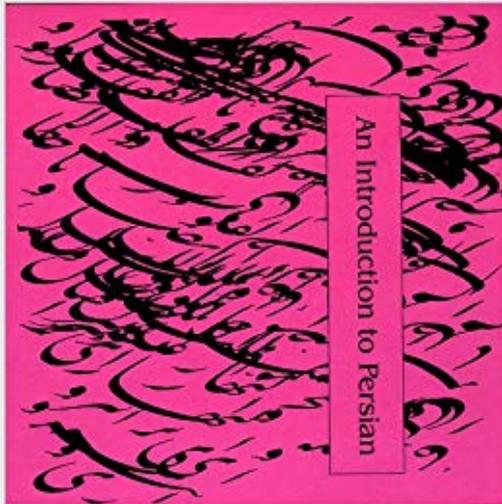


## **An Introduction to Persian** by Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization Wheeler M Thackston, Parviz Bahador



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Tapes to accompany Wheeler Thackston's Introduction to Persian



## **Reviews of the [An Introduction to Persian](#) by Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization Wheeler M Thackston, Parviz Bahador**

1. Nto

This book has some very positive features. It undeniably is extremely grammar oriented (get over it!), and contrary to what some other reviewers have said, it is not necessary to be a professional linguist to work with it and get benefit from it. The author was a great Persian scholar and also a very experienced teacher. This is an extremely rigorous presentation and the material it offers is built up over the course of the lessons in a very systematic way.

The book is highly biased toward the written language, and that needs no defense. Persian is a language where there is a real divergence between spoken and written, and in such cases a choice has to be made as to which to do first. The spoken forms, are, of course, simpler: but they are also largely predictable from the written forms (and the converse does not apply). Although there is a literary flavor to the work, the author does give extensive supplementary vocabularies at the end of the lessons, many of which relate very naturally to everyday topics of conversation (food and clothing, to name just two). There is also an appendix in which the major differences between spoken and written Persian are explained. So the author has certainly done what he can to smooth the way for learners to transition from reading to speaking and after completing the book none of the other available materials for spoken Persian are likely to be difficult- but a learner whose primary interest is speaking should probably try another source first- the best one I've seen is probably the Living Language course.

The reason for only three stars is, as many other reviewers, both positive and negative, have noted, is the lack of an answer key for the exercises- at the very least, a self-contained work should provide one for the English-to-Persian translation exercises. It isn't too difficult (most of the time) to puzzle out the meaning of the Persian-to-English exercises, but Persian syntax can get complicated and without someone to check them, a learner trying to translate into Persian can quickly wonder if he really knows what he is doing or if he has said what he meant to say. This book is a second edition, too- so the absence of a key is a flaw that should have been corrected by now.

## 2. Wenyost

First and foremost, understand what this book is. It would most properly be termed a graded grammar. It is not a book to teach you to memorize how to ask the location of nearest bathroom. The focus is on the written

modern language, with some discussion of classical Persian as well. Now, because it *is* a grammar, it uses actual grammatical terminology. Some reviewers are apparently shocked by this. So, if you're not familiar with that terminology, you may actually have to use an English dictionary to look up some words. It's pretty difficult to learn a language on your own without understanding some grammar. There are very expensive and time-consuming courses in some languages that will drill you through all the various grammatical forms without explaining what they are, or using any hard English words (but nothing like this is available in Persian, anyway.) So, get over it, and use a dictionary.

I'm using this book to learn how to read Persian. It's pretty good for that, and quite thorough. It would be useful as an adjunct resource if you want to learn to speak Persian, but not as your primary resource. It doesn't have the appropriate sort of drills and tapes for learning to speak. The drills are of the more traditional two-way translation variety.

The major weakness of the book, as others have pointed out, is the lack of keys to exercises. For me, it's not a big problem, because if you're learning to read a language, you can usually tell when you've figured out the right translation, because things will just "click". If you wanted to learn to write to your Persian friend in Persian, this would be a major problem, as you really need a key to the exercises, because you'll make little grammatical errors that you won't catch without a key.

A minor weakness is the presentation of the alphabet. Everything you need to know about the Persian script is presented in the introduction to this book. However, it's presented in a very concise format, so what you'll have to do is use this information to make up your own drills with flash cards, etc., so you have a good handle on the alphabet before you start. That's what I did, and it worked fine.

You may also want to either get the tapes associated with the book, or get another course where the focus is on speaking. I say this only because I've had real trouble in the past learning to read languages where I didn't have a firm grasp on what the language sounded like. For some reason, I can teach myself to read much better if I can hear the words in my head. The tapes with the book are fine for that, with good, clear, slow pronunciation, but they're not good for learning to speak, because, again, they don't have the appropriate sort of drills.

So, in summary, it's quite good for learning to read, so-so for learning to write, and useful only as a secondary resource for learning to speak.

This book is an excellent introduction, and I found that, after studying it for about 2 hours a day, I was able to acquire basic conversational ability by the end of the book. He has a very accessible way of presenting elements of the language. Moreover, Thackston's appendices provide a useful and clear introduction to the particulars of Classical and colloquial usages, alongside texts from both Classical and modern authors. However, the book is only an introduction. What the Persian language gains in grammatical simplicity, it loses in stylistic complexity. If the learner wants to tackle the florid and roundabout prose of an Iranian newspaper editorial, Lambton is still the better option. While Lambton's grammar is not as user-friendly or conversational in its approach, its completion does guarantee that the reader will be able to handle even the most baroque piece of Persian prose. Still, I would say Thackston is the best introduction to spoken Persian available.

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