Tajwid Thoughts
by Saaima Yacoob
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ
Tajwīd Thoughts
by
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Recite With Love

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Dedicated to teachers and students of the Qurʾān,
from Imam al-Mujawwidīn, Muḥammad, the beloved of Allah,
may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family, to the dear reader of this book today.
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Introduction

All praise is due to Allah, our Creator, our Sustainer, the one who sent down the Qurʾān and granted us the immense blessing of Islam. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Master, Muhammad, his family, and his blessed companions through whom this sacred science has reached us.

Alhamdulillah, Allah Taʿālā has blessed me to teach the recitation of the Qurʾān for over a decade. Throughout these years, students have asked me important questions about their studies. While some were more easily answered verbally, others required longer written answers. Over the past few years, I have shared these answers on various online platforms. However, I felt that it would be beneficial to organize these answers into a book, making it easier to use in a classroom setting. I have also included some inspirational moments and spiritual lessons that I learned on my own journey of studying the sacred sciences of tajwīd and qirāʾāt.

This book is not written to be read from cover to cover, as not every entry will apply to every student. Students can benefit from the answers that apply to them at this point in their journey, and then refer to the book later as they encounter new learning situations. Teachers can use this book by referring students to specific discussions that
they feel would be helpful in either motivating them or providing a detailed explanation of the teacher’s approach.

I pray that Allah, Most High makes this collection beneficial to all those who teach and study the sciences of *tajwīd* and the *qirāʾāt*. May He, Most High accept it from me, my dear mother, my beloved husband, and my respected teachers, and all of my colleagues and students who read through these entries and provided invaluable feedback. Āmin.

الله هذا الدعاء و عليك الإجابة وهذا الجهد و عليك العقولان
The House on the Narrow Street

Our car pulled up to a narrow street. There was a goat by the door. Yes, imagine, a goat in a metropolis, but this was Karachi, where goats and donkeys and people all found a way to somehow co-exist, at least most of the time. I was about nine years old, and curious. What was this place to which I had been brought?

I moved cautiously behind my mother. Apparently, we had come here to meet a woman who recited Qurʾān correctly. I, who had finished the Qurʾān twice cover to cover, had no idea what correctly meant. I remember her clearly, a frail, thin woman with large dark eyes lined with koḥl and a lip that always pulled to one side when she spoke. Her hair was covered by a thin muslin dupatta tucked behind her ears. She was the woman who would introduce me to my deepest love. Her name was Ābida, and I called her bājī.

Each day, she would call me to her, and teach me one letter, "Take your tongue out a little for this one," I remember her saying, and teaching me to say ٍ. I would walk around her tiny, two room house practicing my letter of the day and reflecting on the life of this frail yet powerful woman. I did what she told me; I respected her. But it would take me years to understand that it was one
moment in my time with her that changed my relationship with the Qurʾān forever.

I used to wash dishes in my parent's home in Karachi. Water gushed through the faucet, and I had plenty of soap. I used to stand on a stool and listen to jinn stories from the cook while I washed. But my baji used to squat in front of a shallow mud "sink" and wash her dishes under a trickle of water that only came at certain times of the day. And there she was scrubbing and rinsing in this trickle of water, when I caught her smiling. I couldn't fathom what she was smiling about, until I noticed that she was smiling about the words that were coming out of her mouth in her immensely melodious voice. They were the words of Allah. Words that I had read so many times, but I never smiled.

That memory, two decades later is still engraved in my mind. It was that day that I became her student, when she gave me a little of what was in her heart to drink, and I became addicted. Throughout my life, I have searched for and have been granted by the grace of Allah Taʿāla amazing Qurʾān teachers, who have given me to drink of that magic potion that fills their hearts. The love that makes them smile even when they are faced with a trickle of water, the love that makes them think of the fountain of the Prophet ﷺ in jannah when confronted with thirst in this world.
What is *tajwīd*? Why learn it? It is the perfect excuse to spend time with your beloved, the Qurʾān.
You Will Have to Take a Taxi

You will have to take a taxi. The closest bus stop that I know of is at the mall. You could always walk from the mall, but remember the hills are quite steep in Amman. You can tell the taxi driver that you need to go to al-Masjid al-Nūr. He won’t know where it is and will probably ask five different people before he figures it out. In the meantime, enjoy the often breathtaking views of Amman, a city built on hills.

Here lives one of the saints that I have been honored to meet and spend time with. Perhaps, one of the most difficult aspects of studying and teaching tajwīd is maintaining the purity of one’s intention. I have to confess that even though I had been studying tajwīd for many years already, I had never really given thought to the significance of that word.

My cousin and I waited in a little store that was half restaurant and half grocery store until a little boy came to guide us to a small, first floor apartment. We entered and we were met with the hospitality that Arabs are famous for.

When asked what I had come to study, I replied, “tajwīd,” in my heart thinking “I think my sister mentioned that on the phone.” The reply I received was unexpected (which I came
to expect from my teacher). I was told that I had not come to study *tajwīd*, I had come to receive the “*sirr*” (secret) of *tajwīd*. I knew for sure that I would not be able to figure out what the secret was in that moment, because it was, after all, the “secret.” However, I did find the courage to ask how I would know if I had received it, and what if I did not receive it?

The answer till this day, makes my skin tremble. The saint responded with one word, “intention.” Intention was not the beginning of learning knowledge; it was the condition. In that moment, I came to understand that true knowledge is the “secret” that lies within sacred knowledge, and the condition (the word *shart* in Arabic and Urdu describes this best) is the purity and sincerity of intention.

How, I asked, was I to achieve this? Again, a short, concise answer, “Make your intention, and then forget about everything else.”

Sometimes, in the piles of papers, notebooks, recordings, and even our own *tajwīd* mistakes, we forget the point of it all, to attain the secret. The condition of which is, intention.

*Find a quiet moment to reflect and write down your intention for studying *tajwīd*, and then “forget everything else.”*
Choosing a Teacher

Every student is unique, as is every teacher. Keeping this in mind, how do you find the best Qurʾān teacher and program to achieve your Qurʾān learning goals?

Here are a few suggestions:

1) **Determine what exactly you need to study. Is it reading fluency, *tajwīd*, or are you looking to memorize?**

Reading fluency is a prerequisite to perfecting our *tajwīd* and memorizing the Qurʾān. At this stage, students work towards being able to read the Qurʾān from the *muṣḥaf* correctly and comfortably.

Studying *tajwīd* focuses on precision in recitation and includes the study of the rules through classical and contemporary texts. This program of study can result in an *ijāzah* (certification) to teach *tajwīd*.

Lastly, memorization of the noble Qurʾān can mean memorizing parts of it for devotional purposes, such as *surāh* Yāsīn, *surāh* al-Kahf, etc., or then embarking on the journey of memorizing the whole Qurʾān.
2) **Find a teacher that SPECIALIZES in this subtopic.**

Not all teachers have experience teaching all of these subjects. While some teachers are amazing at strengthening a student’s ḥifẓ, they may have less experience in helping a student to develop reading fluency.

3) **Know what learning method suits you best.**

Are you someone who does well with intensives, or do you prefer to learn small bits of information over a long period of time?

Are you a student who loves working at his/her own pace independently, or do you feel more motivated in group settings?

Keep these things in mind as you choose a teacher/program.

4) **What are your time constraints?**

How much time do you have to devote to class, reviewing notes, and preparing a recitation portion for the next class?
Choose a program that will allow you to achieve your goals in the time you have available. If you have a lot of free time, look for a program that has multiple classes a week. If you feel you are pressed for time, then perhaps, once a week would be better.

5) Teacher/Student chemistry

It is particularly important that you feel a connection to your teacher. The knowledge of the Qurʾān passes from heart to heart, requiring the student and teacher to care for each other for the purpose of the transference of knowledge.

If you feel that either due to personality or language barriers you are not able to develop a connection with your teacher, it would be best to respectfully not continue with the teacher/program.

6) Method of Correcting Mistakes

While every reading and memorization mistake will be corrected by a teacher, teachers do take different approaches when it comes to correcting tajwīd. While some teachers tend to correct every single mistake, regardless of how subtle it is, other teachers prefer to work on the application of one tajwīd rule at a time.
In the first approach, the student can expect to recite smaller portions in each class and spend quite a bit of time repeating a word or an āyah. In the second method, the teacher will only correct a student on the mistake that he/she is focusing on correcting at the time (such as application of qalqalah), letting other tajwid mistakes go uncorrected.

However, both methods of correction will lead to mastery at the end of the course of study.

7) Online or In Person?

Local classes allow you to be able to see your teacher and for them to see you. This is not always possible online. You also have the benefit of the teacher listening to you without any possible voice quality issues. Lastly, most students develop a stronger bond with a teacher that they meet with in-person.

Unfortunately, there are not always enough qualified Qur’ān teachers available in every area. Online classes allow you to have access to qualified teachers who may not live in your area. Also, for parents of young children, online classes are usually easier because it allows the parent to take class while the child is otherwise engaged, or to easily arrange childcare with other family members for the duration of the class time. Online learning,
however, can seem impersonal at times, and it is highly dependent on the voice quality that your device and internet service provide.

It is important that students consider all of these questions BEFORE choosing a program. Every teacher/program has a particular approach. It is important that a student think carefully about his/her own needs and find a program that suits him/her best.
Choosing a Program to Study the Qirāʾāt

The sacred science of the qirāʾāt is the science of the canonical recitations of the Qurʾān. Allah, Most High revealed the Qurʾān in seven aḥruf. Although we will not go into the details of what is meant by “seven aḥruf,” it is important to note that all of these different recitations of the Qurʾān are preserved and transmitted from the Beloved of Allah through unbroken chains of transmission (asānīd). This science is studied after one has completed their ijāzah in at least one reading (riwāyah), which is most commonly Ḥafṣ ʿan Āṣim, and studied the sacred science of tajwīd at an advanced level.

To facilitate your study of the sacred science of the qirāʾāt, it is important that you choose a program that will best help you to meet your goals.

The following are some questions that one should consider before enrolling in a program:

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1 For a detailed explanation of the qirāʾāt, see An Approach to the Qurʾānic Sciences by Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, pgs. 105-163.

2 Bukhārī 3219
What are the prerequisites?

Although these will differ between programs, the study of the qirāʾāt will be easier for those who have a strong understanding of the rules and theory of tajwīd as well as a background in the Arabic language.

Alḥamdulillāh, although there are now many more resources in English that facilitate the study of this sacred science, a student still needs to have studied Arabic grammar (naḥw) and Arabic morphology (ṣarf) in order to be able to fully understand why and when certain rules with apply in the canonical readings, as well as be able to effectively utilize the resources that have yet to be translated or written in English.

How will the rules pertaining to the differences in the qirāʾāt be taught?

While some programs use textbooks that teach the principles of the qirāʾāt through tables, charts and other mediums, others teach the rules directly from the text of the poems, al-Shāṭibiyyah and al-Durrah, and the many commentaries written on these texts.
We will look at the benefits and challenges presented by each of these approaches.

Contemporary texts that effectively summarize the differences between the riwāyah of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim and the other canonical readings can be much easier on students who are accustomed to using similar textbooks even in their secular studies. However, very few of these texts allow a student to see how the rules are derived from the text of the al-Shāṭibiyyah or al-Durrah. Therefore, a student would not necessarily be able to access more detailed discussions related to the qirāʾāt. These programs focus on ensuring the correct recitation of each reading (riwāyah).

Alternatively, other programs teach students the differences between the qirāʾāt through the actual text of the classical poems. This allows students to not only learn the rules, but also to see how they are derived from the text, learning the system of codes or sigla.

This can be a difficult learning experience for students, as it is a very different way of learning from what most modern students are accustomed to. Another difficulty is that students learn the differences for a particular rule for all the qurrāʾ covered in that poem at the same time. It can
be challenging for students to organize so much information for themselves.

However, this method of study allows a student to be more independent in their learning and research after they have completed a study of these poems with their teachers. Once a student learns to navigate the texts of the poems, they can access the multitude of classical and contemporary commentaries on them. Thus, they can delve into more detailed discussions and even the *tafsir* implications of the *qirāʻāt*, Allah willing.

**How is the recitation component organized?**

Some programs have the capacity to allow each student to recite to a teacher individually. This allows the student to recite each and every difference between the canonical recitations to a teacher. Other programs group students together. In this case, a student would be reciting his/her portion and listening to his/her classmates’ recitations for other parts of the Qurʾān. A group of students would be making a *khatam* of the Qurʾān together.

Another thing to take into consideration is the method of recitation. While some programs require students to make multiple completions of the Qurʾān, one for each *riwāyah*,
or only pairing similar qirāʾāt together (such as all those that recite four counts for al-madd al-munfsil), others recite all ten together in one completion (khatam) of the Qurʾān. The first method is called ifrādan and the second is known as jamʿ.

Reciting each riwāyah separately can be extremely fruitful, as it allows a student to focus on each reading individually. However, this method also takes longer.

Reciting in jamʿ or combining the qirāʾāt allows for all ten recitations to be completed in a shorter period. It also emphasizes the differences between the qirāʾāt as a student is reciting all the differences in each āyah and making sure not to mix recitations. Students have a better understanding of how each rule, for example the lengths of mudūd, varies between the canonical readings. This method, however, can be challenging for students, and may not be suitable for everyone.

**How much time commitment does the program require?**

The study of the qirāʾāt is a blessed and deep science and can be difficult at times. Before enrolling in a program, a student should make note of the number of instructional hours, as well as how much time is required to prepare for
each class. As qirā‘āt programs can often be time consuming, our late teacher Mufti Mohamed-Umer Esmail  would encourage students to consult with their family before enrolling in his class. I would also encourage students to do the same.

**Does the program include a study of other sciences related to the qirā‘āt?**

In order to complete one’s study of the qirā‘āt, it is important for a student to study the sciences of the orthography of the Qur’ān (*rasm*), the science of verse enumeration (*‘add al-fawāṣil*), and the study of the transmitters that are within the chains of transmissions of the qirā‘āt (*asānīd*). Ask to see if the program offers a study of these sciences as well, or if you will need to pursue these separately.

Every program is organized to fulfill the vision of that institute or teacher. It is important to understand a program well before enrolling in it. The most important part of one’s decision-making process is praying the prayer of *istikhārah* and establishing a sincere intention.
**Tajwīd Notebook**

We all have been stuck in that awkward moment when we need to write something down but cannot find a pencil or piece of paper. So, we find ourselves scribbling with crayons on the back of an envelope, or a random flyer. Sometimes, *tajwīd* notes suffer the same fate. They are written on a random piece of paper (with the intention of them being transferred later), or on a note’s app on a smartphone.

Although the crisis is averted in the moment, unfortunately, it doesn’t facilitate mastery of *tajwīd* rules. One of the first things my Shaykh told me was that I was required to have a notebook dedicated to the rules he would cover in class. I still have this notebook till today.

**Organizing Your Tajwīd Notebook**

You can buy a simple spiral notebook, or a journal. Some students use loose leaf paper that is filed in a binder. You can also have a word processing document that is dedicated to your *tajwīd* notes. You can take notes in the order that you learn them in class, or you can create sections, and write your new notes in the appropriate section. Here is a suggested list of sections you might need:
• Makhārij
• Ṣifāt
• Ghunnan
• Mudūd
• Waqf
• Extra

You can use tabs to separate the various sections, or just fold the first page before a new section begins. You can also buy a multi-subject notebook. Make sure to keep this notebook with your muṣḥaf and have it with you at every class.

Benefits of a Tajwīd Notebook

Having a notebook dedicated to tajwīd notes helps to know which rules you have covered and which you still need to learn. Also, it serves as a quick reference point for when you are trying to remember a specific rule. Lastly, but most importantly, it allows you to easily review the rules you have learned in your previous lesson.

Remembering Tajwīd Rules

In all the years that I have been teaching tajwīd, I have only had a few students who always answer my questions about tajwīd rules correctly. These students use the same
study technique. Just as they set time aside to practice the recitation lesson for the next class, they also set aside dedicated time to memorize whatever rules were covered in the previous session. Overtime, they have memorized all the rules that have been covered. Also, while preparing their recitation lesson, they identify examples of the rules we have studied. This helps to solidify their understanding of the material, but also makes it easier for them to answer the teacher’s questions in class.

Your tajwīd notebook is an essential part of your journey. For students who hope to obtain ijāzah, it is indispensable, as mastery of the rules is just as much a requirement for ijāzah as mastery in recitation.

I pray this helps all of us to get our tajwīd notebooks organized :)
Tajwīd Through Technology

So, it’s 2021 and Shaykh al-Huṣary along with twenty other Qāris is in your purse or your pocket.

We have lots of apps that start with the word “Qurʾān” on our phones, our tablets, and we have tens of websites bookmarked on our web browser. Considering how many resources we have access to, one would think that reciting the Qurʾān incorrectly is a thing of the past.

The difficult truth, however, is that although awareness of the science of tajwīd has increased, its mastery, for the most part, has not. There are some extremely effective tools available to Qurʾān students today that were not available to our predecessors, and yet, I would argue, our quality of recitation is not drastically better.

This leads us to today’s topic. How can we effectively use the technological tools available to help us improve our recitation?

Listening to Recordings of Expert Reciters

Whether you are memorizing or working on perfecting your recitation, listening to the recitation of expert reciters is always helpful. Unfortunately, many students
choose a reciter for the beauty of their voice, or style of recitation. However, one of the drawbacks of the internet is that anyone can upload their recitation. Often, they have beautiful voices, but are not trained reciters, and therefore make technical mistakes.

When choosing a reciter to listen to for the purposes of learning, students should choose a reciter that recites slowly, is known to be an expert reciter, and that the recording is of a high quality. It is often difficult to hear the subtle points of *tajwīd* in poor quality recordings.


**Reciting with Recordings of Expert Reciters**

If you are using a recording to review a *sūrah* that you have memorized, then you should recite *with* the reciter. However, if you are using the recording to practice your application of *tajwīd* rules, you will not benefit as much if you recite *with* the reciter. Instead, pause the recording, and recite the āyah aloud, that the *qārī* or *qāri‘ah* just recited. When you recite along with the reciter, you will not be able to hear your own mistakes. When we pause the recording and recite, we are more likely to hear them.
Recording Your Own Recitation

The problem with tajwīd mistakes is that they are the natural way we say that letter or sound. Our brain does not necessarily identify it as a “mistake.” This means that sometimes when we are practicing, we are simply solidifying our mistake. One of the ways to prevent this is to record your own recitation and replay it to yourself. This will allow you to compare your recitation to that of the expert reciter and identify mistakes. Most phones, even basic mobile phones, often have a pre-installed application that allows you to make voice recordings.

Another great time to record your recitation is while you are in class. This allows you to go back and listen to your mistakes, while also listening to your teacher’s corrections and explanations. Just remember to ask your teacher before recording a lesson.

Use Qur’ān Apps

There are so many wonderful Qur’ān apps available free of cost. One of the many benefits of these apps is that most of them follow the structure of the 15-line Madīnah musḥaf. Therefore, for those of us who have memorized or are memorizing using the 15-line musḥaf, these apps provide us the opportunity to review on the bus or even while waiting in a doctor’s office.
Podcasts and Videos to Learn the Rules of Tajwīd

This is perhaps one of my favorite tools available. Although the rules of *tajwīd* are standard, every teacher has a unique way of explaining them. Alḥamdulillāh, with the multitude of videos and podcasts available, we can access multiple explanations of the same concept. This allows students to develop a much deeper understanding of the rules.

These videos and podcasts are a great resource for teachers of *tajwīd* as well. Teachers can refer students to external resources and use valuable class time to focus on perfecting recitation. Also, recorded lessons allow students to watch a lesson multiple times to solidify their understanding. It also allows students to pause the recording to take notes.

Like anything else, it is important that students use the many resources available to them in a systematic manner, and not haphazardly.

The science of *tajwīd* is the science of preserving the sound of the Qurʾān. For the past 1400 years mastery in this science has only been achieved by sitting with a teacher of this art. While technology is a tool we can use to learn this science, it does not change the nature of the
knowledge itself, or the meticulous system through which we have received it.
Recommended Tajwīd Textbooks

I am often asked about *tajwīd* textbooks. Although there are many useful resources out there, there is something about sitting down with a book, highlighting, and making notes in the margins that facilitates learning like nothing else!

In all my years of teaching *tajwīd*, I have to admit that I have yet to find the one perfect *tajwīd* textbook in English. There are multiple textbooks that I find beneficial, and each has its own merit. I chose the books listed below because they *use language that is easy to understand*, are *well organized*, and *include charts and activities* that facilitate comprehension and retention.

1. *Azharia Educational Textbook*

This rather short and concise *tajwīd* textbook is published by Dār al Maʿrifah in Damascus. They are also the publishers of the widely used color coded *tajwīd muṣāḥif*. I came upon this textbook at a local Islamic bookstore and found it a useful resource to have in my classroom. This book is not a reference book for *tajwīd* rules, but rather it mainly focuses on the correct *application* of the rules. Each chapter has a brief explanation of the concept, and then a multitude of examples. This is a great textbook for teachers who are teaching *younger or beginner level*
*tajwīd students*. I found that this textbook would be best used to practice the rules in isolation, before expecting students to apply them when reciting longer selections from the Qurʾān.

Availability: Not as widely available

Price: $10-$15 USD

2. *Tajwīd Untangled* by Zaheer Khatri

This is by far one of my favorite textbooks to use with younger learners and beginner students of *tajwīd*. I remember sitting in *tajwīd* classes when I was young and struggling to find examples of the rule we were studying. I would be searching through a long surah, and by the time I found the example, my teacher had moved on to the next topic. This textbook eliminates that problem. Although it only explains basic *tajwīd* rules, it does so quite effectively through the use of charts. It provides examples and worksheets that students can complete to solidify their understanding of the concept. The same activities can even be used as an assessment. The days of making your own *tajwīd* worksheets are almost over.
Availability: This book is published by Learning Roots in the UK and is widely available at online Islamic bookstores.

Price: $15-$25 USD

3. *Let’s Beautify Our Recitation: A complete handbook on Tajwīd* by Haroon Baqai

This textbook is better suited for older learners and goes into more detail about each rule than the two books mentioned above. While it provides a detailed explanation of basic *tajwīd* rules, it also provides **worksheets and practice activities**. It begins with the **basics of reading**, such as letter recognition, vowels, *tanwīn*, and *shaddah*. It then explains *tajwīd* rules such as the rules of *mīm sākinah* and the rules of *madd*. Although it does not cover all the topics in the science of *tajwīd*, it is still an excellent resource for **beginner and intermediate level students**.

Availability: Widely available at online Islamic bookstores.

Price: $17-$20 USD

This is a beautiful textbook written by Shaykh Muhammad Saleem Gaibie that follows the traditional method of studying a text. He begins the book with a detailed biography of Ibn al-Jazarī, one of the foremost scholars of the science of *tajwīd*. The biography is detailed and is truly a treat to read. He then goes through the *Jazariyyah*, translating each line of poetry into English, and providing a commentary of the line. A special element of this text is that Qārīʾ Muhammad Saleem also gives the word for word translation for each line. This allows students to develop Arabic vocabulary while studying this text. I would recommend that a student complete at least one of the *tajwīd* textbooks mentioned above before working their way through this text with a teacher.

Availability: Available online as a PDF

Cost: You can download it here: Commentary on the Jazariyyah by Muhammad Saleem Gaibee. Hard copies can be purchased through Tanzil Institute in Cape Town, South Africa.
5. *Tajwīd Rules of the Qurʾān* by Kareema Czerepinski

While many English language *tajwīd* textbooks focus on the basic rules of *tajwīd*, and often do not delve into details, Shaykhah Kareema has written this invaluable three volume text, which is an English language commentary of the well-known poem of *tajwīd*, *Al-Muqaddamah al-Jazariyyah*. This three-volume set is an essential resource for advanced students of *tajwīd*. The only drawback is that sometimes English linguistic terms are used to explain some rules, and readers may or may not be familiar with those terms. That being said, this is still a wonderful *tajwīd* textbook in English.

Availability: Widely available at online Islamic bookstores.

Price: As low as $10 USD for each individual volume. The three volume set costs between $35 – $50 USD.

6. *The Road to Acquiring Proficiency with the Qurʾān: An illustrated guide to tajwīd* by Munowar Harneker

This is a great resource for every *tajwīd* teacher to have in his/her classroom. The book includes tables for beginner and intermediate level *tajwīd* rules, as well as practice exercises and worksheets that can be used by students to solidify their understanding of the rules.
Availability: The pdf is available for download at Noorun Mubeen Publications – Spreading the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah (wordpress.com) A print copy can be ordered directly from the publisher.

I pray that you find this list of textbooks useful either as a teacher in the classroom, or as a student of tajwīd. May Allah Taʿālā reward all the authors of the textbooks above for their effort, and may He accept their books from them and make them a source of benefit for the ummah of His Beloved ﷺ. Āmīn.

Disclaimer: The author does not benefit monetarily from the purchase of any of the books above.
Struggling to Succeed

You look at your beautiful muṣḥaf, admire its calligraphy, listen to expert recitations, try to copy them, and even take classes. Even with all this exposure, why are you not able to achieve perfection?

There can be many reasons why you may feel like you are not going anywhere. Often, it has something to do with your practice routine...

Some of the common mistakes that tajwīd students make are not practicing enough, or worse, practicing their mistakes and making them even more entrenched, and lastly, relying solely on recorded recitations rather than reciting on their own.

Here are some tips to help you effectively structure the time you spend practicing.

**In Class**

1. Make sure you can hear the difference between the correct and incorrect sound.
2. Make sure you understand what you are doing incorrectly, such as exactly where your tongue is supposed to be, etc.

3. MARK your mistakes! Circle your mistake, and then write the details in the margin or on a sticky note, so you remember what your mistake was.

4. If possible, record your class, so that you can revisit your mistakes, and the teacher’s corrections.

**After Class**

1. Practice from the *muṣḥaf* in which you marked your mistakes.

2. Isolate the sound or word you are having a problem with. Sometimes, students insist on repeating the whole āyah, and are not able to concentrate on the sound they are having problems with.

3. Record and listen to yourself saying the sound/word. Sometimes, it is easier to catch your mistake when listening to a recording.

4. You can listen to recordings of expert reciters such as Shaykh al-Huṣary. However, relying too much on
recordings of expert reciters does not give you chance to practice your own recitation.

General Advice:

Practice daily and remember to apply tajwīd rules whenever you recite the Qurʾān, not just when preparing for class. (Daily prayers are an exception, as one should focus on one’s prayer and not on tajwīd.)

Do not regularly listen to recordings of other qirāʾāt (ex. Warsh ʿan Nāfiʿ, Khalaf ʿan Ḥamza, etc.) until you have completed your ijāzah in the riwāyah of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim.

Lastly, remember that taufīq (success) is only from Allah. Make the effort, and hope in Allah’s mercy. I pray that Allah Taʿālā makes all of us among the people of the Qurʾān, those who recite the Qurʾān as it was revealed and embody its message. Āmīn.
A Lump in My Throat: How to get over recitation anxiety

Have you heard the words, “affective filter?” These two words are an important concept in the theory of second language acquisition (which is what tajwīd is for non-Arab Muslims). Stephen Krashen explains that when the “affective filter” is high, students have a difficult time progressing in learning a second language.³ Basically, this means that while your stomach is churning, and you are struggling not only with the sound of ع, but also with the lump that seems to be permanently lodged in that makhraj, you will have a difficult time learning.

Does that lump sound familiar? It has been around for so long, I think it may be a permanent feature of my throat now. However, even though we may feel nervous from time to time, consistent anxiety when reciting to a teacher (or even by oneself) can stall a tajwīd student’s progress.

The real question is: how do we get over it? As always, before looking for solutions, it is best to list the problems first. Here are some reasons for why we may feel anxious:

1. We are reciting aloud in front of someone.
2. We are afraid that we will make mistakes.
3. We are aware of the immense weight that a mistake in reciting the Qurʾān carries.
4. We want to correct our recitation but feel frustrated that it is not happening.

Believe it or not, sometimes all of this is happening when we are reciting one word! If all or even some of these thoughts go through your head while you are reciting, you will definitely have trouble focusing and enjoying your lesson.

In the following paragraphs, I will expand on each of these issues, and provide some useful solutions.

**Reciting Aloud in Front of Someone:**

This feeling is similar to stage fright. For most of us, speaking in front of an audience is not something we do often. So, when we have to recite in class in front of a teacher and sometimes fellow students, it can be debilitating. One of the ways to overcome this feeling is
to imagine that you are sitting in a place of peace, like a garden, and reciting by yourself.

Secondly, do not allow yourself to think about what your “audience” is thinking. At the end of the day, we all have mistakes, and our reason for attending class is to correct those mistakes. None of us are trying to develop a fan club through our *tajwīd* classes! Also, recite in front of others, such as family members on a regular basis in order to gain more confidence.

On a spiritual level, we need to come to a place where we realize that every time we recite the Qurʾān, we are reciting to Allah *Taʿālā*, and the Qurʾān is telling us something about our own condition. When we develop this higher spiritual relationship with the Qurʾān, the size or the nature of the “audience” will no longer make us nervous. It is just you and the Qurʾān in tranquility.

**We Are Afraid of Making Mistakes**

While in Amman, I had a chance to recite to and make a *khatam* with a Shaykh who was said to be the holder of the highest *sanad* (chain of transmission) in Jordan. You can imagine how nerve wrecking that was! Every time I made a mistake, I would apologize to him profusely. And, each time, he would say, “I love it when you make a mistake, because it allows me to correct it. If I correct it, I
am sure that I have heard it and corrected it.” He would say, if you do not make the mistake in front of me, you may make it later, and I will not be there to correct you.

*Tajwīd* mistakes help us to purify our intention and be aware of our reality.Anyone who is studying *tajwīd* for the purposes of feeding their ego, will not achieve mastery due to not being able to bear being corrected. Secondly, our reality. Our reality as human beings is that we are imperfect. Perfection belongs only to Allah.

*Tajwīd* is a unique science. Its enthusiasts revel in their imperfection and seek teacher after teacher to pick out their mistakes.

My advice is, do not be scared. Make mistakes, and get corrected.

**The Awareness of the Immense Weight that a Mistake in Reciting the Qurʾān Carries.**

This awareness is something that is a gift from Allah *Taʾālā*. This particular cause of nervousness is not something we should try to avoid, but rather, we should embrace. This nervousness motivates us to perfect our *tajwīd* even more. However, if it becomes overwhelming,
take a moment to send ṣalawāt on the Beloved of Allah (May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him).

**Feeling Frustrated Because You Are Not Able to Fix Your Mistakes**

We all feel frustrated when we have done everything we can possibly imagine to fix the pronunciation of a letter or sound. We know the theory, our teacher has explained it to us, and yet, we just cannot get it right. Sometimes, this feeling lasts through one week of practice. Other times, it can be months before we can correct a sound. It took me three years to perfect my sound of the letter rāʾ. This feeling can cause many students to give up, or to feel so frustrated that they are not able to focus during practice sessions.

**Some practical solutions:**

It never hurts to go over theory and to review multiple sources. Sometimes, another teacher may explain it in a way that makes more sense to you than the way it was originally explained to you. For letter pronunciation, I would suggest visiting Tajwid In English as well as AQL Arabic Sounds in addition to listening to your teacher’s explanations. Also, take a methodical approach to practicing the sounds and letters. A step-by-step approach will be shared later.
But, sometimes, we watch all the videos and follow all the steps, and yet we are still reading it incorrectly. This is an important moment in our spiritual development. Our frustration arises from the fact that we are relying on ourselves to achieve the desired result, not realizing that each and every sound that we are able to produce correctly is simply by the tauפq (facilitation) given to us by Allah. It is only through Allah’s grace and mercy upon us that we can correct our recitation. The effort and time spent practicing a letter or a sound is like a duاء, a prayer entreating Allah Ta’âla to help us and to bless us with the treasure that each letter is.

My Arabic teacher, Ustâdh Fahim Qazi of Qurٰnic Linguistics, taught us this duاء. Reciting this duاء at moments of frustration will in shâ Allah remind us to keep our focus on Allah. While we rely on ourselves, we will always feel frustrated.

The duاء: Yā Fattâhu, yā ‘Alîm, iftaḥ lanâ fâthân qarîban.

يَا فَتْتَاحُ يَا عَلِيمُ إِفْتَحْ لَنَا فَتْتَاحًا قَرِيبًا

In this duاء, we ask Allah: Yā Fattâḥ, the One who grants openings and victories over and over again, and Yā ‘Alîm, the One who has absolute knowledge of everything, to give us an opening soon.
To conclude, *tajwīd* is not just a science to be studied. But, rather, the study of *tajwīd* is a spiritual journey that focuses us on Allah, Most High and reminds us of our own imperfection and neediness as servants of Allah. I pray that the tips and thoughts above help us to overcome the anxiety that we experience when reciting.
Makhārij al-Ḥurūf: A step by step approach to fixing your pronunciation

Words can be thought of as a string of sounds represented in some languages with symbols that together represent a concept, an object, or a person. In Arabic, three letters with distinct shapes and sounds come together to form the word “heart,” قلب, while at the same time reflecting the nature of the heart; it is easily swayed. Changing any letter in this little parcel will alter the meaning. It is not just so with Arabic, but with English as well, saying “I love roses” is not the same as saying “I love noses.”

The little rhymes that we came up with as children by replacing the first letter of a word were often quite humorous. However, when we enter the world of Qur’ānic recitation, the substitution of letters is far from humorous. The beautiful word that represents our most vital organ can be changed to mean “dog,” (كلب) only by a slight variation in the position of the tongue.

As the knowledge of tajwīd spreads, many Muslims are becoming more aware of the importance of pronouncing each letter as it should be pronounced. As we are trying, we are also realizing the difficulty of the endeavor. Our tongue naturally looks for a familiar sound similar to the
one we hear, and automatically makes the substitution. Hence, using the sound of the letter “a” for the sound of ع.

How do we stop that automatic substitution? Although it can seem like a daunting task, I pray that the step-by-step approach outlined below will make the process seem much easier. I pray that students and teachers find it of benefit.

1. **Know the makhraj** (point of origination of the letter). You can learn this through *tajwīd* books, or even through videos online.

2. **Make sure you can hear the sound correctly.** Listen to recitations, and make sure you can pick out the sound that you are trying to learn. If you cannot do so, then you need to spend more time listening to a recording, or to your teacher, in order to make sure you can differentiate that sound from similar sounds.

3. While trying to produce the sound, close your eyes, and **focus on the position of your tongue**, and notice exactly where it is. Or **focus on the sensation caused in your mouth or throat** when you say the letter correctly. (You will need a teacher to help you at this stage, so you are sure that you are producing the correct sound).
4. Remembering the sensation caused by the sound of the letter will help you to know whether you are saying it correctly or not.

5. Another way is to record your recitation and to listen to it to determine whether you are producing the correct sound.

6. Once you have produced the correct sound, (even once), you are ready to practice.

7. One of the best ways to practice is to choose a name of Allah Ta’ālā that has that sound in it, and to say it after every prayer multiple times. Not only will you be making dhikr, but also, you will have a routine of practicing that sound. For example, if I am having trouble with pronouncing the letter ح, then I could choose to say ﴾يا رَحْمَانٍ﴿ and say it multiple times after every prayer to practice the correct sound of the letter ح.

If you cannot hear the difference at all, it is often beneficial to think about the sounds that you do know in your native language(s). You are probably making an automatic substitution. Once you know which letter in your language you are using to substitute the Arabic letter, it may become easier to not make the automatic substitution.
There are many ways of correcting one’s pronunciation of the letters. These are the steps that have helped me and my students to correct our pronunciation.
Reciting the Qirāʾāt

Alḥamdulillāh, Allah has facilitated the study of the sacred science of qirāʾāt for you. You attend class, take good notes, but find that even though you have always had excellent recitation in the riwāyah of Ḥafṣ, you seem to be struggling in your recitation class.

This is usually because there are many new sounds to master. Some do occur in the riwāyah of Ḥafṣ, but only in one place. It is important to treat these new sounds, such as imālah, taqlīl, taṣ-hīl of hamzah, ishmām, etc., just as one learned the basics of tajwīd. To master them is just as important as when we worked hard to master the makhārij of letters, as it is part of the preservation of these canonical readings and the sound of the Qurʾān.

One of the techniques that students can use is to practice each one of these sounds in isolation. For the sounds of fath, taqlīl, and imālah, one of my teachers would recommend practicing the sounds together, by saying just the sound of alif (without it being in a word). He would say to start with the sound of the alif when it is attached to a letter of istiʿlāʾ (ex.; ,eventually), then say the sound of alif when it is attached to a letter of istifāl (ex.; 🔂), then to say the sound of alif as it is in taqlīl, and then to say the sound of imālah.
By practicing these sounds in succession, the student will train his/her ear to hear the slight differences in the *alif*.

It is also important for students to record themselves while practicing these sounds, so they can determine whether they are saying them correctly or not.

Lastly, students should make it a habit to listen to recordings of expert reciters reciting the canonical recitations. It would be best to listen to the recitations that differ the most from the *riwāyah* of Hafṣ. By listening to these recordings often, a student’s ear becomes accustomed to the new sounds they are trying to master. *In shā’ Allāh*, this will lead to them becoming easier on the tongue.
Tajwīd is Like Your Extended Family

There is a joke among tajwīd teachers that if you want to test someone’s mastery of the rules of tajwīd, quiz them on the *mudūd*. That might leave us wondering, why the *mudūd*? Frankly, I found some other chapters just as elusive. But unlike other rules, *mudūd* are interconnected, and yet they have definitions and lengths of their own. It is like quizzing someone on the relationships between the members of a large extended family. So, this leads us to the question that I hear most often from students: **How do I master the rules of tajwīd?** The answer: The only way one can know all the relationships between random people, is by being a part of that family.

Simply being told, even repeatedly, that the lady wearing the purple scarf and the huge ruby ring is the mother-in-law of your first cousin’s second daughter is never going to help. But, when you sit next to her, and listen to her praise her daughter-in-law, who happens to be your cousin’s daughter, now that you will remember!

I can tell you from experience, that no matter how much your teacher explains a rule, you will not remember it. However, it is when you make mistakes on that *madd*, and she asks you its name, and makes you say it again, and again, and again, that you will eventually remember, that yes, this is *madd wājib muttaṣil*, and I have a problem with
not making it long enough. Tajwīd is a labor of love, each letter, each tajwīd rule is a friend. You have a personal story with each one of them. Until this relationship is developed, it will always be difficult to remember which madd is which.

I am writing this, because many people think of tajwīd as a science like physics or even history. Sometimes, it can feel similar to memorizing the clearly printed definitions of the bold terms in a history book. Unfortunately, tajwīd is not that simple. It is more like an art, where the teacher teaches you the technique, and you spend the rest of your life perfecting it. Nothing in tajwīd is ever completely mastered. Right when you think you have gotten it, you’ll discover a slight new nuance, and you will start the process of practicing all over again.

Although metaphors are useful, we all need some practical steps too. Here is how I managed to store and organize all those large, interconnected spider webs of madd rules:

1. Make sure you understand the concept. Ask questions until you get it. (This is where you need a teacher.)

2. Do some basic practice to ensure that you have understood the rule. (You may need a teacher’s help with this step too.)
3. Every time you recite the Qurʾān, have your *tajwīd* notebook close by, and try to identify as many rules as possible.

4. Find someone, a sibling, a friend, your children, even a stuffed panda and try to teach the *tajwīd* rule you are trying to master.

To close, remember that mastering the rules is only a part of achieving our eventual goal, to recite the Qurʾān as it was recited by the Beloved of Allah (May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him.) He ﷺ recited the Qurʾān to the *ṣaḥābah* and they repeated it to him ﷺ. **Listen and repeat:** the original and eternal method connecting us back to that wondrous day when the Beloved of Allah ﷺ heard the words “Recite: In the name of your Lord who created you.”
I sat in class, week after week, trying halfheartedly to understand the corrections of this perfectionist of a man. I wanted his knowledge, but I just could not quite understand what he was saying. He spoke English for sure, but for some reason, I could understand the words but not what they meant. There was movement of jaws, there was lots of exaggerated smiling. I always thought that somewhere he must have got it wrong. I had studied tajwīd for so long, and no one had mentioned smiling jaws.

There I was at the door of knowledge, and I found it closed. My attempts at gaining knowledge were like a body without a soul, and all my attempts to resurrect it were unsuccessful. Until one day, in a moment of anger, I spoke harshly to my “teacher,” and discovered that I was not his student at all. For a student, as he would teach me, not only respected her teacher outwardly, but rather respected her teacher in her heart. And, it was this respect, and this adab that was the key to the locked door in front of which I stood.

It was in that moment of realization, and the moment of my sincere apology that this strange, meticulous man who barely spoke to us outside of class would become one of my greatest teachers. Tajwīd he explained was not about
correctness, it was about the preservation of the Qurʾān. He was exacting; every sound had to be correct. Where did he get this energy, this constant motivation to keep correcting, patiently, the same student for three years? It was from his immense love for the beloved Prophet Muḥammad (May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him).

He taught us, his students, that reciting the Qurʾān correctly was a labor of love. He introduced us to the immense reality that we now, fourteen centuries later, can say each letter the way the beloved of Allah Taʿālā said it. That was a heavy realization, the realization that *tajwīd* is not just a science of the Qurʾān; it is a way of expressing our love for the Beloved of Allah (May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him).
Praising Students’ Tajwīd

I studied with my first Shaykh of tajwīd for three years, and in that whole time, he praised me once. I found something he was looking for in a book, and he said “Mā shā’ Allah ‘alayki.” And that was it.

I remember craving that praise, and always feeling anxious, asking myself, “Am I doing okay?” He did not, and would not, answer those questions.

As tajwīd teachers, we find ourselves in the rather odd situation of spending hours a day picking out people’s errors and pointing them out to them, and then of course helping them correct them. Under normal circumstances, we would not point out someone’s mistakes for hours a day.

So, how do we handle this unique situation? At times, we may feel that praising a student helps to “soften the blow” of the countless corrections that are being thrown at them. However, we will soon realize, that the same praise can become an obstacle in their path to perfecting their recitation.

Shortly after I completed my ijāzah, and started teaching Qurān full time, I came across students who did not make progress in their recitation no matter how hard I tried. It
was at this point that I understood the wisdom of my teacher. The students I was teaching were so convinced of the excellence of their recitation, that they did not desire to learn more, nor did they strive to do so. They were intermediate students of tajwīd, who were very satisfied with where they stood.

Another, much more dangerous effect of excessive praise from a teacher is that it can corrupt the intention of a student. They no longer seek to be closer to Allah Taʿālā through their recitation, but rather strive for their teacher’s approval.

We can see how either situation can ruin their journey of trying to be among those that preserve the sound of the Qurʾān.

So, what is the middle road? (Thankfully, there always is one.)

The balance lies somewhere in between and depends a great deal on knowing your student. Students that continue to strive and do well without praise, should not be needlessly praised. However, students that need motivation, should be praised on a particular rule they applied well, or a makhraj they mastered. Harmful praise is that which makes general statements about their entire recitation, voice, or gives them a false sense of confidence. We must guide them to find their motivation and hope in
Allah, and not encourage the hope of, one day, attaining their own perceived perfection.

To be a teacher is to guide someone from a place of not knowing to a place of knowing. We hold their hand, we comfort them, but we should never give them the impression that they have arrived at a destination that never comes, because the journey itself is the destination.

*Completed in the blessed month of *Shābān*, 1442 AH with a prayer on the Beloved of *Allah* ☪:

الله صل على سيدنا وحبيبنا محمد وعلى آل محمد وصحبه وسلم