

The Arabic Definite Article

The Arabic definite article (AL) is a prefix that can only be attached to nouns. It is basically a **hamzatu wasl (A)** with a vowel-less **laam (L)**. The **hamzatu wasl** is dropped when reading in succession, while the **laam** has two cases depending on the initial letter of the attached noun. This is explained as follows:

1. The first case is if the **laam** of the definite article precedes a noun beginning with a moon letter. In this case, the **laam** is pronounced separately and called a moon **laam**, while a sukoon is placed on top of it to distinguish it (applied in Quranic text). Examples for the moon **laam** include:

الهِلَال	هِلَال	الْيَوْم	يَوْم	الْعِلْم	عِلْم	القَمَر	قَمَر
الْعَيْن	عَيْن	الْغَرْب	غَرْب	الْقَرْن	قَرْن	الْمَنْزِل	مَنْزِل

2. The second case is if the **laam** of the definite article precedes a noun beginning with a sun letter. In this case, there is a merging of the **laam** into the next letter, so the **laam** is dropped, and the letter following it is stressed and acquires a shadda to distinguish this case. Examples for the sun **laam** include:

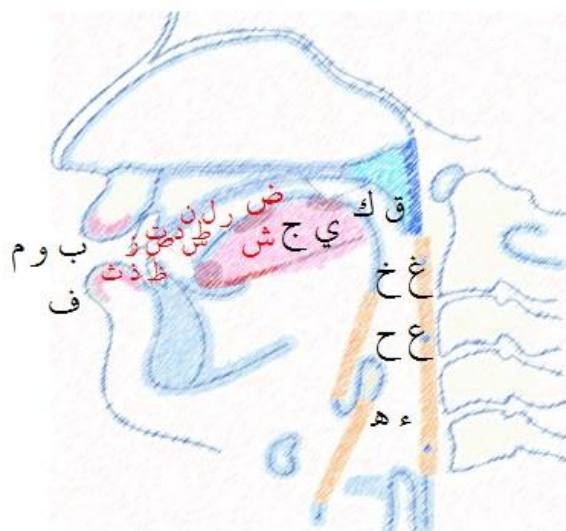
الظُّهْر	ظُّهْر	الثَّقَافَة	ثَقَافَة	الصَّيْف	صَيْف	الشَّمْس	شَمْس
الضَّيْف	ضَيْف	السَّيْف	سَيْف	الرَّزْمَن	رَزْمَن	النَّهْر	نَهْر

The sun **laam** is indicated by the shadda while the sukoon on the moon **laam** is usually not written. The **hamzatu wasl** is distinguished in classical literature by a sign drawn on top of it which resembles the head of the letter saad (an abbreviation of wasl). The definite article is indicated as follows in the Quranic text:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

The reasons for pronouncing or dropping of the **laam** is due to the articulation points of letters. This is since the sun letters share articulation points with the **laam** and so cannot be pronounced together, while the moon letters are further away and do not share articulation points with the **laam**. The articulation points of letters are illustrated as follows:

Articulation Points of Letters



هـ	م	ي	ق	ع	ف	خ	و	ك	ج	ح	غ	ب	أ	القمرية
ن	ل	ظ	ط	ض	ص	ش	س	ز	ر	ذ	د	ث	ت	الشمسية

Doubled Laam

This is the case with nouns that originally begin with a laam, and so when attached to the definite article there will be a doubling of the laam written in sequence. Both laams will merge together and be pronounced as one letter only. Examples to the double laam:

لَوْمٌ	لَوْمٌ	لَحْمٌ	لَحْمٌ	لَيْلٌ	لَيْلٌ	لَبَنٌ	لَبَنٌ
لَثَّةٌ	لَثَّةٌ	لَهْجَةٌ	لَهْجَةٌ	لُغَةٌ	لُغَةٌ	لَوْنٌ	لَوْنٌ

Alif Laam which is not a prefix: This appears in exceptional words where the definite article is considered part of the word and therefore cannot be separated from the stem. Examples include the demonstrative pronouns, the Arabic word for now, in addition to several proper nouns:

الذين - التي - اللائي - الآن

اليسع - النضر - العباس - الفضل - النعمان

التفات - التباس - التقاء..

Note that:

The **hamzatul wasl** of the definite article is dropped in writing when the (al) is preceded by the **prepositional laam** with a kasra, or the **initial laam** with a fat-ha. Example to this rule:

لَلصَّدَق	الصَّدَق	لِلْمُدَّرْس	الْمُدَّرْس	لِلْعِلْم	الْعِلْم
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As well, the **laam** of (al) is also dropped when attached to a noun that starts with laam (the double laam case). This is since the writing of three similar letters in sequence (laams) is not accepted.

لِلُّغَةِ	اللُّغَةِ	لُغَةِ	لَلَّيْلِ	اللَّيْلِ	لَيْلٍ	لَلَّبَنِ	اللَّبَنِ	لَبَنِ
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This is not the case if (al) is part of the structure of the word:

لِلْتِقَاءِ	التِّقَاءِ	لِلْتِبَاسِ	التِّبَاسِ	لِلْتِفَاتِ	التِّفَاتِ
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Note that:

The Glorified Name of Allah ﷻ includes the definite article. It was originally ilaah (meaning God), and with (al) prefixed the original hamza within the name was dropped while the laam of the definite article was merged into the laam of the noun. And since it is a sun letter, a shadda is place above the second laam.

إِلَهِ	إِلَهِ	إِلَهِ	إِلَهِ	إِلَهِ	إِلَهِ
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A Common Spelling Mistake

Dropping the silent definite article when spelling sentences.

الإِملاء الصحيح: أشرقَتِ الشَّمْسُ في السَّمَاءِ هذا الصَّبَاح.
الأخطاء الشائعة: أشرقَتِ شمس في سماء هذا صَباح.