

Heritage Arabic eBook

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Title: What does a student need to do in order to graduate on time?

Domain: This activity aims to develop students’ abilities to use language meaningfully in various communicative situations. It exercises the kinds of knowledge that heritage Arabic learners need in order to function in the contexts where they typically find themselves situated. Various abilities are necessary in these contexts: referring to oneself, to one’s immediate environment, to general interests or to education/work related matters are all language skills that are invoked in everyday communication.

This activity promotes [critical dialect awareness](#)—i.e. explicit knowledge about the contexts in which specific registers (formal or informal) and varieties (MSA, “dialect,” more local variants, inter-dialectal communication) are used—a skill that is necessary if heritage Arabic learners are to function at a high level of literacy.

Modes of communication: Interpersonal and Interpretative

Proficiency/Performance Range: Novice-high to Intermediate-high

Objectives:

- (1) Students will be able to articulate in Arabic the various challenges facing undergraduates today using sentence and paragraph length discourse (both written and oral)
- (2) Students will be able to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in verb conjugation across spoken dialects and MSA
- (3) Students will be able to utilize vocabulary specific to topics of studying, working, family life, etc.

Step One: IN CLASS

1. In a large group, encourage students to come up with key words and phrases related to studying, working, and family life. On the board, write key words and phrases that the students offer. Possible questions to ask might include:
 - a. What do you study? Why did you choose your major? Did your parents want you to study something else?
 - b. Do you work outside of school? How do you balance your work and school obligations?
 - c. Where do you live? Do you live with your family, with roommates, in the dorms or by yourself?
 - d. What are the costs associated with pursuing a college degree? How do you finance your studies? Does your family help with tuition and textbook costs?
 - e. Do you have responsibilities at home? What are they?
 - f. What are other activities that you need to do during your time at college in order to get a job after graduation?
2. After writing key words and phrases on the board, review vocabulary with students to check for comprehension. Have students write vocabulary in their notebooks.

3. Break students into groups based on similar dialects (when possible). Have students brainstorm in these groups at least 5 sentences explaining what they must do to graduate on time and find a job after graduation. Request that they compile a list of the top five factors that hinder timely graduation. They can speak to each other in MSA, their regional dialects, or a mixture of the two.

*During these initial in-class activities, we urge you to encourage students to write using any variety of Arabic that comes to them, regardless of whether it is MSA, their regional dialect, or even if they use some English words. **This will allow students to focus more on the content of their communication and what they can say rather than what they cannot say.** During later steps of this activity, students will translate these texts into MSA. Keep in mind that some concepts used at a US university might not translate very well into Arabic and so using English for those concepts is appropriate.

Step Two: AT HOME

1. Have students study verb conjugation in Modern Standard Arabic. Ask them to compare the verbal forms that they use in their spoken dialects with those of MSA. This may be a relatively mechanical exercise, but it is important for students to analyze the similarities and differences between the spoken and written varieties of Arabic.
2. Have each student record a short interview (1-2 minutes) in Arabic with another student about the most important things students must do to graduate on time and find jobs after graduation. This interview may be in MSA or regional dialects, with the additional option of using some English. Have students prepare a short clip from the interview to play in class. This clip can be posted to a class website, blog or other forum that makes it easy to share in class.

Step Three: IN CLASS

1. Give a short quiz at the beginning of class on verb conjugation in Modern Standard Arabic.
2. After the quiz, discuss some of the differences between the verbs in MSA and in regional dialects. If there are multiple dialects spoken in class, compare and contrast the ways that spoken verbs are conjugated.

*We recommend that you use these moments of reflection on the difference between MSA and regional dialects to begin/continue a discussion with your students about language variation in the Arabic speaking world. This can be a contentious topic, but an important one to have. Explain to students that language variation exists in all languages; it is normal, and there is no such thing as a “good” or “bad” variety (please see [Heritage Language](#) for a more detailed discussion about our philosophy and assumptions about the Arabic language). Discuss with students how the social context often dictates when a certain variety is used over another. One way to do this is to make a list with the students of contexts in which MSA is normally used and contexts in which regional varieties are used. This discussion can be in Arabic or English.

3. Return to the interviews the students conducted for their homework. In groups of 4, have

students share with their fellow group members at least one thing that their interviewee said was important for graduating on time. This conversation should be in Arabic (either MSA, regional dialects or a mixture of the two). If there are words they don't know how to say in Arabic, have students look at dictionaries or ask for help.

4. In pairs, have students work together to write words, sentences, strings of sentences, or a paragraph (depending on their performance range) drawing on their interviews and the vocabulary you wrote on the board during the previous class discussion. This time, students will focus on writing in MSA. Push your students to produce text types at the level just above their current level of performance.
5. Have each pair of students exchange their written text with another group of 2 for peer-editing.

Step Four: AT HOME

1. Have students type up their peer-edited texts and post them to the course website, Facebook or blog page.

Step Five: IN CLASS

1. Print out a collection of the students' texts to distribute in class. In small groups, have students read these texts together.
2. Have students discuss in their small groups how the information contained in the texts generated by peers may be useful to college students like themselves.

*If telecollaboration with heritage students at another university is possible, have your students exchange these texts with them. Your students can compare and contrast their own concerns with those of their telecollaboration partners. For information on creating a telecollaboration, check CILC's [Heritage Telecollaboration](#).