

Alphabet - Lesson 1

The Vowels and the Consonants

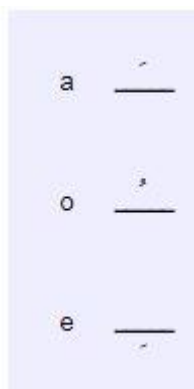
Persian has six vowels. These six vowels are divided into two categories; short and long vowels.

Short vowels: "a" (as in "sad") "e" (as in "bed) "o" (as in "tone")

Long vowels: "ā" (as in "father") "ī" (as in "ring") "ū" (as in "tool")

Obviously, the vowels don't sound exactly like the English examples mentioned above.

It is important to know the vowels and to remember their categories. Long vowels, like consonants, are letters of the Persian alphabet and are always written. Short vowels, on the other hand, are not separate letters. They are optionally put as auxiliary marks over and below the other letters to show which short vowel those letters are followed by. In the following table, the horizontal lines represent any letter of the Persian alphabet.



As the above table shows, the accents used for "a" and "e" look the same; this small mark (similar in shape to the French accent aigu) goes over its preceding consonant to sound "a" and above it to sound "e". The accent for the vowel "o" goes over its preceding consonant and looks like a small English digit "9."

Persian letters are written joined

After becoming familiar with these three vowels (which are marks rather than letters), it is time to learn some rules about the letters of the alphabet. All Persian consonants plus the remaining three vowels (long vowels) are represented by letters in the alphabet. As a loose general rule, we can say that the letters of a single word are written joined together in Persian. The exceptions will be dealt with later.

Persian letters have two forms

A letter is always written either in its ending form or in normal form. (Again, there are exceptions which will be mentioned later.) All the letters are always written in their normal form, except when they come at the end of a word, when of course they are written in their ending form.

Letters in their ending form have different shapes simply because they are not going to be attached to any letter following them. Here is a list of six Persian letters to start with:

normal form

sound	ending form	normal form
k	ک	ک
b	ب	ب
i-y	ی	ی
n	ن	ن
m	م	م

As the shapes of the letters suggest, the right column contains the normal form of the letters; they all have a dangling horizontal part at their left end which has to attach to the next letter in the word (Persian is written from right to left).

Pay special attention to the letter "ی" (the third one). This letter represents both the consonant "y" and the vowel "i". This is very similar to the role that the letter "y" plays in English.

To grasp an idea of how all this works, try to read the following examples using the above table. Again, don't forget that Persian is written from right to left.

Quebec kebek كِبِك

cake keyk كِبِك

Yemen yaman يَمَن

salt namak نَمَك

little kam كَم

when key كِبِي