



Five College Center for World Languages

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# Five College Spoken Arabic Courses Online Orientation Tutorial

## Instructions

This tutorial answers many frequently asked questions about the program. Students applying for admission to Five College Spoken Arabic courses are no longer required to complete this online orientation tutorial, but may wish to review the information before beginning their coursework.

Questions about the status of an application or orientation response should be directed to [fcmlp2@umass.edu](mailto:fcmlp2@umass.edu). Course information and applications are on the [Five College Center for World Languages](#) website.

## About

### Who sponsors Five College Spoken Arabic courses and where do sessions meet?

#### Joint Sponsorship

Five College Spoken Arabic courses are sponsored jointly by the Five Colleges: Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The administrative home for these courses is the Five College Center for World Languages (FCCWL). The Center is located at Amherst College, 79 S. Pleasant St. in downtown Amherst ([directions to the Center](#)). FCCWL's operations and staff are supported equally by each of the five institutions. The courses offered by the Center are listed at the University and have been approved for Five College interchange credit by each of the other four campuses. A student studying for a degree at any of the five institutions may enroll in Fall and Spring academic courses as part of their regular course load. There is no special fee.

#### Mission of FCCWL

The role of FCCWL is to support study of the Less-Commonly Taught Languages (commonly abbreviated as LCTLs) by Five College students. FCCWL works only with languages not represented in traditional classroom language offerings at the colleges. Arabic is the one exception. Spoken Arabic

courses are designed to complement classroom offerings in Modern Standard Arabic by giving Arabic students an opportunity to develop conversational skills in a specific dialect. In addition to offering courses, FCCWL also engages in numerous course and materials development projects funded by government and private foundation grants.

## **Sessions on All Five Campuses**

Spoken Arabic courses may be scheduled to meet on any of the five campuses. Conversation sessions meet on the home campus of the native speaking conversation partner assigned to each section, and conversation partners are spread out among all five campuses. Sessions are scheduled based on schedule information submitted by admitted students. Each student is assigned to whichever conversation section can best meet his/her educational needs with preference given to a home campus or nearby campus location when possible. The Center does not have the resources to provide home campus sessions for all students and conversation partner availability is limited. Therefore, a student enrolling in the course should be aware that his/her sessions may be scheduled to meet on another campus.

## **Format**

### **What is the format of Spoken Arabic courses? How are these courses different from regular classroom language courses?**

#### **What is the course format?**

Spoken Arabic courses are currently offered as Supervised Independent language courses. Students in a Supervised Independent Spoken Arabic course work independently during the week and then have a weekly 60-minute conversation session to practice using the material studied independently. The conversation session is led by a native speaker trained to be a conversation partner with the program. Conversation sessions typically have only 1-3 students. The final grade for a Supervised Independent Spoken Arabic course will be based 80% on a final oral evaluation conducted by a member of the Five College Arabic faculty or an external evaluator, 10% on attendance, and 10% on on-time submission of weekly self-assessment reports.

At the lower levels (generally levels I through III), a detailed syllabus guides preparation for each week's session. Upper-level students participate in choosing topics for weekly discussion. Students should expect to spend about 4 hours per week working independently to prepare for the 60-minute conversation practice session each week. The final oral evaluation at the end of the course is based on the content of the syllabus for the semester.

#### **How is a conversation session different from a regular classroom session?**

Teachers in a classroom course often introduce new material to students and then have students practice using the material in the classroom and at home. For a conversation session, a student prepares the material ahead of time, practicing extensively on his/her own. The student then attends the conversation session and participates in the activities based on prior preparation. The activities in a conversation session emphasize active use of the language to communicate with other students and the conversation partner.

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## **Why is the person who leads my section referred to as a "conversation partner" rather than a "teacher"?**

The term "conversation partner" is used to stress the nature of the session. A regular classroom teacher presents information to a larger body of students and then leads the class through a set of activities designed to address the common needs of the entire group. A conversation partner works with a small group of students to practice, refine, and elaborate upon knowledge and skills students have developed through independent study.

## **Who can be a conversation partner?**

A variety of individuals work as conversation partners for the program. Most conversation partners are undergraduates; some graduate students or community members may also be conversation partners. Conversation partners must be native speakers or have near-native proficiency in the language. Conversation partners are trained and supervised by the Center.

## **What is a course organizer?**

Each course offered by the Five College Center for World Languages has a staff member assigned as the course organizer for the course. The staff member handles logistics for the course for both students and the conversation partner, reads weekly self-assessment reports, schedules final oral evaluations, and works with the program director to address student concerns. The course organizer is the person to contact about difficulties ordering the textbook or accessing multimedia materials, questions about the syllabus or assignment due dates, and questions about any other logistical aspects of the course. The current course organizer for Spoken Arabic courses is Theo Hull, Program Assistant with the Center. They may be reached at [fcmlp2@umass.edu](mailto:fcmlp2@umass.edu) or by phone at 413-542-5264.

# **Conversation Sessions**

## **What happens in a conversation session?**

### **Conversation Sessions**

Conversation sessions provide a chance for learners to practice using the language. The session is conducted entirely in the language students are learning with an opportunity to ask questions in English at the very end of every session. Conversation sessions focus on using the language in the types of situations one might encounter in everyday life. Students commonly engage in role plays, question and answer activities, description, narration, and problem-solving exercises. In beginning level courses, typical topics are greetings, introductions, getting acquainted conversations, telephone calls, asking for directions, shopping and bargaining, and talking about schedules and events in the past, present or future. More advanced students will practice more complex speech activities that involve expressing opinions, giving reasons in arguments, and discussing current events and cultural issues.

### **Conversation Partners**

In this program, the term "conversation partner" is used to refer to the person who leads the conversation session. The role of the conversation partner is to facilitate activities that make active

use of the language. In a successful conversation session, the students will be the ones doing most of the talking for at least 90% of the time. The conversation partner may engage students in dialogue or may have students work in pairs with one another. The conversation partner will use the language being learned throughout the session. At the end of the session, the conversation partner will give students a chance to ask questions in English.

## **How to Prepare**

Most of your study time each week needs to be devoted to oral practice. This means you must have a regular time and place to study where you can talk out loud without bothering others. To do well, you literally need to TALK TO YOURSELF. Ask yourself what you would need to do and say to communicate in a particular situation. Imagine yourself in many variations of the same situation. Act out various role plays or dialogs, describe things, and narrate events aloud. Practice over and over again, always keeping in mind that your goal is communication in a wide variety of situations.

## **What makes a good conversation session?**

Here are some characteristics of a good conversation session:

- students are actively speaking throughout the session
- activities encourage students to create language rather than read from a book or piece of paper
- every student gets an equal chance to participate
- the interactions are almost completely in the target language, English is used sparingly
- every student in the session arrives well-prepared
- the conversation partner arrives well-prepared
- questions, problems, and corrections are dealt with in a constructive manner

**Warm-Up Activity (Levantine Arabic)**

**Role Play: Offering Cake (Levantine Arabic)**

**Questions and Answers Between Students (Swahili)**

**Role Playing Informal Greetings (Pashto)**

**Role Playing Meeting a New Friend for Lunch (Persian)**

**Discussing What a Student Did Last Week (Persian)**

# **Preparation**

## **How do I prepare for the start of the semester?**

### **Order your Textbook!**

Order your textbook one or two months before the start of the semester. You will be given textbook ordering information when you register. Textbooks need to be ordered online. If you have questions or difficulties ordering the text, contact your course organizer as soon as possible for assistance (Theo Hull at [fcmlp2@umass.edu](mailto:fcmlp2@umass.edu) or 413-542-5264).

**Late Enrollments:** If you enroll late, order your textbook immediately and contact your course organizer about how to prepare for sessions until your textbook arrives.

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## Find your Syllabus

Course syllabi are housed on the LangMedia website. The primary web address for this website is: <http://langmedia.fivecolleges.edu>. There are individual links for each language. Find your Arabic course and level. This page has syllabi from the most recently offered Arabic courses. Syllabi for the upcoming semester will be posted on LangMedia a week or two before the semester starts. Course formats and requirements vary by semester, so you will need to study your up-to-date syllabus when it is issued.

## Prepare for your First Session

Before attending your first session you need to find your syllabus online and follow the instructions on the syllabus to prepare for the first session. You are expected to attend the first session prepared.

## Watch your E-mail for Important Scheduling Information

Regular conversation session meeting times are set at the beginning of the semester. Conversation session scheduling will take place over e-mail. Students send schedule information to the native speaking conversation partner. The conversation partner chooses a time that will work for all members of the group. That time then becomes the regular meeting time for the semester and should remain consistent throughout the semester. Conversation sessions meet on the home campus of the conversation partner, and the conversation partner will notify students of the exact meeting location.

You will receive more details about the process of scheduling conversation sessions when you register for the course. If you have questions about the scheduling process, contact your course organizer. Your course organizer is Theo Hull, Program Assistant for FCCWL. They can be reached at [fcmlp2@umass.edu](mailto:fcmlp2@umass.edu) or 413-542-5264.

## After your Session: Submit your Self-Assessments

10% of your final grade is based on weekly submission of self-assessment reports. You should submit your self-assessment as soon as possible after each week's conversation session and no later than 9am on the following Monday (you get the weekend as a grace period in case you forget). The self-assessments are designed to help students reflect about the language learning process and to let the FCCWL office know about any academic or logistical issues that need attention. Self-assessments need not be long. Some students choose to write a lot, others just a sentence or two. You get full credit for assessments turned in on time, but only partial credit for late assessments. You will get a special online link to self-assessments when you register for the course.

# Policies

## What if ... ? (questions, absences, course drops, etc.)

### Logistical Questions

Address questions about course logistics to the FCCWL staff, not to your conversation partner. FCCWL language courses each have a staff member assigned as the course organizer for the course. The course organizer for all Spoken Arabic courses is **Theo Hull**. They are the person to contact about

issues such as difficulties purchasing or accessing materials, scheduling problems, evaluation scheduling, and questions about meeting course requirements. They can be contacted at [fcmlp2@umass.edu](mailto:fcmlp2@umass.edu) or 413-542-5264.

## Scheduling and Attendance Policies

- **Absences:** Students are graded on attendance. If you are ill, have a job or graduate school interview, a religious holiday, or some other school-sponsored activity, you can be excused from the session so that you are not penalized for missing a session. A student who needs an excused absence should e-mail the FCCWL staff AND his/her conversation partner. A student who misses a session will NOT get a makeup session and needs to arrange to spend more time on the material on his/her own.
- **Extended absences due to health or personal emergencies:** Students who experience serious health problems or other personal emergencies need to consult with home campus health services and/or deans. If an extended absence is necessary, the program director will work with the student and appropriate deans to determine the best course of action.
- **Permanent changes to the regular meeting time:** Conversation groups may change to a different regular meeting time during the semester if the conversation partner and all students in the group agree upon a new meeting time that works well for all involved. Requests to change to a new time must be communicated to the Center office by the conversation partner. The program staff will only approve the change after verifying with the conversation partner and each individual student that the change in time will work.
- **Final evaluation dates are on your syllabus:** Do not make travel plans (such as buying a plane ticket) until you know the exact date and time of your final evaluation. Graduating seniors, please remind the office of your senior grade deadline!

## Other Important Policies

- **Drop and course repetition policies:** Drop policies differ by home campus. The drop policy for your campus will be stated on the course contract you will sign when you register for the course. A student who receives a grade below a B- for the course or who has repeated absences from conversation sessions will not be allowed to enroll in future Five College Center for the Study of World Languages (FCCWL) courses. FCCWL courses cannot be repeated to replace a failing grade or to improve a grade.
- **Accommodations:** The University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Five College Center for World Languages are committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS) at UMass or on your home campus, you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in your FCCWL course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify the program director within the first three weeks of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

## How to Succeed

**What do I need to do to be successful in a Spoken Arabic course? Is this course a good fit for my needs?**

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## **Do you have enough time to devote to the course?**

You need to be able to spend 4-5 hours per week practicing the language on your own and attend a weekly 60-minute conversation session. Daily practice is more effective than cramming your practice into one or two sessions.

## **Approach Language Study as a Training/Practice Regimen**

Language study is a serious commitment. You need to think of language study as similar to athletic training, musical training, or practice in dance or theater. It takes sustained practice and study every day in order to make noticable progress. Simply completing a set of exercises will not produce tangible results. You need to prepare and practice communicating regularly.

## **Study Where You Can Talk to Yourself**

You need to practice where you can comfortably repeat and imitate the speakers in audio and video materials. You also need to spend time improvising out loud, thinking through the various types of scenarios and speaking tasks you will do in your conversation sessions. You need to pretend you are part of a role play or real situation in which you need to address and respond to people. Imagine how you would handle certain situations and practice the speech involved out loud.

## **Review Constantly**

Language courses are cumulative. It is easy to forget the vocabulary and forms learned in earlier weeks if you do not continually review. It is also easy to find yourself feeling lost and overwhelmed half-way through the semester, if you have not been systematically reviewing as you go. Include time for review every day.

## **Submit Your Weekly Self-Assessment Report**

Self-assessment reports are an important part of your course and 10% of your final grade. The reports are designed to help you think about the effectiveness of your language learning strategies and to let program staff members know how things are going. Self-assessments are graded based on the timeliness of submission. You do not need to write a lot. Short, simple responses are fine. The key is that you have taken a few minutes to think about your progress and to pay attention to key factors that may affect the success of your learning. Having multiple missing or late self-assessments will result in a lower final grade, while a strong record of on-time self-assessments makes a significant positive contribution to the final grade assigned.

## **Read Your E-Mail, Stay in Touch with Questions and Concerns, Respond to Queries Promptly**

Organizing a language program based on small group and individual sessions is a complex process. You will be one of 100-150 students in 60 different courses working with over 30 different mentors and conversation partners. Conversation partners help you with learning the language; the FCCWL staff helps you deal with logistical issues related to your course. Each language has a staff member who serves as the course organizer for all courses in that language. Theo Hull is the course organizer for all Spoken Arabic courses. You can reach them at [fcmlp2@umass.edu](mailto:fcmlp2@umass.edu) or 413-542-5264. Your course organizer is your first contact about logistical issues. If for some reason, your course organizer is not available, another staff member will help you. You will be introduced via email to your course organizer at the start of the course.

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In this context, your success in the course requires you to take the initiative in communicating with your course organizer and in responding promptly to e-mail queries. Here are some situations that require PROMPT e-mails or calls to your course organizer:

- **Textbooks unavailable or any online materials you can't access:** Contact your course organizer right away if you find a textbook is unavailable or you are waiting for one that is on order. Do not wait until your session with your conversation partner to explain there is an access problem. The FCCWL staff is here to help with logistical issues. They will help assess the situation and make sure that you get access to the materials you need so that you do not get behind in your assignments. The same goes for online materials, whether on LangMedia or elsewhere. This is a problem for the FCCWL staff to deal with, not your conversation partner. Remember: Conversation partners help you learn the language; your course organizer and other FCCWL staff members deal with logistical issues.
- **Scheduling or location confusions:** If you do not find your session at the time and place you expected, contact the office immediately so we can sort out the confusion. During the day, you can call 413-542-5264. If it is evening, e-mail. Campuses sometimes change room assignments, buses break down, or someone gets ill. As soon as you let us know the problem, we will work on sorting it out.
- **Provide your schedule accurately and promptly for oral evaluation scheduling:** At mid-semester time, you will receive an e-mail from your course organizer asking you to provide your schedule for the oral evaluation period. Respond PROMPTLY and ACCURATELY. The evaluation scheduler is looking for a single time block that works for the outside evaluator and every single student needing an individual oral in that language. Given the very tight schedules of outside evaluators, possible time blocks are usually few and far between. "Oops, I goofed" is not a good response if you neglected to write a course on your schedule and everything is all scheduled. It is not possible to change your oral evaluation time slot once it has been scheduled.

## **FINAL WORD: Practice Proactive Communication Skills**

In order to successfully manage the logistical side of this course, you need to practice proactive communication skills similar to those required in a professional internship or work environment. To do this successfully, you need to:

- check email at least twice per day (once in the am and once in the pm);
- keep the email and phone number of the Center in your contact list and promptly contact the office if logistical questions or issues come up (for something that needs a quick response during business hours, please call; we may not see your email in time);
- read emails carefully, note how the information applies to your situation, and promptly take whatever next step or response is necessary;
- take a proactive approach to problem solving if something is confused or amiss by actively seeking solutions, information, or persons that can help sort out the situation.

## **End of Tutorial and Response**

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# End of Tutorial

Students who need to complete this orientation tutorial as part of an application for a Spoken Arabic course, need to submit the [TUTORIAL RESPONSE](#). Once your orientation is complete and your application approved, you will be able to make an appointment or attend a drop-in session to do the paperwork necessary to enroll.

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