

The Circumstantial (Hal) Clause

A hal clause is a special kind of Arabic construction that allows you to indicate that the action (or event or state) mentioned in the hal clause is *occurring at the same time* as the action (or event or state) mentioned in the main clause. It can be translated many ways into English, but most often you can use the conjunctions *while* or *when* at the beginning of the English subordinate clause. The English equivalents of hal clauses also frequently begin with an *active participle* (the "-ing" adjective form: the "talking" dog, the "working" man).

The English sentences below would all probably be translated into Arabic using a hal clause. The word in italics signals the beginning of the hal clause:

- He arrived *while* carrying a book.
- He arrived *carrying* a book.
- He arrived *with* a book in his hand.
- I met Anwar Sadat *while/when* he was president.

Probably the most difficult thing to become accustomed to--for a native speaker of English--in forming hal clauses is that they do not use the exact equivalents of those italicized English words in the examples above. Mostly they use the Arabic word **وَ** (*and*) or they put the *active participle* at the beginning of the clause into the accusative case. Below would be two ways of saying in Arabic (using a hal clause) the English sentence "He drank the coffee *while* looking at her all the time":

شَرِبَ الْقَهْوَةَ وَهُوَ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا كُلَّ الْوَقْتِ.
شَرِبَ الْقَهْوَةَ نَاطِرًا إِلَيْهَا كُلَّ الْوَقْتِ.

A third way of saying the same thing would be to omit the **وهو** and simply start the hal with the present tense verb:

شَرِبَ الْقَهْوَةَ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا كُلَّ الْوَقْتِ.

In this last example the main verb (*he drank*) sets the action of the entire sentence in the past and the present tense form of the second verb (*he is looking*) doesn't have a temporal function; it serves to indicate that the two actions are occurring simultaneously (but both in the past).

If the action in the hal clause has already taken place while the action in the main clause is occurring, this can be indicated by using the phrase **وَإِذْ** at the beginning

of the hal clause:

قَامَ وَقَدْ شَرِبَ كُلَّ الْقَهْوَةِ.
He got up, having drunk all the coffee.