

o

/o:/

o

o

o

واو

wā'ō

v, ū, o, au

w, ū, o, au

/ʊ, u:, o:, ɔ:/

و

Urdu alphabet

The **Urdu alphabet** is the right-to-left alphabet used for the Urdu language. It is a modification of the Persian alphabet known as Perso-Arabic, which is itself a derivative of the Arabic alphabet. The Urdu alphabet has up to 58 letters.^[1] With 39 basic letters and no distinct letter cases, the Urdu alphabet is typically written in the calligraphic Nasta'liq script, whereas Arabic is more commonly in the Naskh style.

Usually, bare transliterations of Urdu into Roman letters (called Roman Urdu) omit many phonemic elements that have no equivalent in English or other languages commonly written in the Latin script. The National Language Authority of Pakistan has developed a number of systems with specific notations to signify non-English sounds, but these can only be properly read by someone already familiar with the loan letters.

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اردو تہجی

Example of writing in the Urdu alphabet: *Urdu*

Type	Abjad
Languages	Urdu, Balti, Burushaski, others
Parent systems	Proto-Sinaitic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phoenician <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aramaic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nabataean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arabic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perso-Arabic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urdu alphabet
Unicode range	U+0600 to U+06FF U+0750 to U+077F U+FB50 to U+FDFF U+FE70 to U+FEFF

The Urdu language emerged as a distinct register of Hindustani well before the Partition of India. It is distinguished most by its extensive Persian influences (Persian having been the official language of the Mughal government and the most prominent lingua franca of the Indian subcontinent for several centuries before the solidification of British colonial rule during the 19th century). The standard Urdu script is a modified version of the Perso-Arabic script and has its origins in 13th century Iran. It is closely related to the development of the Nastaliq style of Perso-Arabic script. Urdu script in its extended form is known as Shahmukhi script and is used for writing other Indo-Aryan languages of North Indian subcontinent like Punjabi and Saraiki as well.

Despite the invention of the Urdu typewriter in 1911, Urdu newspapers continued to publish prints of handwritten scripts by calligraphers known as *katibs* or *khush-navees* until the late 1980s. The Pakistani national newspaper *Daily Jang* was the first Urdu newspaper to use *Nasta'liq* computer-based composition. There are efforts under way to develop more sophisticated and user-friendly Urdu support on computers and the internet. Nowadays, nearly all Urdu newspapers, magazines, journals, and periodicals are composed on computers with Urdu software programs.

Urdu and Hindi, an official federal language of India, are different registers of the same language, and thus they are mutually intelligible and can use each other's script to write the other's language. Usage of script generally signifies the user's faith: Muslims generally use the Urdu (Perso-Arabic) script, while Hindus use the Devanagari script. In addition to Pakistan, the Urdu script is official in five states of India with a substantial percentage of Hindustani-speaking Muslims: Bihar, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh.

Other than the Indian subcontinent, the Urdu script is also used by Pakistan's large diaspora, including in the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Canada, Saudi Arabia, and other places.^[2]

Nasta'liq

The Nasta'liq calligraphic writing style began as a Persian mixture of scripts Naskh and Ta'liq. After the Mughal conquest, Nasta'liq became the preferred writing style for Urdu. It is the dominant style in Pakistan, and many Urdu writers elsewhere in the world use it. Nasta'liq is more cursive and flowing than its Naskh counterpart.

Alphabet

The Urdu script is an abjad script derived from Perso-Arabic script, which is itself a derivative of the Arabic script. The Urdu alphabet was standardized in 2004 by the National Language Authority, which is responsible for standardizing Urdu in Pakistan. According to the National Language Authority, Urdu has 58 letters of which 39 are basic letters while 18 are digraphs to represent aspirated consonants made by attaching basic consonant letters with a variant of He called do chashmi he.^{[3][4][1]} Tā' marbūṭah is also sometimes considered a letter though it is rarely used except for in certain loan words from Arabic.

As an abjad, the Urdu script only shows consonants and long vowels; short vowels can only be inferred by the consonants' relation to each other. While this type of script is convenient in Semitic languages like Arabic and Hebrew, whose consonant roots are the key of the sentence, Urdu is an Indo-European language which does not have the same luxury hence necessitating more memorization.

Differences from Persian alphabet

Urdu has more letters added to the Persian base to represent sounds not present in Persian, which already has additional letters added to the Arabic base itself to represent sounds not present in Arabic. The letters added include: ٹ to represent /t/, ڈ to represent /d/, ظ to represent /z/, ع to represent /ɛ:/, and ے to represent /e:/. Furthermore, a separate do-cashmi-he letter, ھ, exists to denote a /h/ or a /ʰ/. This letter is mainly used as part of the multitude of digraphs, detailed below

No.	Name ^[5]	ALA-LC ^[6]	Hunterian ^[7]	IPA	Isolated glyph	
1	الف	<i>alif</i>	ā, ʾ, –	/ɑː, ʔ, Ø/	ا	
2	با	<i>ba</i>	<i>b</i>	/b/	ب	
3	پا	<i>pa</i>	<i>p</i>	/p/	پ	
4	تا	<i>ta</i>	<i>t</i>	/t̪/	ت	
5	ٹا	<i>ṭa</i>	<i>ṭ</i>	<i>t</i>	/t̪/	ٹ
6	ثا	<i>ṣa</i>	<i>ṣ</i>	<i>s</i>	/s/	ث
7	جیم	<i>jīm</i>	<i>j</i>	/d͡ʒ/	ج	
8	چیم	<i>cīm</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>ch</i>	/t͡ʃ/	چ
9	بڑی حا	<i>baṛī ḥa</i>	<i>ḥ</i>	<i>h</i>	/h, f/	ح
10	خا	<i><u>kh</u>a</i>	<i><u>kh</u></i>	<i>kh</i>	/x/	خ
11	دال	<i>dāl</i>	<i>d</i>	/d̪/	د	
12	ڈال	<i>ḍāl</i>	<i>ḍ</i>	<i>d</i>	/d̪/	ڈ
13	ذال	<i>zāl</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>z</i>	/z/	ذ
14	را	<i>ra</i>	<i>r</i>	/r/	ر	
15	ڑا	<i>ṛa</i>	<i>ṛ</i>	<i>r</i>	/r̪/	ڑ
16	زاین	<i>zain</i>	<i>z</i>	/z/	ز	
17	ژاین	<i><u>zh</u>ain</i>	<i>zh</i>	<i>zh</i>	/ʒ/	ژ
18	سین	<i>sīn</i>	<i>s</i>	/s/	س	
19	شین	<i>shīn</i>	<i>sh</i>	<i>sh</i>	/ʃ/	ش
20	صاد	<i>slād</i>	<i>sl</i>	<i>sl</i>	/ʃ/	

						ص
21	ضاد	<i>dzād</i>	<i>dz</i>	<i>dz</i>	<i>/d̪z/</i>	ض
22	طو	<i>tsā</i>	<i>ts</i>	<i>ts</i>	<i>/t̪s/</i>	ط
23	ظو	<i>zlā</i>	<i>zl</i>	<i>zl</i>	<i>/l̪z/</i>	ظ
24	عین	<i>‘ain</i>	<i>ā, o, e, ‘, –</i>		<i>/ɑː, ɔː, eː, ʔ, ʕ, Ø/</i>	ع
25	غین	<i>ghain</i>	<i>gh</i>	<i>gh</i>	<i>/ɣ/</i>	غ
26	فا	<i>fa</i>	<i>f</i>		<i>/f/</i>	ف
27	قاف	<i>qāf</i>	<i>q</i>		<i>/q/</i>	ق
28	کاف	<i>kāf</i>	<i>k</i>		<i>/k/</i>	ک
29	گاف	<i>gāf</i>	<i>g</i>		<i>/g/</i>	گ
30	لام	<i>lām</i>	<i>l</i>		<i>/l/</i>	ل
31	میم	<i>mīm</i>	<i>m</i>		<i>/m/</i>	م
32a	نون	<i>nūn</i>	<i>n</i>		<i>/n, ɲ, ŋ, ŋ/</i>	ن
32b	نون غنّہ	<i>nūn ghunnah</i>	<i>ɳ</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>/ɳ/</i>	ن
34	واؤ	<i>wā’o</i>	<i>v, ū, o, au</i>	<i>w, ū, o, au</i>	<i>/b, uː, ɔː, ɔː/</i>	و
33	چھوٹی ہا گول ہا	<i>choṭī ha gol ha</i>	<i>h</i>		<i>/h, f/ or /Ø/</i>	ہ
35	دو چشمی ہا	<i>do-cashmī ha</i>	<i>h</i>		<i>/ʰ/ or /ʱ/</i>	ھ
36	ہمزہ	<i>hamzah</i>	<i>ʔ, –</i>		<i>/ʔ/, /Ø/</i>	ء
37	چھوٹی یا	<i>choṭī ya</i>	<i>y, ī, á</i>		<i>/j, iː, aː/</i>	ی
38	بڑی یا	<i>baṛī ya</i>	<i>ai, e</i>		<i>/ɛː, eː/</i>	

The digraphs of aspirated consonants are as follows.

Digraph ^[6]	Transcription ^[6]	IPA
ဗှ	<i>bh</i>	[b ^h]
ပှ	<i>ph</i>	[p ^h]
တှ	<i>th</i>	[t ^h]
တှ်	<i>ṭh</i>	[ṭ ^h]
ဗှ	<i>jh</i>	[d͡ʒ ^h]
ဗှ်	<i>ch</i>	[t͡ʃ ^h]
ဓှ	<i>dh</i>	[d̪ ^h]
ဓှ်	<i>ḍh</i>	[ḍ ^h]
ရှ	<i>rh</i>	[r ^h]
ရှ်	<i>ṛh</i>	[ṛ ^h]
ကှ	<i>kh</i>	[k ^h]
ကှ်	<i>gh</i>	[g ^h]
လှ	<i>lh</i>	[l ^h]
မှ	<i>mh</i>	[m ^h]
နှ	<i>nh</i>	[n ^h]
ဟှ	<i>hh</i>	[h ^h]
ဝှ	<i>wh</i>	[ʋ ^h]
ဗှ်	<i>yh</i>	[j ^h]

Retroflex letters

Old Hindustani used four dots over three Arabic letters to represent retroflex consonants (ث, ڙ, ڄ).^[8] In handwriting those dots was often written like a small vertical line attached to a small triangle. Subsequently this shape has become identical to a small letter ط.^[9]



Vowels

The Urdu language has 10 vowels and 10 nasalized vowels. Each vowel has four forms depending on its position: initial, middle, final and isolated. Like in its parent Arabic alphabet, Urdu vowels are represented using a combination of digraphs and diacritics. Alif, Waw, Ye, He and their variants are used to represent vowels.

Vowel chart

Urdu doesn't have standalone vowel letters. Short vowels (*a*, *i*, *u*) are represented by optional diacritics (*zabar*, *zer*, *pesh*) upon the preceding consonant or a placeholder consonant (*alif*, *ain*, or *hamzah*) if the syllable begins with the vowel, and long vowels by consonants *alif*, *ain*, *ye*, and *wa'o* as matres lectionis, with disambiguating diacritics, some of which are optional (*zabar*, *zer*, *pesh*), whereas some are not (*nadd*, *hamzah*). Urdu does not have short vowels at the end of words. This is a table of Urdu vowels:

Romanization	Pronunciation	Final	Middle	Initial
a	/ə/	ـَ	ـِ	آ
ā	/aː/	ا	ا	آ
i	/ɪ/	ـِ	ـِ	اِ
ī	/iː/	ی	ی	ی
e	/eː/	ے	ی	ی
ai	/ɛː/	ے	ی	ی
u	/ʊ/	و	و	اُ
ū	/uː/	و	و	او
o	/oː/	و	و	او
au	/ɔː/	و	و	او

Alif

Alif is the first letter of the Urdu alphabet, and it is used exclusively as a vowel. At the beginning of a word, *alif* can be used to represent any of the short vowels: اب *ab*, اسم *ism*, اردو *Urdū*. For long *ā* at the beginning of words alif-mad is used: آپ *āp*, but a plain alif in the middle and at the end: بھاگنا *bhāgnā*.

Wā'o

Wā'o is used to render the vowels "ū", "o", "u" and "au" ([u:], [o:], [ʊ] and [ɔ:] respectively), and it is also used to render the labiodental approximant [ʋ].

Ye

Ye is divided into two variants: *choṭī ye* ("little ye") and *baṛī ye* ("big ye").

Choṭī ye (چھوٹی یے) is written in all forms exactly as in Persian. It is used for the long vowel "ī" and the consonant "y".

Baṛī ye (بڑی یے) is used to render the vowels "e" and "ai" (/e:/ and /ɛ:/ respectively). *Baṛī ye* is distinguishable in writing from *choṭī ye* only when it comes at the end of a word/ligature. Additionally *Baṛī ye* is never used to begin a word/ligature, unlike *choṭī ye*.

Letter's name	Final Form	Middle Form	Initial Form	Isolated Form
چھوٹی یے Choṭī ye	یے		ی	ی
بڑی یے Baṛī ye	ے	ی	ی	ے

The 2 he's

He is divided into two variants: *gol he* ("round he") and *do-cashmī he* ("two-eyed he").

Gol he (گول ہے) is written round and zigzagged. It can only be used as in Persian.

Do-cashmī he (دو چشمی ہے) is written as in Arabic Naskh style (as a loop), in order to create the aspirate consonants and write Arabic words.

Letter's name	Final Form	Middle Form	Initial Form	Isolated Form
گول ہے Gol he	ہے	ہے	ہے	ہے
دو چشمی ہے Do-cashmī he	ہے	ہے	ہے	ہے

Ayn

Ayn in its initial and final position is silent in pronunciation and is replaced by the sound of its preceding or succeeding vowel.

Nun Ghunnah

Nasalized vowels are represented by *Nun Ghunnah* written after their non nasalized versions, for example: *ہے* when nasalized would become *ہے*. In middle form *Nun Ghunnah* is written just like *Nun* and is differentiated by a diacritic called *Maghnoona* or *Ulta Jazm* which is a superscript V symbol above the ن.

Examples:

Form	Urdu	Transcription
Orthography	ں	ṅ
End Form	میں	main
Middle Form	کنڈول	kaṅwal

Hamza

In Urdu *Hamza* is silent in all its forms except for when it is used as *Hamza-e-Izafat*. The main use of *Hamza* in Urdu is to indicate a vowel cluster.

Diacritics

Urdu uses the same subset of diacritics used in Arabic based on Persian conventions. Urdu also uses Persian names of the diacritics instead of Arabic names. Commonly used diacritics are Zabar (Arabic Fathah), Zer (Arabic Kasrah), Pesh (Arabic Dammah) which are used to clarify the pronunciation of vowels. Jazam (Arabic Sukun) is used to indicate a Consonant Cluster and Shad (Arabic Tashdid) which is used to indicate a Gemination. Other diacritics include Khari Zabar (Arabic Dagger alif), Do Zabar (Arabic Fathatan) which are found in some common Arabic loan words. Other Arabic diacritics are also sometimes used though very rarely in loan words from Arabic. Zer-e-Izafat and Hamza-e-Izafat are described in next section.

Other than common diacritics, Urdu also has special diacritics, which are often found only in dictionaries for the clarification of irregular pronunciation. These diacritics include Kasrah-e-Majhool, Fathah-e-Majhool, Dammah-e-Majhool, Maghnoona, Ulta Jazam, Alif-e-Wavi and some other very rare diacritics. Among these, only Maghnoona is used commonly in dictionaries and has a unicode representation at U+0658. Other diacritics are only rarely written in printed form mainly in some advance dictionaries.^[10]

Izāfat

Izāfat is a syntactical construction of two nouns, where the first component is a determined noun, and the second is a determiner. This construction was borrowed from Persian. A short vowel "i" is used to connect these two words. It may be written as *zer* (ـِ) at the end of the first word, but usually is not written at all. If the first word ends in *inḥotī he* (ہ) or *ye* (ی) then *hamzā* (ء) is used above the last letter (ہ or ی). If the first word ends in a long vowel then *barī ye* (ے) with *hamzā* on top (ئ) is written.^[11]

Forms	Example	Transliteration	Meaning
ـِ	شیرِ پنجاب	<i>sher-i Panjāb</i>	the lion of Punjab
ء	غزوة ہند	<i>ghazwah-yi Hind</i>	the Conquest of India
ئ	ولئ کامل	<i>walī-yi kāmil</i>	perfect saint
ئے	روئے زمین	<i>rū-yi zamīn</i>	the surface of the Earth
	صدائے بلند	<i>ṣadā-yi buland</i>	a high voice

Computers and the Urdu alphabet

In the early days of computers, Urdu was not properly represented on anycode page. One of the earliest code pages to represent Urdu was IBM Code Page 868 which dates back to 1990.^[12] Other early code pages which represented Urdu alphabets were Windows-1256 and MacArabic encoding both of which date back to the mid 1990s. In Unicode, Urdu is represented inside the Arabic block. Another code page for Urdu, which is used in India, is Perso-Arabic Script Code for Information Interchange. In Pakistan, the 8-bit code page which is developed by National Language Authority is called Urdu Zabta Tākhti (اردو ضابطہ تختی) (UZT)^[13] which represents Urdu in its most complete form including some of its specialized diacritics, though UZT is not designed to coexist with the Latin alphabet.

Encoding Urdu in Unicode

Like other writing systems derived from the Arabic script, Urdu uses the 0600–06FF Unicode range.^[14] Certain glyphs in this range appear visually similar (or identical when presented using particular fonts) even though the underlying encoding is different. This presents problems for information storage and retrieval. For example, the University of Chicago's electronic copy of John Shakespear's "A Dictionary, Hindustani, and English"^[15] includes the word 'بھارت' (India). Searching for the string "بھارت" returns no results, whereas querying with the (identical-looking in many fonts) string "بھارت" returns the correct entry.^[16] This is because the medial form of the Urdu letter *do chashmi he* (U+06BE)—used to form aspirate digraphs in Urdu—is visually identical in its medial form to the Arabic letter *hā'* (U+0647; phonetic value /h/). In Urdu, the /h/ phoneme is represented by the character U+06C1, called *gol he* (round *he*), or *chhoti he* (small *he*).

Confusable glyphs in Urdu and Arabic script

Characters in Urdu	Characters in Arabic
◌ (U+06C1), ◌ (U+06BE)	◌ (U+0647)
س (U+06CC)	س (U+0649), ي (U+064A)
ک (U+06A9)	ك (U+0643)

In 2003, the Center for Research in Urdu Language Processing (CRULP)^[17]—a research organisation affiliated with Pakistan's National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences—produced a proposal for mapping from the 1-byte UZT encoding of Urdu characters to the Unicode standard.^[18] This proposal suggests a preferred Unicode glyph for each character in the Urdu alphabet.

Software

The Daily Jang was the first Urdu newspaper to be typeset digitally in *Nasta'liq* by computer. There are efforts underway to develop more sophisticated and user-friendly Urdu support on computers and on the Internet. Nowadays, nearly all Urdu newspapers, magazines, journals and periodicals are composed on computers via various Urdu software programmes, the most widespread of which is InPage Desktop Publishing package. Microsoft has included Urdu language support in all new versions of Windows and both Windows Vista and Microsoft Office 2007 are available in Urdu through Language Interface Pack^[19] support. Most Linux Desktop distributions allow the easy installation of Urdu support and translations as well.^[20] Apple implemented the Urdu language keyboard across Mobile devices in its iOS 8 update in September 2014.^[21]

Romanization standards and systems

There are several romanization standards for writing Urdu with the Latin alphabet, though they are not very popular because most fall short of representing the Urdu language properly. Instead of standard romanization schemes, people on Internet, mobile phones and media often use a non-standard form of romanization which tries to mimic English orthography. The problem with this kind of romanization is that it can only be read by native speakers, and even for them with great difficulty. Among standardized romanization

schemes, the most accurate is ALA-LC romanization which is also supported by National Language Authority. Other romanization schemes are often rejected because either they are unable to represent sounds in Urdu properly, or they often do not take regard of Urdu orthography and favor pronunciation over orthography^[22]

Roman Urdu also holds significance among the Christians of Pakistan and North India. Urdu was the dominant native language among Christians of Karachi and Lahore in present-day Pakistan and Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan in India, during the early part of the 19th and 20th century, and is still used by Christians in these places. Pakistani and Indian Christians often used the Roman script for writing Urdu. Thus Roman Urdu was a common way of writing among Pakistani and Indian Christians in these areas up to the 1960s. The Bible Society of India publishes Roman Urdū Bibles that enjoyed sale late into the 1960s (though they are still published today). Church songbooks are also common in Roman Urdu. However, the usage of Roman Urdu is declining with the wider use of Hindi and English in these states.

See also

- Nasta'liq script
- Persian alphabet
- Urdu Wikipedia
- Urdu keyboard
- Urdu Braille
- Urdu Informatics

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External links

- [Urdu alphabet](#)
- [Urdu alphabet with Devanagari equivalents](#)
- [Hugo's Urdu Alphabet Page](#)
- [calligraphyislamic.com](#) a resource for Urdu calligraphy and script
- [Urdu Script Introduction from Columbia University](#)
- [National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language](#)

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