



## Urdu and English

### Language background

Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by more than 170 million people, primarily in Pakistan and parts of India. It belongs to the Indo-European language family and shares many grammatical features with Hindi. Although the two languages are closely related in their spoken form, they differ significantly in writing system and some aspects of vocabulary.

Urdu developed through centuries of interaction between local South Asian languages and Persian and Arabic. As a result, Urdu vocabulary reflects influences from several linguistic traditions, particularly Persian and Arabic.

Urdu is written using a Perso-Arabic script, which is read from right to left. Like Arabic, this script often omits short vowels in everyday writing, meaning readers rely heavily on context and familiarity with word patterns to determine pronunciation. These features can influence how Urdu speakers approach English spelling, pronunciation and sentence structure.

### Key linguistic differences from English

- Urdu is written from right to left
- Urdu uses a Perso-Arabic script, which differs from the Roman alphabet used in English
- short vowels are often not written in Urdu text
- Urdu does not use capital letters
- Urdu typically follows subject–object–verb word order
- English consonant clusters are uncommon in Urdu
- Urdu distinguishes between aspirated and unaspirated consonants
- many Urdu speakers grow up navigating multiple languages

### What teachers may notice in English

Teachers may notice patterns such as:

- pupils writing without capital letters
- vowels missing in spelling
- phonetic spelling patterns
- sentence structures influenced by Urdu word order
- additional vowel sounds in words such as *eschool* or *esport*
- strong pronunciation of consonants

These patterns are often predictable forms of language transfer between Urdu and English.



## Why this happens

Urdu writing does not distinguish between upper-case and lower-case letters, so learners must learn English capitalisation as a new writing convention.

Because short vowels are often omitted in Urdu text, readers rely heavily on consonant patterns when recognising words. When writing in English, learners may therefore omit vowels or focus more strongly on consonants.

Urdu grammar typically places the verb at the end of a sentence, whereas English places the verb after the subject. This difference can influence how learners structure sentences in English.

Urdu phonology also includes distinctions between aspirated and unaspirated consonants, meaning that small changes in breath can alter the meaning of a word. These sound patterns may influence pronunciation when speaking English.

English also allows consonant clusters such as school or spring. Because these clusters are less common in Urdu, learners may insert a vowel to make pronunciation easier.

## Classroom strategies

- explicitly model capital letter use in writing
- highlight vowel patterns during spelling instruction
- model English sentence structures clearly
- break down complex consonant clusters
- practise pronunciation of unfamiliar sound patterns
- encourage oral rehearsal before writing

## Strengths to leverage

Urdu-speaking pupils often bring valuable strengths to the classroom, including:

- strong listening skills
- awareness of sound patterns in language
- strong oral communication
- experience navigating multilingual environments
- strong memory for spoken language

## Reflective questions for teachers

- Are spelling patterns influenced by pronunciation?
- Are missing vowels affecting reading and writing?
- Are sentence structures reflecting Urdu word order?