

Imam Al-Bukhari's Methodology in The Acceptance of Hadiths

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Abstract: This article explores the principles and obligations that Imam al-Bukhari set for himself before engaging in the study of hadith. These requirements and duties are indirectly relevant to every student of knowledge who seeks to specialize in the science of hadith. The paper also discusses Imam al-Bukhari's methodology in the collection and classification of hadiths, as well as some of the key criteria he employed in determining the authenticity of narrations and in their transmission. Furthermore, it provides substantiated information regarding the structure and style of *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. In addition, the study analyzes the methods applied by Imam al-Bukhari and presents important insights into their practical implementation in the field of hadith studies.

Keywords: Imam al-Bukhari, criteria of authenticity, muhaddith (hadith scholar), method, methodology, *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *jāmi'* (comprehensive collection), *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic), hadith, *isnād* (chain of transmission), *matn* (text of the hadith), narration, tetrads (groups of four), conditions of authenticity.

Introduction: Imam al-Bukhari, in addition to being an exceptional muhaddith distinguished by his remarkable memorization of hadiths and the biographies of narrators, was also a scholar who developed innovative methodologies for the acceptance and classification of hadith literature. In this regard, many hadith scholars and religious authorities have written commentaries and marginal notes on his collection *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and other works, as well as numerous studies dedicated to his biography and his methodological approach to the authentication and acceptance of hadiths.

"*Rubaiyyat al-Bukhari*" consisting of sixteen parts, which embodies the duties and requirements set by Imam Bukhari for the students of hadith science, as well as the methods of accepting hadith and the conditions of authenticity - all the criteria of Imam Bukhari's quatrains are expressed in the personality of the scholar and in the work "*al-Jami' as-sahih*".

Indeed, during the era of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, the science of ḥadīth had reached a highly advanced stage, with numerous collections compiled by various ḥadīth scholars. Following his passing, several additional scholars of ḥadīth emerged.

Nevertheless, both contemporary Islamic scholars and subsequent generations of ḥadīth experts have consistently regarded Imam al-Bukhārī's collection, *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, as the most authentic, reliable, and comprehensive compilation of ḥadīth.

This is attributable to the fact that Imam al-Bukhārī accepted narrations only from narrators who met his exacting standards. His conditions and requirements for the transmission and recitation of ḥadīth were significantly more stringent than those of other muhaddiths, and he established rigorous criteria for the acceptance of a ḥadīth from any given narrator.

Some ḥadīth scholars placed considerable emphasis on the personal character and moral integrity of narrators, and they refrained from accepting a ḥadīth from any narrator whose qualities and ethical conduct did not adequately satisfy their established criteria for ḥadīth authentication.

No ḥadīth was accepted from narrators whose reliability, identity, or lineage was unknown, or whose character had been negatively evaluated to the level of *qaḍḥ* (*jarḥ*—criticism indicating a flaw or deficiency in reliability). This also applied to narrators who appeared as solitary transmitters within the *isnād* (chain of

transmission), with the exception of the Companions of the Prophet.

One of Imam al-Bukhārī's principal methods in the acceptance of ḥadīth was the meticulous investigation of the identities and biographies of narrators. He was among the first scholars to systematically establish the study of narrators' histories ('ilm al-rijāl) as a distinct discipline within ḥadīth studies, compiling comprehensive information about each transmitter. Prior to composing his renowned collection *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Imam al-Bukhārī authored works such as *Tārīkh al-Ṣaghīr*, *Tārīkh al-Awsaṭ*, and *Tārīkh al-Kabīr*, which documented the identities of narrators, as well as *Al-Kunā* and *Kitāb al-Ḍu'afā' al-Ṣaghīr*. The study of narrators' identities and biographies provided a crucial foundation for assembling a collection of authentic ḥadīth, enabling the identification of defects that could compromise authenticity and the differentiation of sound ḥadīth from flawed transmissions. In his evaluations, Imam al-Bukhārī considered factors such as the narrators' year of birth, place of origin, lineage, kunya, personal qualities, scholarly training, sources of ḥadīth acquisition, knowledge, piety, honesty, and their capacity to accurately transmit and recite ḥadīth.

Imam al-Bukhārī included only authentic ḥadīth in his seminal work *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. He developed specific methodological criteria for the acceptance of ḥadīth and rigorously adhered to these conditions. More broadly, both the compilers of the six canonical ḥadīth collections recognized as ṣaḥīḥ within the science of ḥadīth, as well as other ḥadīth scholars, produced their works while observing well-defined criteria. The methods employed by ḥadīth scholars for accepting narrations have been the subject of scholarly study, and several dedicated treatises have been composed on this topic. Notable examples include Ibn Ṭāhir al-Muqaddasī's *Shurūṭ al-A'immah al-Sitta* ("The Six Conditions of Ḥadīth Scholars") and Abū Bakr al-Ḥāzīmī's *Shurūṭ al-A'immah al-Khamsa* ("The Conditions of Five Ḥadīth Scholars"). The rules commonly referred to in the sources as "Imam al-Bukhārī's conditions" can be summarized as follows: the isnād (chain of transmission) must be continuous and uninterrupted; each narrator must be a practicing Muslim of sound character, truthful, just, balanced, and discerning, with minimal errors or deficiencies; and their faith must be complete and robust. Imam al-Ḥākim, in his work *Al-Madkhal*, delineates the conditions applied by Imam al-Bukhārī and Imam Muslim for authentic ḥadīth, stating that these conditions can be categorized into eleven requirements:

1. The isnād (chain of transmission) must be continuous.

2. Each narrator must be a Muslim.
3. The narrator must be truthful (ṣidq).
4. The narrator must not engage in falsehood.
5. The narrator should commit only minimal errors.
6. The narrator must possess the qualities of justice ('adl).
7. The narrator's memory must be strong.
8. The narrator's memory must be free from distortion or delusion.
9. The narrator's faith must be sound.
10. The narrator must have met the preceding narrator in the chain directly.
11. The narrator must possess clear and complete knowledge of the identities and biographies of all narrators in the chain.

These criteria collectively ensured the reliability and authenticity of the ḥadīth accepted by these eminent scholars. Additionally, it is stipulated that both the ḥadīth text (matn) and the isnād be free from qaḍḥā' (defects that undermine reliability) and shudhūdh (anomalies or irregularities).

According to Imam al-Bukhārī, for a ḥadīth to be deemed authentic, every narrator in the isnād, up to the Companions, must be universally recognized by scholars as trustworthy (thiqah), just ('adl), firm in faith, sound in religion, truthful, and sincere. The narrators must be free from falsehood, deceit, shudhūdh (anomalies), and 'illāti qaḍḥā' (defects that compromise the reliability of the narrator or the ḥadīth). Additionally, narrators are required to fully embody the qualities of justice and fairness, possess sharp intellect, and maintain a precise and coherent memory. The chain of transmission must be uninterrupted. In cases of taḥrīr or direct narration (i.e., 'an fulān 'an fulān), it is essential that the narrator meet their teacher (shaykh) in person and receive the ḥadīth directly from them.

Throughout his scholarly career, Imam al-Bukhārī adhered to this methodology with complete dedication. He approached his work with a profound sense of responsibility and intellectual integrity. By systematically collecting and classifying ḥadīth, he established a set of procedures that were unprecedented in the field. Later ḥadīth scholars referred to these rigorous standards as the "conditions of Imam al-Bukhārī" within the science of ḥadīth.

When conducting a semantic analysis of Imam al-Bukhārī's methodology for determining the authenticity (ṣaḥīḥ) of ḥadīths, it becomes evident that his approach surpasses that of other ḥadīth scholars in

precision and rigor. According to his criteria, there are twelve or more distinct methodological principles through which a ḥadīth may attain the status of ṣaḥīḥ. These twelve principles, as identified by Imam al-Bukhārī, are in fact grounded in the five fundamental conditions of authenticity commonly recognized by the scholars of ḥadīth's resides at the core. They are:

1. The narrator is required to be a Muslim, not an anonymous or non-religious individual, and must not have accepted or transmitted hadiths from those lacking religious commitment.
2. It is required that the narrator have reached the age of puberty, thereby possessing the intellectual and moral maturity necessary to understand the responsibility of preserving and conveying the hadith.
2. The narrator is required to be of sound intelligence, as hadiths are not accepted from those afflicted with mental incapacity.
3. The narrator is required to possess moral integrity, as the hadith transmitted by a person of known wickedness or moral corruption is deemed unacceptable.
5. The narrator must be known and characterized by commendable human qualities such as reliability, truthfulness, and justice. A hadith is not accepted from a narrator who does not embody these attributes.

These five conditions are based on the principle of عدالة الرواة ('Adālat al-Ruwāt), which requires that the narrator be just in both religious and worldly matters. The narrator's sense of justice must be equally sound and consistent in both spheres.

6. The narrators who transmitted a hadith from one another must have resided in the same city during the same period. If they did not coexist in the same place and time, the hadith is not regarded as possessing a continuous chain of transmission (isnād).
7. The narrators who transmitted a hadith from one another must have met at least once. If they neither lived in the same city nor met in person, their transmission of the hadith is not regarded as constituting a continuous chain of transmission (isnād).
8. The narrator (i.e., the individual transmitting the hadith) must have received it directly from the preceding narrator, either through oral transmission (riwāyatan) or written form (dirāyatan), in a face-to-face setting and with explicit permission.

These three methods (6–8) form the foundation of 'Itṣāl al-sanad (the continuity of the chain of transmission), which entails connecting the sanad through direct witnessing, hearing, and reciting the hadith as received.

9. It is essential that the narrator have a robust memory, allowing for precise retention and reproduction of the hadith as originally transmitted.

10. If the narrator's memory is weak, he must have both memorized and documented the hadith he received.

These two methods (9–10) pertain to ḥifẓ al-rāwī (the narrator's memory), emphasizing that a fundamental condition for the hadith sanad is the narrator's possession of a strong and accurate memory.

11. Both the isnād (chain of transmission) and the matn (text) of a hadith are required to be free of contradictions. It is impermissible for the narration of a single reliable narrator to contradict that of numerous other trustworthy narrators. For instance, if a hadith is reported in one isnād as being transmitted from father to son, the reverse — son to father — should not occur in another chain. The isnād must also be free from insertions (shudhudh), alterations in the sequence of narrators, and any changes in the names of the transmitters.

The eleventh method, known as khāliyatun min ash-shudhudh (خالية من الشذوذ), requires that the hadith's matn and isnād be free from shudhudh—that is, any form of anomaly or contradiction. This principle mandates that the content and transmission of the hadith remain consistent and free from conflicting reports.

12. The chain of transmission (sanad) and the text (matn) of the hadith must be free from factors that compromise their integrity. Hadiths are not accepted from narrators characterized by jarh (discrediting defects), who are dishonest, lack interest in hadith studies, possess weak memory, exhibit excessive fearfulness, lack piety, or do not fully observe the pillars of religion, including those who engage in mudallas (concealment or misrepresentation).

This twelfth method, (خالية من العلة القاضية), fundamentally embodies the condition that the hadith must be free from defects that impair its text and the rank of its narrators in the chain of transmission. In other words, according to this principle, a ṣaḥīḥ hadith must be devoid of any causes or factors that undermine the integrity and status of both its matn (text) and the narrators in its isnād (chain).

The superiority of Imam Bukhari's Al-Jami' as-Sahih over other hadith collections is evident through a comparative analysis of the conditions for accepting hadith employed by the compiler himself and those used by other muhaddithun (hadith scholars). Below, the methodologies of nine authors—whose works are recognized as sahih collections—regarding the

acceptance of hadith as authentic are examined, and their results are comparatively analyzed. According to our research findings, among these nine scholars, only Imam Bukhari strictly adhered to these twelve

conditions. In other words, if the chain of transmission (sanad) and the text (matn) of a hadith fully satisfy these conditions, the hadith is considered sahih according to Imam Bukhari.

Conditions of Authenticity and the Extent to Which Hadith Scholars Adhere to Them

عدد الشروط التي التزم المحدثون	خالية من العلة القادحة	خاليّة من الشذوذ	حفظ الراوي		اتصال السند			عدالة الروات					الشروط العامة في التصحيح
	خالية من العلة القادحة	خالية من الشذوذ	إذا كان الراوي ضعيف	يجب أن تكون	يجب أن يكون الحديث قد	الإلتقاء ولو	أن يكون الرواة	ثقة ثقة،	لم يكن فاسقا	عاقلا	بالغا	أن يكون مسلما	الشروط في التصحيح
No	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	عدد الشروط
													اسم المحدث
12	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	1 الإمام البخاري
11-10	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	2 الإمام مسلم
10	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	3 الإمام الترمذي
9	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	4 الإمام أبو داود
8	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	5 الإمام النسائي
7	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	6 الإمام الدارمي
7-6	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	7 الإمام ابن ماجه

6	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	الإمام مالك	8
5	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	الإمام أحمد	9

Imam Muslim strictly adhered to eleven of these conditions of authenticity; that is, a hadith whose chain of transmission (sanad) and text (matn) meet these eleven conditions is considered sahih according to him. For example, if a scholar (shaykh) arrives in a city and delivers a lesson by narrating a hadith, and one of the listeners then conveys that hadith to a friend residing in the same city but who did not attend the lesson, and subsequently a third person who was not present at the lesson narrates the hadith from the friend, according to our research findings, Imam Bukhari would not consider this sanad to be muttasil (continuous). However, Imam Muslim and other muhaddithun regard the sanad of this hadith as muttasil.

According to Imam Abu Dawud, if a hadith fulfills any nine of these conditions, it is considered sahih. According to Imam Tirmidhi, a hadith must fulfill ten conditions in order to be considered sahih. For this reason, some hadith scholars regard Imam Tirmidhi's Sunan collection as superior to Imam Abu Dawud's Sunan.

One point that must be specifically emphasized in our research is that the conditions for accepting hadith employed by Imam Malik and Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on them) are fewer than those of other muhaddithun. However, this does not imply that the hadiths included in their collections are of a lower degree of authenticity. The comparative analysis of the conditions used by hadith scholars constitutes a separate study, and the results presented in this table may vary depending on further research. Moreover, there are several positive factors associated with the hadith collections of these scholars, including but not limited to: Imam Malik's proximity in time to the era of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which resulted in fewer narrators between the muhaddith and the Prophet; and the fact that Imam Ahmad lived during a period when Medina and Baghdad were prominent centers of hadith scholarship. Additionally, there are other reasons which may justify elevating the sanad (chain of transmission) of hadiths narrated by these scholars to the highest level of authenticity.

Imam Bukhari strictly adhered to these twelve conditions when accepting hadith as sahih, and for this reason, scholars worldwide have universally recognized his hadith collection as consisting entirely of authentic

hadiths. In fact, some scholars have expanded Imam Bukhari's conditions for authenticity to as many as fifteen.

In addition to the aforementioned conditions, Imam Bukhari employed several other methodologies for accepting hadith as authentic, some of which are articulated in his work collectively known as *Rubā'iyāt al-Bukhārī* (Bukhari's Four Books). This treatise consists of sixteen quatrains, each encompassing four principles. It was conveyed by Imam Bukhari to his student, Qadi Abu Abbas Walid ibn Ibrahim ibn Zaid al-Hamadani. However, these quatrains embody the essential conditions and requirements that must be fulfilled by any student aspiring to engage in the science of hadith.

An analysis of Imam Bukhari's quatrains reveals that he developed specific methodologies for engaging in the science of hadith. According to him, anyone aspiring to study hadith must set for themselves twenty-one conditions and adhere to them strictly in order to memorize, accept, and transmit hadith. These conditions are as follows:

1. The student of hadith must possess strong piety (taqwa) and self-discipline, as well as a robust memory and retention capacity.
2. The student should have comprehensive knowledge of the life (sīrah) and history of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), including the biographies of the Companions (Sahaba), the Successors (Tabi'un), and prominent scholars in the Islamic tradition.
3. The student must be familiar with the narrators of hadith, including their names, kunyah (patronymics), titles, places of birth and death, and the historical periods in which they lived.
4. The individual pursuing hadith studies must have a strong capacity for memorization (hifz) and a reliable memory (dhabt).
5. The student should understand the distinctions between different types of hadith—such as muttasil (continuous) and munqaṭi' (disconnected), as well as ṣaḥīḥ (authentic) and 'illat (defective) hadith.
6. The student must possess comprehensive knowledge of the technical terminology (istilah) used by muhaddithun in the science of hadith.

7. From childhood through maturity, the student should consistently engage in studying hadith and its related sources without interruption.
8. Regardless of circumstances—whether in youth or old age, wealth or poverty, health or illness—the student must persist in the study of hadith.
9. The student should be willing and able to study hadith in any place or environment.
10. The student should not hesitate to learn hadith from anyone, whether they are more or less knowledgeable, older or younger.
11. A student learning hadith from written sources must verify the authorship and ensure the reliability of the source before studying from it.
12. The study of hadith must be pursued not for worldly gain but solely for the pleasure of Allah and success in the Hereafter.
13. The student should seek to have an assistant or helper in the study of hadith.
14. The student must learn to write in clear and legible handwriting.
15. The student should possess a comprehensive knowledge of the Arabic language.
16. The student must be knowledgeable in Arabic grammar, eloquence (fasahah), and rhetoric (balagha).
17. The student should have sufficient financial means or support to facilitate the process of acquiring knowledge.
18. The student must preserve their health and memory, and avoid wasting energy and life on frivolous matters.
19. The student should be determined and persevering, capable of enduring hardships in the pursuit of knowledge.
20. The student must have a family, a place of residence (own house), and financial resources.
21. The student must disregard the envy of the envious, the backbiting of the malicious, and the insults of the ignorant.

One of Imam Bukhari's methods involved accepting hadith exclusively from narrators who met the aforementioned criteria and who had been engaged in the study of hadith from a young age. This approach constitutes a distinctive condition unique to his methodology in the authentication and acceptance of hadith.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing research and analysis, it can be concluded that Imam Bukhari's *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is regarded as one of the most reliable and authoritative

collections of hadith within the Islamic world. Imam Bukhari held a distinguished position in the science of hadith and employed an exceptionally rigorous methodology in analyzing the chains of transmission (*isnād*) and the textual content (*matn*) of hadith. Prior to including any narration in his compilation, he meticulously scrutinized the narrators, assessing their integrity (*'adl*) and accuracy in memorization (*ḍabt*), as well as thoroughly verifying the source and continuity of the hadith. For this reason, the hadiths compiled in *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* are considered superior in authenticity and reliability compared to those found in other collections by various *muhaddithun*.

Imam Bukhari truly inaugurated a new era in the discipline of hadith studies. His contributions were of profound significance not only for the advancement of hadith science but also for the broader development of Islamic scholarship as a whole. His methodologies for the authentication and narration of hadith set a precedent that subsequent scholars of hadith have followed. Moreover, contemporary researchers continue to acknowledge Bukhari's methodology as a rigorous scientific standard. Consequently, *Sahih Bukhari* has maintained its enduring relevance across successive generations.

Furthermore, the criticisms and doubts expressed by certain misguided groups who reject hadith and question Imam Bukhari's status in hadith sciences are entirely unfounded from a scholarly perspective. Our aforementioned research fully confirms Imam Bukhari's efforts and competence within the historical context of hadith studies and the established criteria of transmission science. Therefore, *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is not merely the work of a single *muhaddith* but rather a profound scientific and spiritual legacy for the entire Muslim community, holding unparalleled significance in faithfully conveying the authentic teachings of Islam. In this regard, Imam Bukhari's scholarly heritage continues to serve as a source of guidance, knowledge, and inspiration for the Muslim ummah to this day.

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