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HANDOUT

ISL3666

Ulum-ul-Quran

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ISL3666

Ulum-ul-Quran

The Sciences of the Qur'an — Study Handout

This handout covers ISL3666 Ulum-ul-Quran: the classical disciplines developed to understand the Qur'an — its revelation, compilation, readings, occasions of revelation, abrogation, miraculous nature and exegesis. Each science answers one question about the text; together they form the Muslim scholarly tradition's toolkit for engaging revelation.

Key Arabic terms are transliterated with English meanings. Exam answers should define each science, state its subject matter and benefit, and cite classical authorities (Al-Zarkashi, Al-Suyuti) where relevant.

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Unit 1: Introduction: What Are the Ulum-ul-Quran

Lectures 1–4

Learning Objectives

- Define 'ulum-ul-Quran and its scope
- Explain why these sciences developed
- Name the classical encyclopedias of the field
- Distinguish ulum-ul-Quran from tafsir

Definition and Scope

'**Ulum-ul-Quran**' (sciences of the Qur'an) = all disciplines discussing the Qur'an from any angle: its revelation and compilation, its readings and scripts, its language and rhetoric, its occasions of revelation, its abrogating and abrogated verses, its miraculous inimitability, and the principles of its interpretation. It is the **study OF the Qur'an as a text and phenomenon**; **tafsir** is the **explanation OF its meanings** verse by verse. Ulum provides the tools; tafsir applies them.

Why the Sciences Arose

- New Muslims (non-Arabs) needed the text preserved, vocalized and explained.
- Variant readings required authentication (which are truly Quranic?).
- Legal derivation needed rules (which verses abrogate which?).
- Polemics (with other faiths, with skeptics) demanded systematic defense of the text's integrity and miracle.

Classical Authorities

Al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH) — Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an: the first great encyclopedia, ~47 sciences.

Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) — Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an: the most famous compendium, ~80 topics.

Al-Zarqani (modern) — Manahil al-Irfan: a standard modern textbook of the field.

Exam framing: whenever asked about any Quranic science, structure your answer as: definition → subject matter → classical authority → benefit (fa'ida) → one example. This five-part template fits every unit of this course.

Unit Summary

- Ulum-ul-Quran = sciences ABOUT the Quranic text; tafsir = explanation OF its meanings.
- Developed from needs: preservation, authentication, legal derivation, defense.
- Al-Zarkashi (Al-Burhan), Al-Suyuti (Al-Itqan), Al-Zarqani (Manahil al-Irfan).

Exam Pointers

★ Define ulum-ul-Quran and distinguish it from tafsir.

★ Name three classical works with authors and one fact each.

★ Why did the sciences of the Qur'an develop? (4 reasons)

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Unit 2: Wahy: Revelation

Lectures 5–8

Learning Objectives

- Define wahy linguistically and technically
- Describe the modes of revelation to the Prophet ■
- Explain the stages of the Qur'an's descent
- Discuss the first and last revelations

What Wahy Is

Wahy linguistically = swift, secret communication. Technically: Allah's communication to His prophets. The Qur'an describes three modes (42:51): **direct inspiration** (ilham-like casting into the heart), **from behind a veil** (as with Musa), and **sending a messenger** (Jibril) — the Qur'an's mode. To the Prophet ■ revelation came as: the ringing of a bell (most intense), Jibril in human form (usually as Dihyah), Jibril in true angelic form (seen twice), and true dreams (the first six months).

Stages of Descent (Nuzul)

- 1) From Allah to the **Lawh al-Mahfuz** (Preserved Tablet) — eternal. 2) To **Bayt al-Izzah** (the lowest heaven) — all at once, on Laylat al-Qadr. 3) To the Prophet ■ **gradually over ~23 years** — the earthly revelation.
- **Wisdom of gradualness:** strengthening the Prophet's heart, gradual legislation (e.g., alcohol prohibited in stages), answering emerging questions, easing memorization — the Qur'an itself gives these reasons (25:32).

First and Last

- **First:** the opening of Surah Al-Alaq (96:1-5), 'Iqra', in Ramadan, in the cave of Hira.
- **Last (disputed):** commonly cited: '...This day I have perfected your religion...' (5:3), or the verse on riba/debt (2:281) — know both views and that scholars differ.

Makki vs Madani (preview of Unit 4): the 13 Makkan years built faith (tawhid, afterlife, character); the 10 Madinan years built the community (law, jihad, social organization). The stages of revelation mirror the stages of the mission — content follows context, which is exactly what asbab al-nuzul studies.

Unit Summary

- Wahy: Allah's communication; Qur'an came via Jibril in several experiential modes.
- Three descents: Lawh al-Mahfuz → Bayt al-Izzah → gradual 23-year revelation.
- Gradualness: strengthening, gradual law, answering questions, memorization. First: Iqra; last: disputed (5:3 or 2:281).

Exam Pointers

★ Describe the modes of wahy to the Prophet ■.

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- ★ Explain the three stages of nuzul with wisdom of gradualness.
- ★ What were the first revealed verses? Where and when?

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Unit 3: Compilation and Preservation (Jam' al-Qur'an)

Lectures 9–12

Learning Objectives

- Describe preservation during the Prophet's ■ lifetime
- Explain Abu Bakr's compilation after Yamama
- Explain Uthman's standardization (mushaf)
- Refute doubts about the text's integrity

In the Prophet's ■ Lifetime

Preservation was **dual**: mass **memorization** (huffaz among the companions; the Prophet ■ reviewed with Jibril annually, twice in the final year) and **writing** by the scribes of revelation (kuttab al-wahy: Zayd ibn Thabit, Mu'awiyah and others) on available materials — but no single bound volume, since revelation was ongoing.

Abu Bakr's Compilation

After the **battle of Yamama** (many memorizers martyred), Umar urged Abu Bakr to compile; Zayd ibn Thabit led the committee with a **rigorous standard**: no verse accepted without **two witnesses** — written fragment PLUS memorized testimony. The result: the suhuf (loose sheets) kept with Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Hafsah.

Uthman's Mushaf

As Islam spread, **dialectal disputes** over recitation alarmed Hudhayfah; Uthman commissioned a **standard codex** from Hafsah's suhuf, in the **Qurayshi dialect**, and sent copies to the major centers (Makkah, Madinah, Kufa, Basra, Syria), ordering other materials burned to prevent confusion. This is the text Muslims read today — its authenticity rests on **mutawatir** (mass-transmitted) preservation, not on any single manuscript.

> *Answering the skeptic: 'Was the Qur'an changed?' Response: (1) mutawatir transmission — thousands memorized each generation, making coordinated alteration impossible; (2) the Uthmanic codices cross-check each other; (3) manuscript evidence (Sana'a, Birmingham fragments) matches; (4) the Qur'an's own challenge and divine promise of preservation (15:9). Memorize this four-point defense.*

Unit Summary

- Prophetic era: memorization + scribal writing, no bound volume yet.
- Abu Bakr (post-Yamama): Zayd's committee, two-witness standard → the suhuf.
- Uthman: standard Qurayshi codex sent to centers; mutawatir transmission guarantees integrity.

Exam Pointers

★ What triggered Abu Bakr's compilation? Describe Zayd's methodology.

★ Why did Uthman standardize the mushaf?

★ Refute the claim that the Qur'an's text was altered (4 points).

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Unit 4: Makki and Madani Revelations

Lectures 13–15

Learning Objectives

- Define Makki vs Madani (three criteria)
- List the characteristics of each type
- Explain the benefits of this classification
- Classify sample surahs

Three Definitions

Place-based — revealed in Makkah vs Madinah (fails for en-route revelations like Hudaybiyyah).

Audience-based — addressed to Makkans vs Madinans (fails: some Madani verses address all mankind).

Time-based (preferred) — revealed before vs after the Hijrah, wherever the place. This is the standard scholarly criterion.

Characteristics

- **Makki:** short, powerful verses; themes: tawhid, afterlife, prophethood, moral character; 'Ya ayyuha al-nas' (O mankind); stories of past nations; no detailed laws.
- **Madani:** longer verses; themes: law (worship, family, criminal, economic), jihad, hypocrites, People of the Book; 'Ya ayyuha alladhina amanu' (O you who believe); organizational detail.

Benefits of Classification

Understanding **gradual legislation** (why rulings came in stages), **asbab al-nuzul** context, **naskh** (later Madani verses may abrogate earlier ones), and the **Prophetic method**: faith before law — the mission's pedagogy. It also guards against misapplication (e.g., applying Makkan patience-verses to cancel Madinan self-defense rulings, or vice versa).

> *Classify: Surah Al-Ikhlas (Makki — short, tawhid), Surah Al-Baqarah (Madani — long, law), Surah Al-Kawthar (Makki — shortest, consolation). Exam trick: 'Ya ayyuha alladhina amanu' openings are almost always Madani — a quick classification heuristic.*

Unit Summary

- Standard criterion: before vs after Hijrah (time-based).
- Makki: short, creedal, 'O mankind'. Madani: long, legal, 'O you who believe'.
- Benefits: gradual legislation, context, naskh ordering, Prophetic pedagogy (faith before law).

Exam Pointers

★ State the three definitions of Makki/Madani and identify the preferred one.

- ★ Contrast characteristics in a table.
- ★ Classify three given surahs with reasons.

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Unit 5: Asbab al-Nuzul: Occasions of Revelation

Lectures 16–18

Learning Objectives

- Define sabab al-nuzul and its types
- Explain the benefits of knowing the occasions
- State the rules for accepting a reported sabab
- Apply asbab to resolve apparent difficulties

Definition and Types

Sabab al-nuzul = the historical circumstance (question asked, event occurred) prompting a verse's revelation. Types: **responses to questions** ('they ask you about...' — yas'alunaka), **responses to events** (Badr, Uhud, the slander against Aisha — Surah Al-Nur), and **initiated rulings** (no specific trigger). The verse's wording is general even when the occasion is specific — '**generality of wording, not specificity of cause**' is the ruling principle (so the verse applies beyond its occasion).

Benefits

- Understanding the verse's **intended meaning** (context disambiguates).
- Knowing **who/what is meant** by general expressions.
- Resolving **apparent contradictions** (different occasions, different rulings).
- Grasping the **wisdom of legislation** (why this ruling, here, now).

Methodological Rigor

Not every story is authentic: a reported sabab needs a **sound chain**; companion statements about occasions are accepted (they witnessed revelation), later speculation is not. Multiple reports may indicate multiple aspects of one occasion. Al-Wahidi's Asbab al-Nuzul is the classical collection; Al-Suyuti sifted it critically in Lubab al-Nuqul.

> *Application: 2:115 'To Allah belong the east and the west...' — revealed about praying toward a direction when the qiblah is unknown (travel/night). Without the sabab, one might misread it as canceling the qiblah; with it, the verse's scope is clear. Context protects meaning — the asbab motto.*

Unit Summary

- Sabab = the prompting question/event; wording stays general beyond the occasion.
- Benefits: disambiguation, identifying referents, resolving tensions, legislative wisdom.
- Require sound transmission; companions' reports carry weight; Al-Wahidi collected, Al-Suyuti critiqued.

Exam Pointers

★ Define sabab al-nuzul; give one example of each type.

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- ★ State the 'generality of wording' principle and its importance.
- ★ How does knowing the sabab resolve an apparent contradiction? (example)

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Unit 6: Al-Nasikh wal-Mansukh: Abrogation

Lectures 19–21

Learning Objectives

- Define naskh and its scriptural basis
- Distinguish its types: ruling/text/both
- Explain the wisdom of abrogation
- Give famous examples

Definition and Basis

Naskh = a later ruling replacing an earlier one (2:106: 'We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring better or similar'). Conditions: both texts scriptural, the later known to be later, genuine conflict (not mere specification). Only a handful of verses are agreed cases — exaggeration of naskh's scope is a classical scholarly complaint.

Types

Ruling abrogated, text remains — most cases (e.g., the bequest verse 2:180's ruling superseded by inheritance verses; the text still recited).

Text abrogated, ruling remains — e.g., the stoning verse (reported: wording lifted, ruling retained in practice).

Both abrogated — e.g., the ten-sucklings report (nursing kinship reports).

Wisdom and Examples

- **Wisdom:** gradual legislation (alcohol: 3 stages), easing hardship, testing obedience, responding to changing community capacity.
- **Alcohol:** 2:219 (harm noted) → 4:43 (not while intoxicated at prayer) → 5:90 (total prohibition) — the textbook gradual case.
- **Qiblah:** Jerusalem → Ka'bah (2:144). **Fasting:** optional fidya → obligatory Ramadan (2:184-185).

Exam caution: distinguish naskh (replacement) from takhsis (specification — narrowing a general verse, which most 'abrogation' claims actually are). Scholars like Al-Suyuti reduced claimed cases drastically. A safe exam position: naskh is real but rare, with strict conditions.

Unit Summary

- Naskh: later scriptural ruling replaces an earlier one (2:106); conditions: both scriptural, chronology known, real conflict.
- Types: ruling-only (common), text-only, both (rare).
- Wisdom: gradualism, easing, testing; classic cases: alcohol stages, qiblah, fasting.

Exam Pointers

★ Define naskh with its conditions.

- ★ Trace the three stages of alcohol prohibition.
- ★ Distinguish naskh from takhsis (specification).

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Unit 7: Qira'at: The Canonical Readings

Lectures 22–25

Learning Objectives

- Define qira'at and the seven ahruf
- Name the ten canonical readers
- Explain the conditions for an authentic reading
- Discuss the wisdom of multiple readings

The Seven Ahruf

The Prophet ■ said the Qur'an was revealed in **seven ahruf** (modes/dialects) — a divine concession easing recitation for Arabia's tribes. The canonical **qira'at** are the transmitted recitation traditions preserving this diversity. All authentic readings are **equally Quranic** — not 'versions' but divinely-sanctioned facets.

The Ten Readers

The famous **seven** (Ibn Mujahid's canon): Nafi' (Madinah — Warsh/Qalun transmit), Ibn Kathir (Makkah), Abu Amr (Basra), Ibn Amir (Syria), Asim (Kufa — **Hafs transmits: the reading of the Madinan mushaf used worldwide**), Hamzah (Kufa), Al-Kisa'i (Kufa). Plus three: Abu Ja'far, Ya'qub, Khalaf — making **ten**. Each reader has transmitters (rawis): hence 'Hafs an Asim'.

Conditions and Wisdom

Authentic reading needs: (1) sound chain to the Prophet ■, (2) agreement with the Uthmanic script (rasm), (3) conformity with Arabic grammar. Missing any = shadh (irregular). —

- **Wisdom:** linguistic richness, legal breadth (readings can affect rulings, e.g., ablution verses), ease for diverse Arabs, and the miracle's multiplication — the text's inimitability across readings.

Example: 1:4 'maliki' (Owner — Asim/Hafs) vs 'maliki' (King — other readings): both true of Allah, both transmitted, the script's bare consonants allow both. One verse, two readings, zero contradiction — the standard illustration of qira'at harmony.

Unit Summary

- Seven ahruf: divine concession of multiple modes; qira'at preserve them.
- Ten canonical readers (seven + three); Hafs-an-Asim is the global standard.
- Authenticity: sound chain + Uthmanic script + Arabic grammar; wisdom: richness, legal breadth, ease.

Exam Pointers

★ Explain the seven ahruf and their purpose.

★ Name the seven canonical readers with their cities.

★ State the three conditions of an authentic qira'ah; illustrate with maliki/maliki.

Unit 8: I'jaz al-Qur'an: The Miraculous Inimitability

Lectures 26–29

Learning Objectives

- Define i'jaz and the tahaddi (challenge)
- Explain the aspects of the miracle: language, content, knowledge
- Respond to objections
- Relate i'jaz to the Prophet's ■ proof of prophethood

The Challenge (Tahaddi)

The Qur'an **challenges** doubters to produce the like of it (17:88 — all mankind and jinn together), then ten surahs (11:13), then **one surah** (2:23; 10:38) — 'and you will never do it' (2:24). The challenge was issued to the **masters of Arabic eloquence** at their peak, with every motive to meet it (it would have destroyed Islam instantly) — and fourteen centuries of silence is the empirical proof.

Aspects of I'jaz

- **Linguistic:** unmatched eloquence, unique rhythm and structure — the Arabs recognized a category beyond their poetry and prose (Al-Walid ibn Al-Mughirah's testimony).
- **Content:** coherent legislation, theology and ethics from an unlettered Prophet ■; internal consistency across 23 years.
- **Knowledge:** accurate accounts of past nations, prophecies fulfilled (Byzantine victory, 30:2-4), descriptions aligning with discovered natural phenomena — presented without the errors of contemporary lore.
- **Effect:** its transformative impact on hearts and civilizations — a living, ongoing miracle.

Answering Objections

'Others produced eloquent Arabic' — none matched it by the Arabs' own judgment, and the challenge stands open. 'It's just good literature' — literature doesn't legislate civilizations or predict the future. 'The inimitability is subjective' — the historical test is objective: motivated experts tried (Musaylimah's parodies were laughed at) and failed. Classical works: Al-Baqillani's I'jaz al-Qur'an, Al-Rummani, Al-Khattabi.

> *Exam structure for 'prove i'jaz': 1) state the tahaddi and its graduated challenge, 2) the historical fact of failure despite motive and ability, 3) one linguistic + one content aspect, 4) conclude: the only explanation covering all data is divine origin. Four steps, full marks.*

Unit Summary

- Tahaddi: produce its like → ten surahs → one surah; issued to eloquence-masters with full motive; unmet for 1400 years.
- Aspects: linguistic supremacy, content coherence, verified knowledge, transformative effect.

- Classical defenders: Al-Baqillani, Al-Rummani, Al-Khattabi.

Exam Pointers

★ Trace the graduated challenge (tahaddi) through its verses.

★ Explain three aspects of i'jaz.

★ Answer the objection: 'It's merely great literature.'

Unit 9: Tafsir: Principles and History

Lectures 30–34

Learning Objectives

- Define tafsir and its conditions
- Distinguish tafsir bil-ma'thur from bil-ra'y
- Survey the history: companions to modern era
- Name major mufassirun and their works

Definition and Sources

Tafsir = the science explaining the Qur'an's meanings. The exegete must master: Arabic language, asbab al-nuzul, naskh, qira'at, hadith, fiqh principles — interpreting without tools is forbidden speculation. **Sources in order:** 1) the Qur'an itself (verses explaining verses), 2) the Sunnah, 3) companions' explanations, 4) successors', 5) sound Arabic linguistics — **tafsir bil-ma'thur** (transmitted). **Bil-ra'y** (by opinion) is valid when grounded in these and sound reasoning; condemned when it is mere whim (tafsir bil-ra'y al-madhmum).

History of Tafsir

- **Prophetic era:** the Prophet ■ explained to companions (16:44 — 'that you may explain').
- **Companions:** Ibn Abbas (the great exegete), Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Ali.
- **Successors:** Mujahid, Qatadah, Al-Dahhak — tafsir transmitted in hadith collections.
- **Classical works:** Al-Tabari (Jami' al-Bayan — the monumental transmitted tafsir), Ibn Kathir (the most widely read), Al-Qurtubi (legal focus), Al-Razi (theological/philosophical), Al-Baydawi (concise school text), Al-Alusi (Ruh al-Ma'ani).
- **Modern:** thematic and scientific-literary approaches; Sayyid Qutb (Fi Zilal), Al-Mawdudi (Tafhim) — tafsir engaging modern questions.

Types and Principles

- **By method:** tahlili (verse-by-verse), ijmalI (concise), muqaran (comparative), mawdu'i (thematic — gathering all verses on one topic: the modern growth area).
- **Principles:** no verse interpreted against established texts; consider context (siyaq); distinguish decisive (muhkam) from ambiguous (mutashabih, 3:7) — the ambiguous is referred to the decisive, not speculated upon.

> *Thematic (mawdu'i) example: 'justice (adl) in the Qur'an' — gather 2:177, 4:135, 5:8, 16:90..., classify (divine justice, judicial, social), synthesize the Quranic theory. This method powers modern research and makes an excellent exam question in itself.*

Unit Summary

- Tafsir needs mastery of the ulum; sources: Qur'an → Sunnah → companions → successors → Arabic.
- Ma'thur (transmitted) vs ra'y (reasoned — valid if grounded, condemned if whimsical).

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- History: Prophet ■ → companions (Ibn Abbas) → Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Qurtubi, Razi → modern thematic tafsir.

Exam Pointers

★ List the sources of tafsir in order with the rationale.

★ Distinguish tafsir bil-ma'thur from bil-ra'y (with the two kinds of ra'y).

★ Name four classical mufassirun and each work's distinctive feature.

Unit 10: Muhkam, Mutashabih and Translation

Lectures 35–38

Learning Objectives

- Explain muhkam vs mutashabih (3:7)
- Describe the etiquette of approaching ambiguous verses
- Discuss translating the Qur'an: permissibility and limits
- Summarize the course as an integrated toolkit

Muhkam and Mutashabih

'It is He who sent down the Book; in it are **muhkam** verses — the mother of the Book — and others **mutashabih**' (3:7). **Muhkam:** decisive, clear (most legal and creedal verses). **Mutashabih:** ambiguous — the divine attributes' modality (istiwa', yad), the Hour's timing, the disconnected letters. Rule: **interpret the ambiguous in light of the decisive** ('There is nothing like Him', 42:11, governs all attribute verses); those 'firm in knowledge' say 'we believe in it' — faith without speculative modality (bila kayf). Chasing ambiguities to sow discord is condemned in the same verse.

Translation of the Qur'an

The Qur'an's **i'jaz is in its Arabic** — translation conveys **meaning approximately**, never the Qur'an itself (hence 'translation of the meanings'). Rulings: translation allowed and needed for da'wah and non-Arabic speakers; it does not substitute the Arabic in salah; the translator needs the ulum (mistranslations usually come from ignoring asbab, naskh or Arabic). Famous English translations: Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Saheeh International, Abdel Haleem — each with strengths; compare several for study.

The Integrated Toolkit — Course Review

Approach any verse with: 1) correct qira'ah and i'rab, 2) Makki/Madani context, 3) sabab al-nuzul, 4) naskh check, 5) muhkam/mutashabih classification, 6) tafsir sources in order. The ulum are not trivia about the Qur'an — they are the discipline of reading it responsibly. 'The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it' — this course is one fulfillment of that hadith.

Capstone: take 2:106 (the naskh verse) and run the full toolkit — qira'at stable, Madani, sabab (Jewish objections to abrogation), muhkam in meaning, explained by Sunnah and companions, translated carefully ('We do not abrogate...'). Every science you learned illuminates one verse — that is the point of ulum-ul-Quran.

Unit Summary

- Muhkam (decisive) governs mutashabih (ambiguous); bila kayf for the attributes; 3:7 is the charter.
- Translation = 'translation of the meanings'; needed, limited, never replacing Arabic recitation.
- Full toolkit: qira'ah → context → sabab → naskh → classification → tafsir sources.

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Exam Pointers

- ★ Explain 3:7 and the proper handling of mutashabih verses.
- ★ Is translating the Qur'an allowed? State the limits.
- ★ Apply the six-step toolkit to a given verse.

Key Terms Glossary

All key terms from this handout in one place — use for quick revision.

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