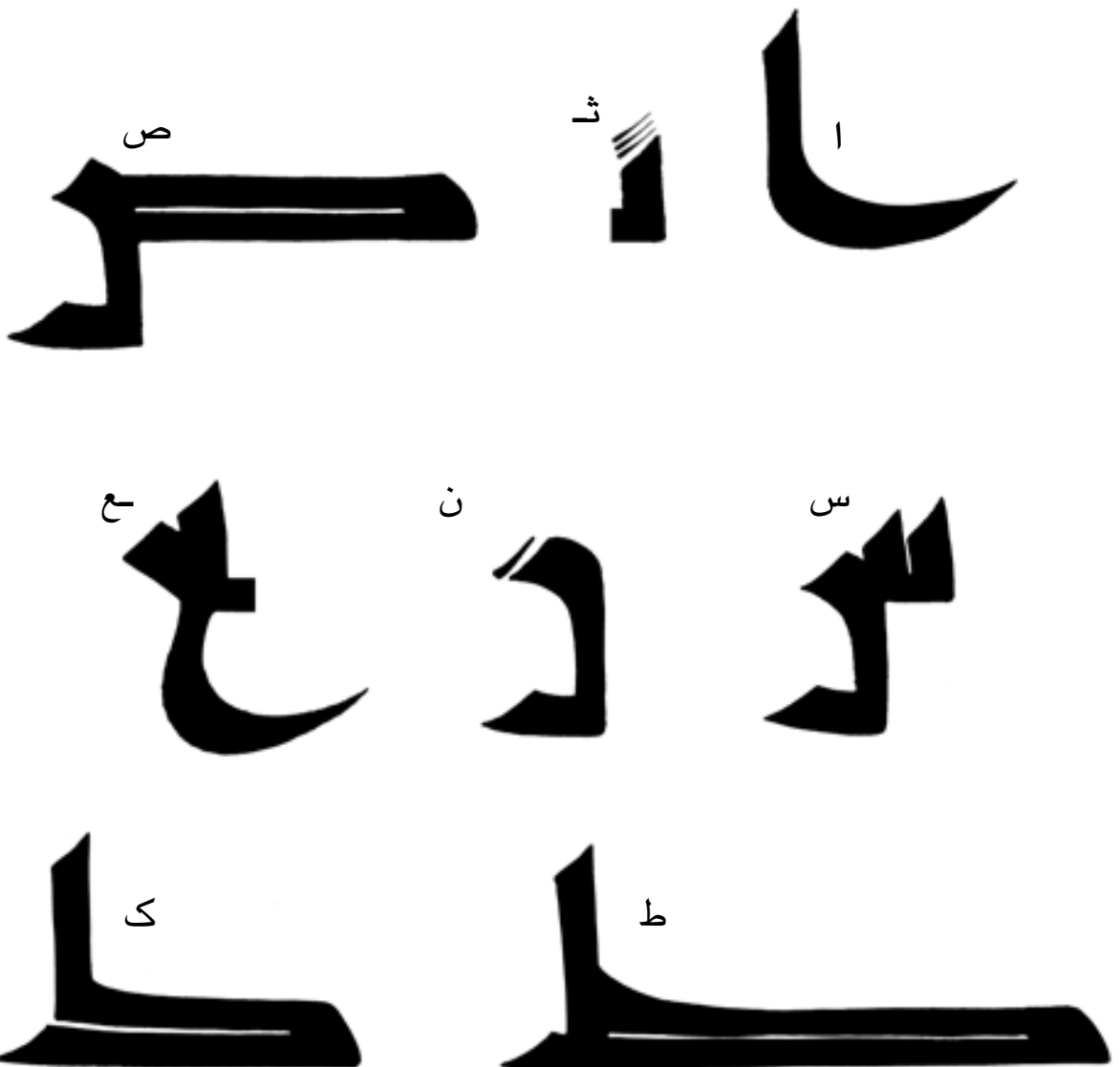
## 2- The Sub Circular Letters

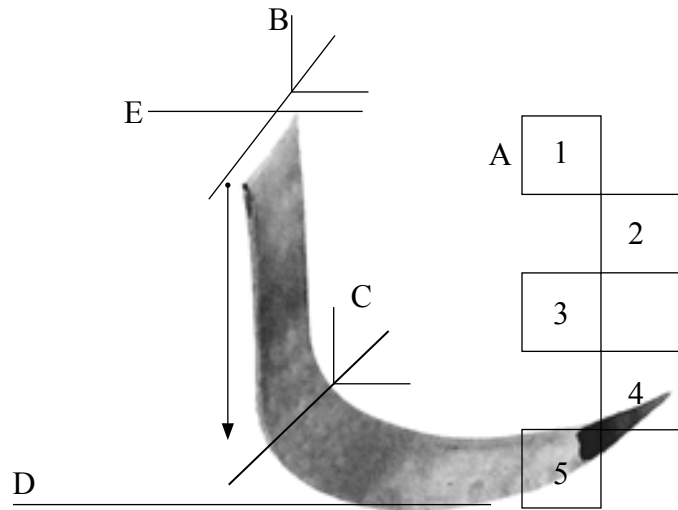
These are the letters whose body is formed with a tightly curled stroke that is almost circular or almost part-circular. The six almost full-circle letters are mīm, fā', wāw, qāf, yā' and hā' (note that fā' and yā' also belong to the group of long letters). The three part-circle letters are jīm, ḥā' and khā'. Two other letters are closely related to this group. They are, rā' and zāy.



### 3- The Vertical and Toothed Letters

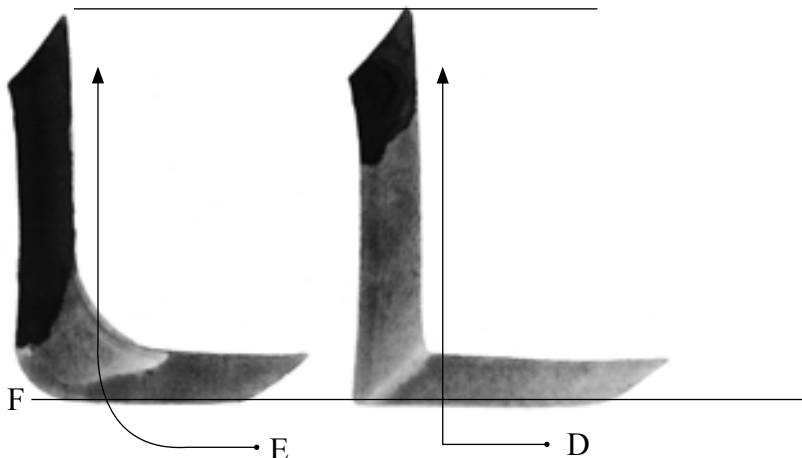
These are the letters whose body is formed with a vertical stroke. The four vertical letters are, alif, lām, kāf', ṭā' and ḍhā' (note that thā' and dhā' also belong to the long letters group). The eight toothed letters are, bā' and tā' and thā', sīn and shīn, ṣād and ḍād, and nūn (note that bā' and tā' and thā', ṣād and ḍād, also belong to the long letters group).





Simply put, the alif is the most important letter of the Arabic alphabet. It has been explained by authors like ‘Ibn Arabi that its sound, originally a glottal stop (although now also including the vowel “ah”), is the opening sound for all the other letters, whereas none of their sounds are needed to form the alif. Thus they all depend on it, while it depends on none. In this, of course, it parallels our understanding of God, the origin of all things and on whom all depend, while He depends on nothing and no one. The calligrapher invokes this sacred symbolism of the self-sustaining alif whenever the letter occurs at the beginning of a word or syllable by letting it stand in isolation, as a complete syllable in itself.

The other half of the symbolism, in which the letters depend on the alif, is also invoked by the calligrapher in the proportional system that controls the entire Primary Kufic script. Designating a point measure from the diagonal touch of a correctly held qalam and recognizing the perfection symbolized by the number five, the calligrapher can trace a perfect alif at a height of five points. The other letters all take their dimensions in relation to this perfect alif. We therefore encourage you to pay great attention to forming this deceptively simple-looking letter appropriately. It is the origin and control of all the rest.



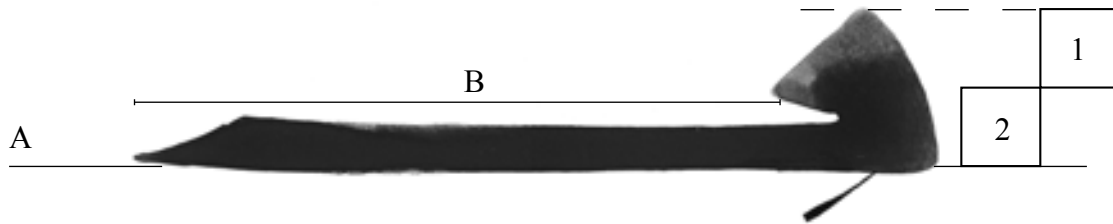
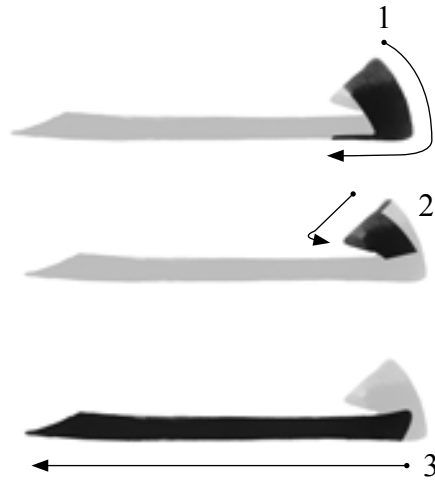
So, for the isolated form of the alif, start with the qalam in the normal position and set it at the fifth point above the baseline. Slowly draw the qalam downwards for four points. Shift the qalam to the dipped position and start a smooth curve towards the right until the baseline is reached. Continue the smooth curve outwards and upwards until the alif is five points wide. End the curve with a sharp tip one and a half points above the baseline.

For the medial or final alif, start on the baseline with the qalam in the normal position. Draw the qalam to the left until it has barely passed the previous letter. Then make a hard or soft angle to echo the previous letter and take the line upwards for a distance of five points.

When making the letter with an ordinary pen, it is not necessary to hold the pen like a qalam. Set the pen down at the standard height (on the baseline above the word being written). Bring it down vertically almost to its own baseline and make a shallow curve to the right about three quarters of the standard measure.

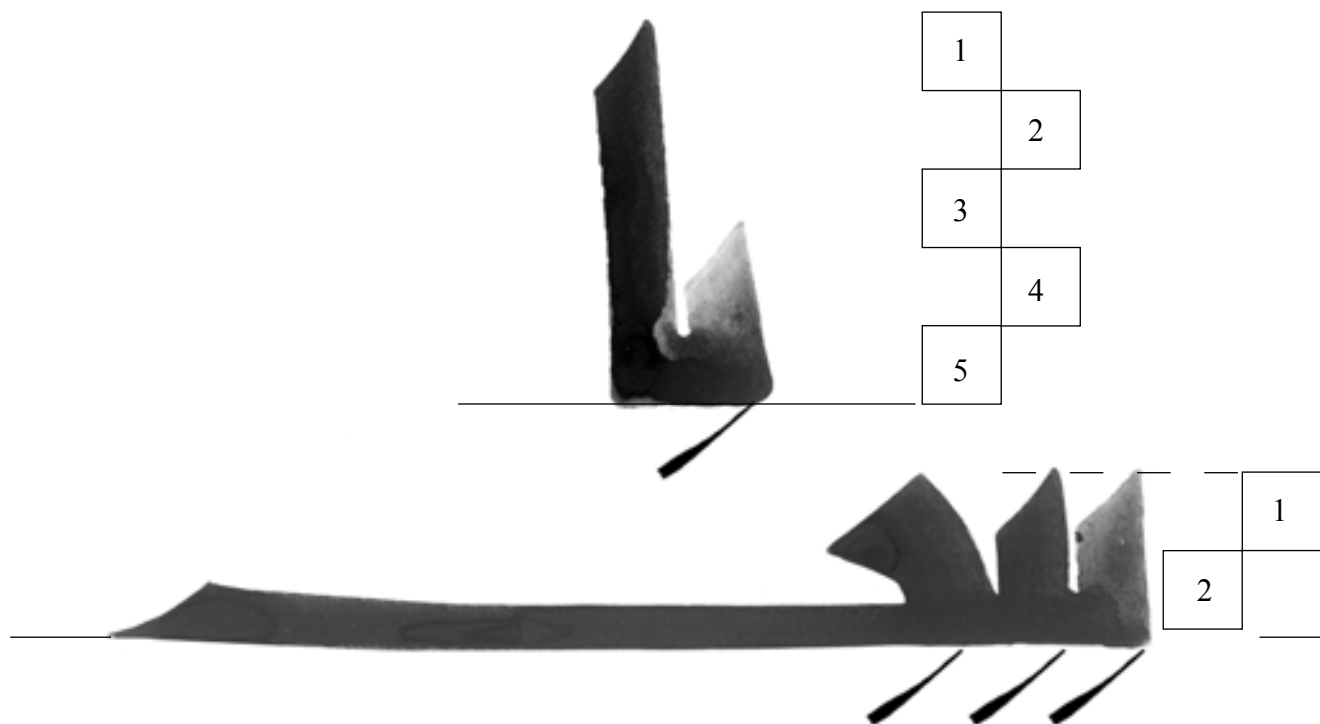
For the medial or final alif with an ordinary pen, make the letter as with a qalam, remembering to focus attention on achieving an even line thickness and a smooth ink flow.





The letter *bā'* contrasts with *alif* in almost every possible way. In sound, it begins with an explosive burst of air from pursed and pressed lips. In writing, it is low and horizontal. It has a short, thick, upright “tooth” and a horizontal tail that can be extended at the calligrapher’s discretion. Some reasons to extend the tail might include the aesthetic needs of the page, emphasizing the meaning of the text, or perhaps evoking the cadence of *tajweed* (chanting rhythms for the Qur’an). When the extension is extreme (known as extreme *mashq'*), the written lines should be set further apart to balance the page.

The isolated and final forms of the letter *bā'* are made with three strokes. For the first stroke, begin with the qalam in the dipped position so that only the straight lower part of the tip is in contact with the page. Start at the second point above the baseline. Make a slightly curved diagonal trace down to the baseline, rolling the qalam on the way so that it finishes in the full shallow-tip position or in the detail position. Still on the baseline, slide the qalam sideways to make a fine horizontal mark. Break contact with the page and return to the top of the tooth with the qalam in the dipped position. For the second stroke, slide the qalam diagonally along the straight edge of the tip to widen the top of the tooth. Then, keeping the qalam at this angle, make a short downward curve to meet the base of the first stroke. For the third stroke, preferably without lifting the qalam, roll it to the medium shallow-tip position and trace a horizontal tail along the baseline. Thicken the stroke near its end by rolling the qalam a little towards the normal position. Be sure to keep the entire tip in contact with the page to form a nicely pointed and curved diagonal end to the tail.



As we have said, this tail may be as long as the calligrapher decides, but it must be done freehand and without raising the qalam from the page. Forming a long straight line in this way takes practice and it is where the skill lies, so we encourage you to take the necessary time to gain mastery of this letter.

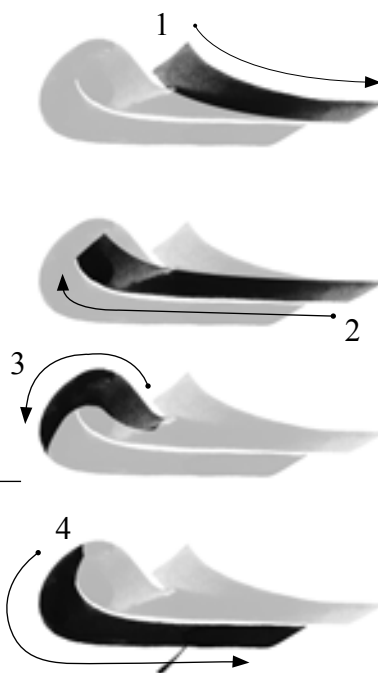
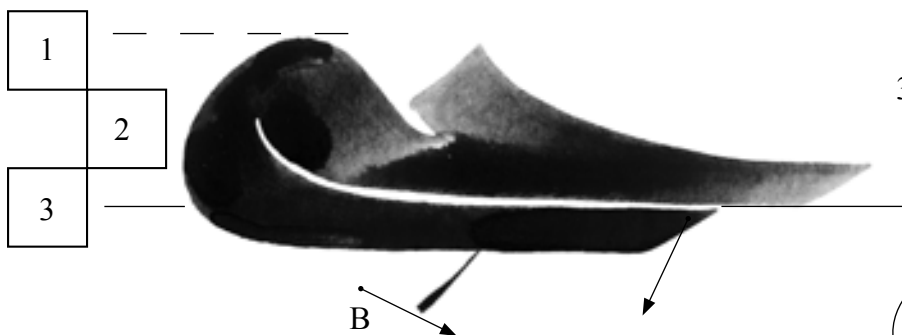
Be sure to add the i'jām under the tooth of the letter.

For the initial and medial forms of the letter bā', the tooth will be straight and vertical or near-vertical. In contrast with the tooth of the isolated form, this tooth is made with a single stroke, which prevents it from becoming wide at the top. Pay attention to the formation of this stroke because several other letters are formed with teeth of this kind. Note that all single-stroke teeth are made with the qalam in the normal position to ensure that each has a slightly dished top. So, to form the tooth of the initial or medial form of the letter bā', start with the qalam in the normal position and set it down at the second point above the baseline. Make a short vertical stroke down to the baseline rocking the qalam into the full shallow-tip or detail position towards the end of the stroke so that the entire stroke lands flat on the baseline. Still in that position, make a short horizontal line to the left to tidy up the outline. For this form of the letter, the horizontal tail is kept extremely short in order to connect it tightly to the succeeding letters.

When using a normal pen, the body of the letter is made with a single stroke for all forms. The i'jām is made with a downward stroke, rather than a simple touch, which is all that was necessary with a qalam.

Related letters are tā', thā', and the initial and medial forms of yā' and nūn.





The letter jīm introduces a new curvilinear aspect and several changes of direction. For the beginner, it can be made in four separate strokes of the qalam. For the more advanced calligrapher, it should be made without lifting the qalam from the page.

To make the isolated form of the letter, begin with the qalam in the normal position in order to create a nicely curved top to the tooth. Start the first stroke at the second point above the baseline. Pull the qalam in a gentle, shallow curve towards the right. As the curve descends, roll the qalam towards the shallow-tip position and continue horizontally along the baseline. For the second stroke, keep the qalam in the same position and push it back the way it came until it arrives just past the starting point of the tooth. Continue upwards, making a curve with a slightly deeper throat than the tooth. Be sure to make this stroke nearly as tall as the tooth. Raise the qalam from the page and return it to the base of the curve just made, still in the shallow-tip position. Make a hump in the curve somewhat higher than the top of the tooth rolling the qalam back to the normal position to end the stroke with a sharp “beak”. For the fourth stroke, continue the curve down to the baseline, closely hugging the profile of the second stroke. Without lifting the qalam, extend the stroke just below the baseline towards the right. Be sure to maintain a hair-fine gap between the upper and lower strokes,



and end with a straight diagonal edge well before the right extremity of the letter.

Note that if you continue this last stroke past the end of the letter, that will transform it into the tail of a yā' connected to the jīm, which is useful for creating some words.

Add the i'jām under the baseline, below the tooth of the letter.

The initial and medial forms of jīm lack the tail, and the second stroke is therefore continued only as far as needed to make a close connection with the following letter. As with contemporary Arabic alphabets, the jīm can be “stacked” above the succeeding letters, including itself. So take the time to plan how far above the baseline to start. When the jīm is in the final position, its body must rest on the baseline, so remember to start the preceding letters high enough above the baseline to allow for this.

When using a normal pen, the letter is formed as with a qalam for all forms except that it can be done with a single stroke. Remember that the i'jām is made with a stroke, rather than a touch.

Related letters are ḥā' and khā'.

