

## Nahw - Singular, Dual, and Plural Nouns in Arabic

Arabic nouns can either be singular (المُفْرَد), dual (المُثَنِّي), or plural (الْجَمْعُ). This is depicted diagrammatically in the following chart (click to enlarge), with further subdivisions for the plural noun.



### The Dual:

The dual can be constructed depending upon its grammatical state. Thus, the rule for constructing dual in رفع are different than the rules for constructing the dual in either نصب or جر . Below, we analyze these rules for constructing the dual of a noun in Arabic.

- When the noun is in رفع the dual is constructed by adding the letters ا and ن

e.g. جَاءَ الطَّالِبَانِ (The two students came) . In this structure the ا is basically the sign of

ضَمٌّ whereas the final ن and the corresponding كَسْرَةٌ do not have a grammatical significance

- When the noun is in either نصب or جر , the dual is formed by adding ا يَنْ to the singular e.g.

رَأَيْتُ الطَّالِبَيْنِ (I saw the two students) or مَرَرْتُ بِالطَّالِبَيْنِ (I passed by the two

students). In this case, the ي indicates both فَتْحَةٌ and كَسْرَةٌ and, as before, the final ن and

the corresponding كَسْرَةٌ do not have a grammatical significance

Note on the use of Dual:

- If the verb precedes the فاعِل the verb must be singular, e.g. ذَهَبَ الْوَلَدَانِ (The two boys went)
- If the فاعِل precedes the verb then the verb should also be dual, e.g. الْوَلَدَانِ ذَهَبَا

The Plural:

As can be seen from the above diagram, there are two types of plurals in Arabic:

- الْجَمْعُ السَّالِمُ or the *Sound Plural*
- الْجَمْعُ الْمُكْسَرُ or the *Broken Plural*

The first category can further be divided into masculine or feminine genders.

The Sound Plural: This is formed from the singular by suffixing additional letters to it while retaining the original letters from the singular noun; thus the name *Sound Plural*. Below, we analyze rule for constructing the Sound Plurals.

Sound Masculine Plural:

- When the noun is in رَفْع the plural is constructed by adding the letters و and ن, with the ن having a فَتْحَةٌ on it. In this structure the و is basically the sign of ضَمَّةٌ whereas the final ن and the corresponding فَتْحَةٌ do not have a grammatical significance. For example, جَاءَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ (The Muslim men came)
- When the noun is in either نَصْب or جَر , the plural is formed by adding a يَنْ , preceded by a letter with a kasra, to the singular. For example, رَأَيْتُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ (I saw the Muslim men)

or مَرَرْتُ بِالْمُسْلِمِينَ (I passed by the Muslim men)

#### Sound Feminine Plural:

- When the noun is in رَفْع the plural is constructed by adding the letters ا and ت to the singular, with a ضَمَّة on the ت . For example, جَاءَتِ الْمُسْلِمَاتُ (The Muslim women came)
- When the noun is in either نَصْب or جَر the plural is formed by adding the letters ا and ت to the singular, with a كَسْرَة on the ت in both the cases. For example, رَأَيْتِ الْمُسْلِمَاتِ (I saw the Muslim women ) or مَرَرْتُ بِالْمُسْلِمَاتِ (I passed by the Muslim women)

#### The Broken Plural:

This is called *broken* because it does not retain the structure of the singular noun i.e. it is formed by breaking up the singular noun. Thus, in this type of plural the singular is altered by changing its vowel or altering its letters. This is analogous to the English where we say *Man-Men*, *Mouse-Mice*, or *Sheep-Sheep*.

The broken plural in Arabic is based on different patterns and there is no one rule which governs the formation of the broken plural. These are best learned by exposure. Below, I list some of these patterns

or اوزان

الوزن	Singular	Plural	Meaning
أَفْعُلْ	نَفْسٌ	أَنْفُسٌ	Self - Selves
أَفْعَالٌ	نَهْرٌ	أَنْهَارٌ	River - Rivers
أَفْعِلَةٌ	سُؤَالٌ	أَسْئِلَةٌ	Question - Questions
فَعْلٌ	كِتَابٌ	كُتُبٌ	Book - Books
فَعُولٌ	قَلْبٌ	قُلُوبٌ	Heart - Hearts

فِعَالٌ	جَبَلٌ	جِبَالٌ	Mountain - Mountains
أَفْعِلَاءٌ	نَبِيٌّ	أَنْبِيَاءٌ	Messenger - Messengers
فِعْلَانٌ	غُلَامٌ	غِلْمَانٌ	Boy - Boys
فُعَالٌ	حَافِظٌ	حُفَاظٌ	Keeper - Keepers
فُعَلَاءٌ	فَقِيرٌ	فُقَرَاءٌ	Beggar - Beggars
أَفَاعِلٌ	أَنْمِلَةٌ	أَنْمَالٌ	Fingertip - Fingertips
أَفَاعِيلٌ	إِبْرِيْقٌ	أَبَارِيْقٌ	Beaker-Beakers
مَفَاعِلٌ	مَسْجِدٌ	مَسَاجِدٌ	Mosque - Mosques
مَفَاعِيلٌ	مِفْتَاحٌ	مِفْتَاحٌ	Key - Keys

I hope this introduction to the Singular-Dual-Plural system in Arabic will be a good starting point for anyone trying to master this subject.