



كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَّثَانِي

"A Book whose parts resemble each other, often repeated." (az-Zumar 39:23)

Mastering the Mutashābihāt

How to recognise the similar verses of the Qur'an and keep each one in its place, for students of hifdh and their teachers.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Preface

All praise is for Allah, and may peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and his Companions.

Every student of hifdh meets them sooner or later: a verse that begins exactly like another verse in a different surah, then takes a slightly different turn. You recite confidently, and without noticing you cross from al-Baqarah into al-A'raf, or add a word that belongs somewhere else. Your teacher stops you, and you cannot say why you went wrong.

These verses are called the **mutashābihāt**. They are part of the beauty of the Qur'an, which repeats its stories and lessons with deliberate variation. For the ḥāfiẓ, they are also the place where most mistakes happen. This guide shows you how to recognise them, lay them side by side, find the exact difference, fix it with a hook, and revise until each verse stays in its own place.

تَعَاهَدُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ، فَوَالَّذِي تَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ لَهُوَ
أَشَدُّ تَقَلُّبًا مِنَ الْإِيلِ فِي عُقْلِهَا

“Keep revising this Qur'an, for by the One in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, it slips away more quickly than camels from their tethers.”

Narrated by al-Bukhārī (5033) and Muslim (791).

Before you start

This guide is for students who have memorised at least some of the Qur'an. Use it with your teacher: when you are unsure of any wording, check it in your mushaf and recite it to your teacher. Never rely on memory alone for the text of the Qur'an.

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Start Know what they are

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ
أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ

“It is He who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses that are precise, they are the foundation of the Book, and others that are unspecific.”

Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān 3:7

Explanation

The word **mutashābih** means “resembling” or “similar”. Scholars use it in two different senses, and it is important not to mix them up:

	Meaning	Who studies it
Mutashābih in meaning	Verses whose meaning is not plain on its own, contrasted with the muḥkam (clear) verses in Āl ‘Imrān 3:7. They are understood in the light of the clear verses, following the scholars.	Scholars of tafsīr and ‘aqīdah
Mutashābih in wording (al-mutashābih al-lafẓī)	Verses or phrases that are repeated in more than one place with almost the same words, differing by a letter, a word or the order.	Every ḥāfiẓ and teacher of hifdh

This guide is about the second kind: the similar wordings that a ḥāfiẓ must keep apart. Allah describes the whole Qur’an as “a Book whose parts resemble each other, often repeated” (az-Zumar 39:23). The repetition is purposeful, and the small differences carry meaning.

What we learn

1	Mutashābih in wording is different from mutashābih in meaning.
2	Similar wordings are a feature of the Qur’an, not an accident.
3	For the ḥāfiẓ, they are where most slips happen, so they need special attention.

Look The six kinds of difference

When two verses look alike, the difference is almost always one of these six. Naming the kind helps you remember it.

What to look for

1	A letter added or left out, such as فَ, وَ, or ل at the start of a phrase.
2	A word added or left out, such as رَعَدًا or لَكُمْ.
3	A different word with a similar sound or meaning, such as يُدَبِّحُونَ and يُقَتِّلُونَ.
4	A different order of the same words.
5	Definite or indefinite, such as الْحَقُّ and حَقٌّ.
6	A different ending or form, such as a different case, number or closing phrase.

Step 1 Catch them as you memorise

Explanation

The best time to deal with a similar verse is the day you memorise it, before your mind has time to blend the two. Most students only notice a pair when a teacher corrects them months later.

- 1 Before you memorise a new page, **read it slowly** and ask: have I met this wording before?
- 2 If a phrase feels familiar, **find the other place** with your teacher, a mutashābihāt book, or a reliable Qur'an search tool.
- 3 Write the pair in your **mutashābihāt log** (at the end of this guide) the same day.
- 4 Every time your teacher corrects you for mixing two places, add that pair too. **Your own mistakes are your most important list.**

What we learn

1	Deal with a pair on the day you memorise it.
2	A familiar-sounding phrase is a warning sign: find its twin.
3	Your teacher's corrections build your personal list.

Step 2 Lay them side by side

Put the verses one under the other and mark the exact difference. In these examples the difference is in **red and underlined**. Check each one in your own mushaf as you read.

1. A letter and a word: Ādam in the Garden

al-Baqarah 2:35

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ **وَكُلَا مِنْهَا**
رَعْدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا

al-A'raf 7:19

وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ **فَكُلَا مِنْ** حَيْثُ
شِئْتُمَا

The difference: al-Baqarah has رَعْدًا مِنْهَا; al-A'raf has مِنْ فَكُلَا with no رَعْدًا.

Hook: al-Baqarah, the longer surah, has the longer wording.

2. A different word, and a wāw: the oppression of Fir'awn

al-Baqarah 2:49

يَسْؤُمُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ **يَذَّبُّونَ** أَبْنَاءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ

al-A'raf 7:141

يَسْؤُمُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ **يَقْتُلُونَ** أَبْنَاءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ

Ibrāhīm 14:6

يَسْؤُمُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ **وَيَذَّبُّونَ** أَبْنَاءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ

The difference: al-Baqarah: يَذَّبُّونَ. al-A'raf: يَقْتُلُونَ. Ibrāhīm: وَيَذَّبُّونَ, with a wāw.

Hook: Three places, three wordings. Learn them as a set, in mushaf order.

3. Order and wording: entering the town

al-Baqarah 2:58

وَادْخُلُوا **الْبَابَ** **سُجَّدًا** **وَقُولُوا** **حِطَّةً** **تَغْفِرَ** لَكُمْ
خَطَايَاكُمْ

al-A'raf 7:161

وَقُولُوا **حِطَّةً** **وَادْخُلُوا** **الْبَابَ** **سُجَّدًا** **تَغْفِرَ** لَكُمْ
خَطِيئَاتِكُمْ

The difference: al-Baqarah puts entering the gate first and says خَطَايَاكُمْ; al-A'raf puts saying حِطَّةً first and says خَطِيئَاتِكُمْ. The verses also begin differently (قُلْنَا اَدْخُلُوا in al-Baqarah, قِيلَ لَهُمْ اسْكُنُوا in al-A'raf).

Hook: In al-Baqarah the body acts first (enter), then the tongue (say).

4. Order and case: the believers and others

al-Baqarah 2:62

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى
وَالصَّابِئِينَ

al-Mā'idah 5:69

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئُونَ
وَالنَّصَارَى

al-Hajj 22:17

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ
وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ

The difference: al-Baqarah: an-Naṣārā before aṣ-Ṣābi'īn. al-Mā'idah: aṣ-Ṣābi'ūn (with wāw) first. al-Hajj: aṣ-Ṣābi'īn first, then al-Majūs is added.

Hook: Only al-Mā'idah has the ون ending.

5. Order: true guidance

al-Baqarah 2:120

قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَى

Āl 'Imrān 3:73

قُلْ إِنَّ الْهُدَى هُدَى اللَّهِ

The difference: al-Baqarah: هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَى. Āl 'Imrān: الْهُدَى هُدَى اللَّهِ.

Hook: al-Baqarah, the first of the two, begins with Allah's name.

6. Order: what is forbidden to eat

al-Baqarah 2:173

وَمَا أَهْلَ بِهِ لَغَيْرِ اللَّهِ

an-Naḥl 16:115

وَمَا أَهْلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ

The difference: Only al-Baqarah puts بِهِ first. al-Mā'idah 5:3, al-An'ām 6:145 and an-Naḥl 16:115 all have لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ.

Hook: بِهِ first in al-Baqarah: ب for Baqarah.

7. Order: intercession and ransom

al-Baqarah 2:48

وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ

al-Baqarah 2:123

وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهَا شَفَاعَةٌ

The difference: In 2:48 intercession comes first and is “not accepted”; in 2:123 ransom comes first and intercession “will not benefit”.

Hook: Both are in al-Baqarah, so this pair can trap even the strongest students. Revise them together.

8. Definite and indefinite: killing the prophets

al-Baqarah 2:61

وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ

Āl 'Imrān 3:21

وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ

Āl 'Imrān 3:112

وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ

The difference: al-Baqarah has the definite الْحَقِّ; Āl 'Imrān has حَقٍّ, and in 3:112 the word is الْأَنْبِيَاءَ.

Hook: al-Baqarah takes "al": الْحَقِّ.

9. A word added, and order: the angels at Badr

Āl 'Imrān 3:126

وَمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَى لَكُمْ وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ فُلُوبُكُمْ بِهِ

al-Anfāl 8:10

وَمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَى وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ بِهِ فُلُوبُكُمْ

The difference: Āl 'Imrān adds لَكُمْ and ends بِهِ فُلُوبُكُمْ; al-Anfāl has no لَكُمْ and says بِهِ فُلُوبُكُمْ.

10. Order and pronouns: do not kill your children

al-An'ām 6:151

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ مِّنْ إِمْلَاقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَآبَاءَهُمْ

al-Isrā' 17:31

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَآبَاءَكُمْ

The difference: al-An'ām: وَآبَاءَهُمْ ... نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ. al-Isrā': وَإِيَّائَكُمْ ... نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّائَكُمْ.

Hook: See Step 4: the meaning explains the order.

11. A different ending: the one sin not forgiven

an-Nisā' 4:48

وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

an-Nisā' 4:116

وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَلَّىٰ صَلًّا بَعِيدًا

The difference: The first part of both verses is the same; 4:48 ends افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا and 4:116 ends صَلَّىٰ صَلًّا بَعِيدًا.

12. Several small differences: their wealth and children

at-Tawbah 9:55

فَلَا تُعْجِبَكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

at-Tawbah 9:85

وَلَا تُعْجِبَكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَأَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الدُّنْيَا

The difference: Four differences in one pair: فِي / أَنْ يُعَذِّبَهُمْ; لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ / وَأَوْلَادُهُمْ; وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ / وَلَا; وَلَا / وَلَا. الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا / فِي الدُّنْيَا.

Hook: The first (9:55) is the fuller one in every place.

13. Order: the man who came running

al-Qaṣaṣ 28:20

وَجَاءَ رَجُلٌ مِّنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْعَى

Yā-Sīn 36:20

وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى

The difference: al-Qaṣaṣ (the story of Mūsā): the man comes first. Yā-Sīn: the far side of the city comes first.

14. A letter: Nūḥ sent to his people

al-A'rāf 7:59

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ

al-Mu'minūn 23:23

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ

The difference: al-A'rāf begins لَقَدْ with no wāw; al-Mu'minūn begins وَلَقَدْ.

What we learn

1

Seeing both places together makes the difference obvious.

2

Mark the exact letter or word that differs; that is what you must remember.

3

Some pairs are in the same surah, so keep an eye on page and verse number too.

Step 3 Fix each one with a hook

Explanation

A hook is a short, personal reminder that links the difference to something you already know. It does not need to be clever; it needs to be yours.

Kind of hook	How it works	Example
Letter of the surah	Link the differing letter to the first letter of the surah's name	ي first in Baqarah
First and fuller	Note which place is longer when that is true for your pair	In at-Tawbah, 9:55 is fuller than 9:85
Mushaf order	Learn a set of three or more in the order they appear in the mushaf	يُدَبِّحُونَ, يُقَتِّلُونَ, وَيُدَبِّحُونَ (2, 7, 14)
Page picture	Remember where the verse sits on the page in your own mushaf: top, middle or bottom, left or right page	Always use the same mushaf
Story context	Tie the wording to what is happening in that passage	al-Qaṣaṣ is Mūsā's story: the man comes first
Meaning	Use the reason for the difference (Step 4)	من إِمْلَاق: the parents are already poor

A caution

A hook is only true for the pair you made it for. Do not turn it into a general rule ("the longer wording is always in the longer surah"); the Qur'an does not follow rules we invent. Always check the mushaf.

What we learn

1

A personal hook turns a confusing difference into something easy to recall.

2

Use the same mushaf so your page memory stays reliable.

3

Hooks serve the text; the mushaf is always the judge.

Step 4

Understand the reason when you can

Explanation

Scholars wrote whole books explaining why similar verses differ, a science called **tawjīh al-mutashābih**. When you understand the reason, you rarely forget the wording. Here is one well-known example:

Example. Why the order changes

al-An'ām 6:151

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ مِّنْ إِمْلَاقٍ تَحْنُ تَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ

al-Isrā' 17:31

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةً إِمْلَاقٍ تَحْنُ تَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ

The difference: In al-An'ām the parents are **already** poor (مِّنْ إِمْلَاقٍ, "because of poverty"), so Allah reassures them first: تَرْزُقُكُمْ, "We provide for you", then for the children. In al-Isrā' the parents **fear** poverty to come (خَشْيَةً إِمْلَاقٍ), worried that the children will make them poor, so Allah mentions the children's provision first: تَرْزُقُهُمْ, then yours.

- Ask your teacher about the reason behind a pair that troubles you. Many have a known explanation.
- Classical works on this include *Durrat at-Tanzīl* by al-Khaṭīb al-Iskāfī, *al-Burhān fī Tawjīh Mutashābih al-Qur'ān* by al-Karmānī and *Milāk at-Ta'wīl* by Ibn az-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī.
- Where no reason is known to you, the hook and the revision are enough.

What we learn

1

Every difference in the Qur'an is deliberate and meaningful.

2

Knowing the reason fixes the wording in your mind.

3

Learn the reasons from qualified scholars and books, not guesswork.

Step 5 Revise them together

أَحَبُّ الْأَعْمَالِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَدْوَمُهَا وَإِنْ قَلَّ

"The most beloved deeds to Allah are the most consistent, even if small."

Narrated by al-Bukhārī (6464) and Muslim (783).

- 1 **Recite both places in one sitting.** When you revise a page that has a pair, turn to the other place and recite it too.

- 2 **Ask to be tested from the middle.** Your teacher or a friend reads the shared opening; you continue in the place they name.
- 3 **Revise your log weekly.** Read every pair in your log once a week, out loud, with the difference in mind.
- 4 **Retire pairs slowly.** When you have recited a pair correctly in four weekly checks in a row, mark it “firm”, but still read it once a month.
- 5 **Recite them in prayer.** Choose a passage with a pair for your night or sunnah prayers. There is no stronger test than reciting from memory in ṣalāh.

What we learn

1	Pairs are revised together, never one at a time.
2	Being tested from the middle is the real check.
3	A pair is firm only after weeks of correct recitation.

Complete each wording from memory, then check the answers on the next page and in your mushaf.

1 In al-A'rāf 7:19, Ādam and his wife are told:

وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ _____ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا

2 Which surah has this wording: al-Baqarah, al-A'rāf or Ibrāhīm?

يَسْؤِمُونَكَمُ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُقَتِّلُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ

3 Complete Āl 'Imrān 3:73:

قُلْ إِنَّ _____

4 Complete al-Isrā' 17:31:

نَحْنُ _____

5 Which verse of an-Nisā' ends this way: 4:48 or 4:116?

وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

6 Complete Yā-Sīn 36:20:

وَجَاءَ _____ يَسْعَى

7 Complete al-Mā'idah 5:69:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا _____

8 Complete at-Tawbah 9:85:

تُعْجِبَكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ _____

Answers

No.	Answer	No.	Answer
1	فَكُلًّا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا	5	4:116
2	al-A'rāf 7:141	6	مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ
3	الْهُدَى هَدَى اللَّهَ	7	وَالصَّائِبُونَ وَالنَّصَارَى
4	تَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ	8	وَلَا تُغْنِيكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَأَوْلَادُهُمْ

Log Your mutashābihāt log

Add every pair you meet or mix up. Tick a week each time you recite both places correctly.

Place 1	Place 2	The difference	My hook	W1	W2	W3	W4
al-Baqarah 2:35	al-A'rāf 7:19	وَكُلًّا مِنْهَا رَعَدًا / فَكُلًّا مِنْ	Longer surah, longer wording	☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐
				☐	☐	☐	☐

... أَنْ تَجْعَلَ الْقُرْآنَ رَيْعَ قَلْبِي، وَنُورَ صَدْرِي،
وَجِلَاءَ حُزْنِي، وَذَهَابَ هَمِّي

“... that You make the Qur’an the spring of my heart, the light of my chest, the removal of my sadness and the departure of my worry.”

From a longer du‘ā’ narrated by Aḥmad (3712); graded authentic by al-Albānī.

Sources

References

- *The Noble Qur’an*. Verses as cited in each pair; check every wording in your own mushaf (Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āsim).
- *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 5033, 6464; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 783, 791; *Musnad Aḥmad* 3712.
- al-Khaṭīb al-Iskāfī. *Durrat at-Tanzīl wa Ghurraṭ at-Ta’wīl*.
- Maḥmūd ibn Ḥamzah al-Karmānī. *al-Burhān fī Tawjīh Mutashābih al-Qur’ān* (also known as *Asrār at-Tikrār fī al-Qur’ān*).
- Ibn az-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī. *Milāk at-Ta’wīl*.
- ‘Alam ad-Dīn as-Sakhāwī. *Hidāyat al-Murtāb wa Ghāyat al-Ḥuffāẓ wa aṭ-Ṭullāb fī Tabyīn Mutashābih al-Kitāb* (a poem for memorising the mutashābihāt).

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وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

“And my success is only through Allah.” (Hūd 11:88)

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