

Amharic Language Introduction

Amharic Script

Amharic is written in a script which is named *fidäl*. Tigrigna, a language closely related to Amharic, and Ge'ez, the language of ancient Ethiopian, also use the same script. Learning the script may look like a very complex system but with practice you will get used to it. If you want to read anything in Amharic and Tigrigna you need to know the *fidäl*.

Each (*fidäl*) letter or symbol represents a whole syllable, like **bu, bi, ba, be**. So if you want to write the Amharic word **Buna**, which means coffee, you will need only two letters **bu+ na**. There are more than 230 letters. Learning the Amharic *Fidäl* may not be an easy task for an adult learner.

But don't worry, there are regular patterns in the system and you won't have to learn all completely different shapes. There are 33 basic consonant shapes followed by the vowel **ä**. The addition of small lines or circles or shortening and lengthening of legs indicates a different vowel following the base consonant. Every time one of the seven vowels of Amharic (ä, u, i, a, e, i and o) is added to a consonant, the shape of the *Fidäl* changes to reflect the change. There are exceptions to the rule and some of the *Fidäls* have a counterpart that sounds exactly the same but are depicted by different symbols for historical reasons.

There are 7 vowels in Amharic and 6 modifications of the basic shape making what are called the 7 'orders' as in; ቤ bā ቤ bu ቤ bi ቤ ba ቤ be ቤ bī ቤ bo

The first order

- a) Letters with one leg

ϕ k'ä † tä ‡ čä † ha † nä † ñä † yä † gä † pä

b) Letters with two Legs

Λ lä H zä ű sä † žä Λ lä ű šä † dä ű bä † jä ű šä † p'ä h kä † s'ä † hä

c) Legless Symbols

∪ ha ∪ sä ∪ mā ∪ wä

The second order

You add a short horizontal line to the middle of the right-hand side of the basic letter shape.

ű su ,ű šu ,ű bu

The third order is mostly formed by adding a short horizontal line to the bottom of the right hand side of the letter.

ű si ,ű ši ,ű bi

The fourth order

The base consonant with the sound 'a' is formation depends on the shape of the basic first order letter.

One leg letters mostly make the fourth order by adding a leftwards curving to the bottom of the single leg.

Λ La, ű sa, ű ša, ű ba, h ka, † k'a, † ta, † ča, † ha, † na, † ña, † ya

The fifth order the consonant followed by the vowel e is formed by a small loop or semi-circle attached to the bottom of the base shape. But letters with rounded bottom will need to add an extra leg to carry the sign.

ű be ,ħ e ,ħ ke ,ű he ,† že ,‡ je ,† p'e ,† s'e

The six order indicating both the consonant plus the vowel i diverse in a way it is formed.

The seventh order

Which is followed by the vowel o, has three characteristics patterns of formation. Most of the letters with a single leg add a small circle at the top of the letter.

ቆ k'ö, ቶ to, ቸ čö, ኸho, ኹno, ኺ ño

The letters with two and three legs mostly shorten the right hand leg to form the 7th

ሶ so, ሸ šo, ሰ bo, ኮ ko , ኸ ho , ዠ, žo , ጆ jo, ጆ po', ጆ

Of the letters with rounded bottoms four of them form the seventh order by adding a short leftward curving line to the center of the bottom of the shape except ho,mo, ro and fo.

ሦ so ሞ wo ሶ s'ö

Here is the full Amharic script in groups based on their shapes

One Legged symbols

ቀ	k'ä	ቁ	k'u	ቂ	k'i	ቃ	k'a	ቄ	k'e	ቅ	k'i	ቆ	k'o
ተ	tä	ቱ	tu	ቲ	ti	ታ	ta	ቲ	te	ታ	tī	ታ	to
ቸ	čä	ቹ	ču	ቺ	či	ቻ	ča	ቼ	če	ቻ	čī	ቻ	čo
ሀ	ha	ሁ	hu	ሂ	hi	ሃ	ha	ሄ	he	ሀ	hī	ሀ	ho
ነ	nä	ኑ	nu	ኒ	ni	ና	na	ኔ	ne	ነ	nī	ና	no
ኘ	ñä	ኙ	ñu	ኚ	ñi	ኛ	ña	ኜ	ñe	ኘ	ñī	ኘ	ño

Ƨ	yä	Ƨ	yu	Ƨ	yi	Ƨ	ya	Ƨ	ye	Ƨ	yī	Ƨ	yo
᠎	gä	᠎	gu	᠎	gi	᠎	ga	᠎	ge	᠎	gī	᠎	go
ᠮ	pä	ᠮ	pu	ᠮ	pi	ᠮ	pa	ᠮ	pe	ᠮ	pī	ᠮ	po

Two Legged letters

᠕	lä	᠕	lu	᠕	li	᠕	La	᠕	le	᠕	lī	᠕	lo
ᠨ	sä	ᠨ	su	ᠨ	si	ᠨ	sa	ᠨ	se	ᠨ	sī	ᠨ	so
ᠨ̄	šä	ᠨ̄	šu	ᠨ̄	ši	ᠨ̄	ša	ᠨ̄	še	ᠨ̄	šī	ᠨ̄	šo
ᠨ	bä	ᠨ	bu	ᠨ	bi	ᠨ	ba	ᠨ	be	ᠨ	bī	ᠨ	bo
᠕	a	᠕	u	᠕	i	᠕	a	᠕	e	᠕	ī	᠕	o
᠕	kä	᠕	ku	᠕	ki	᠕	ka	᠕	ke	᠕	kī	᠕	Ko
᠕̄	hā	᠕̄	hu	᠕̄	hi	᠕̄	ha	᠕̄	he	᠕̄	hī	᠕̄	Ho
᠕	zä	᠕	zu	᠕	zi	᠕	za	᠕	ze	᠕	zī	᠕	zo
᠕	žä	᠕	žu	᠕	ži	᠕	ža	᠕	že	᠕	žī	᠕	žo
᠕	dä	᠕	du	᠕	di	᠕	da	᠕	de	᠕	dī	᠕	do
᠕	jä	᠕	ju	᠕	ji	᠕	ja	᠕	je	᠕	jī	᠕	jo
᠕	p'ä	᠕	p'u	᠕	p'i	᠕	p'a	᠕	p'e	᠕	p'ī	᠕	po'
᠕	s'ä	᠕	s'u	᠕	s'i	᠕	s'a	᠕	s'e	᠕	s'ī	᠕	s'o

Three Legged symbols

᠕	ha	᠕	hu	᠕	hi	᠕	ha	᠕	he	᠕	hī	᠕	ho
ᠮ	T'ä	ᠮ	t'u	ᠮ	t'i	ᠮ	t'a	ᠮ	t'e	ᠮ	t'ī	ᠮ	t'o
ᠮ	č'ä	ᠮ	č'u	ᠮ	č'i	ᠮ	č'a	ᠮ	č'e	ᠮ	č'ī	ᠮ	č'o

The Legless ones

ሀ	ha	ሁ	hu	ሂ	hi	ሃ	ha	ሄ	he	ሀ	hī	ሆ	ho
ረ	rä	ሩ	ru	ሪ	ri	ራ	ra	ሬ	re	ር	rī	ሮ	ro
መ	mä	ሙ	mu	ሚ	mi	ማ	ma	ሜ	me	ም	īm	ሞ	mo
ሠ	sä	ሡ	su	ሢ	si	ሣ	sa	ሤ	se	ሥ	sī	ሦ	so
ወ	wä	ወ	wu	ዊ	wi	ዐ	wa	ዐ	we	ዑ	wī	ዐ	wo
ዐ	a	ዑ	u	ዒ	i	ዓ	a	ዔ	e	ዕ	ī	ዖ	o
ፀ	s'ä	ፁ	s'u	፺	s'i	፻	s'a	፼	s'e	፽	s'ī	፾	s'o
ፈ	fä	ፋ	fu	ፊ	fi	ፋ	fa	ፎ	fe	ፍ	fi	ፎ	fo

Key to Amharic Vowel sounds

Ä-Again' bigger, like the hesitation uh, **u**-moon, soon, **i**-feet, meet, seat, **a**-father like the exclamation ah!,

e- gate, way, **'i**-like player and **O**-shore.

Numbers in Amharic

Number	Script	phonetics	Number	Script	phonetics
1	አንድ	and	20	ሃያ	haya
2	ሁለት	hulät	30	ሰላሳ	sälasa
3	ሶስት	sost	40	አርባ	arba
4	አራት	arat	50	ሃምሳ	hamsa
5	አምስት	amist	60	ስሁሳ	slsa
6	ስድስት	sīdist	70	ሰባ	säba
7	ሰባት	säbat	80	ስማንያ	sämanya
8	ስምንት	sīmīnt	90	ዘጠኝ	zät'äna
9	ዘጠኝ	zät'ägn	100	መቶ	mäto
10	አስር	asir			

Vocabulary

1. Adventure-ጅብዱ-Jäbdu	80. Town-ከተማ - Kätäma
2. Afternoon -ከሰከት- käsäat	81. Trainer -አሰልጣኝ -Asälit'añ
3. Again-እንደገና - ändägäna	82. Training -ሰልጠና -silt'äna
4. Age-እድሜ- idme	83. Truth -እውነት - iwnät
5. Alphabet -ፊደል -Fidal	84. Unique-የተሆነ -Yätäläyä
6. Always-ሁልጊዜ -Hulgize	85. Urgent-አስቸኳይ-Ascäkuway
7. Another -ሌላ- Lela	86. Useful -ጠቃሚ-t'äk'ami
8. Answer/Change(as in money)-መልስ-Mäls	87. Vegetables- አትክልት- atikilt
9. Apology -ይቅርታ-Yik'irta	88. Volunteer-ጾታደኛ-Fäk'adäña
10. Appointmen -ቀጠሮ-k'ät'äro	89. Clever -ጎበዝ -Gobäz
11. Appropriate -ተገቢ-tägäbi	90. Coffee -ቡና- buna
12. Bad -መጥፎ -Mät'ifo	91. Cold -ቀዝቃዛ-k'äzk'aza
13. Bag -ቦርሳ - Borsa	92. Color-ቀለም-k'läm
14. Bed pan -ፖፖ -Popo	93. Compound -ግቢ-Gibbi
15. Big-ትልቅ -tīlik'	94. Correct-ትክክል-tikikil
16. Bill -ሂሳብ - Hisab	95. Country -አገር- agär
17. Body -ገላ- Gäla-	96. Crazy -አብድ -ibd
18. Braid- ሹሩባ -šuruba	97. Customer-ደንበኛ- Dänbäña
19. Brother- ወንድም- wändim	98. Dangerous-አደገኛ-Adägäña
20. Bucket -ባልዲ -Balidī	99. Dark-ጨሆማ - č'äläma
21. But-ግን- Gīn	100. Day/date -ቀን-k'än
22. Candle-ሻማ- šama	101. Delicious- ጣፋጭ-T'afač'
23. Care -አንክብካቤ-inkibikabe	102. Dinner -አራት- irat
24. Careful-ጠንቃቃ -T'änk'ak'a	103. Direction-አቅጣጫ-Ak'itač'a
25. Certain -እርግጠኛ -irigīt'äña	104. Empty -ባዶ-Bado

26. Chair-ወንበር- Wänbär	105. Enough- በቂ - Bäk'i
27. Cheap-ርካሽ -Rikaš	106. Enough -በቃ -Bäk'a
28. Church-ቤተክርስቲያን- Betäkirstiyan	107. Evening -ምሽት-mišit
29. Citizenship-ዜግነት- Zeginät	108. Example-ምሳሌ -Mīsale
30. Class/room -ክፍል- Kifil	109. Expense -ወጪ - Wäč'i
31. Clever -ጎበዝ -Gobäz	110. Farm -እርሻ - irša
32. Gender- ስታ-S'ota	111. Fast-ጉግን - Fät'an
33. Gift -ስጦታ-sit'ota	112. Fasting-ጸም -S'om
34. Glass-ብርጭቆ-Birč'ik'o	113. Father -አባት -abat
35. Greeting -ሰላምታ -sälamita	114. Few-ጥቂት- T'ik'it
36. Home/House ቤት- Bet	115. Fiancé -እጮኛ ič'oñña
37. Hope -ተስፋ-täsfa	116. Flash light -ባትሪ- Batiri
38. Hot /fresh -ትኩስ-tikus	117. Fork -ሹካ šuka
39. How much/how many -ስንት -sint	118. Frankly -በግልፅ -Bägils'
40. Husband-ባል- bal	119. Friend-ጓደኛ- gwadäñña
41. Incense -እግን - it'an	120. Mop -መወልወያ- Mäwälwäya
42. Inside -ውስጥ - Wist'	121. Morning- ጠዋት- t'awat
43. Key -ቁልፍ-k'ulf	122. Mosque -መስጊድ- Mäsgid
44. Kid -ህፃን -His'an	123. Mother -እናት-innat
45. Language-ቋንቋ-k'uankua	124. Mug-ከባያ - Kubaya
46. Letter-ደብዳቤ - Däbidabe	125. Name- ስም-Sim
47. Life -ህይወት- Hiywät	126. Neighbor -ጎረቤት -Goräbet
48. Light/easy -ቀላል-k'älal	127. Never-በፍፁም-Bäfis'um
49. List/ Change(as in money)-ዝርዝር- Zirzir	128. News -ዜና-Zena
50. Low -ዝቅተኛ- Zik'itäña	129. Next -ቀጥሎ -k'ät'ilo
51. Luggage-ሻንጣ -šant'a	130. Night -ሆሊት -lälit
52. Madatory-ግዴታ- Gideta	131. Nothing -ምንም -Minim

53. Malaria-ወባ- Wäba	132. Now -አሁን -Ahun
54. Many -ብዙ - Bizu	133. No- አይ-aye
55. Market-ገበያ - Gäbäya	134. Panties -ፓንት -Pant
56. Mean/means-ማሆንት Malät	135. Parent-ወላጅ - Wälaj
57. Method -ዘዴ- Zäde	136. Peace -ሰላም -sälam
58. Milk -ወተት wätät	137. People -ህዝብ -Hizb
59. Modern-ዘመናዊ- Zämänawi	138. Perhaps -ምናልባት -Minalbat
60. Money -ገንዘብ - Gänizäb	139. Phone -ስልክ -silk
61. Month-ወር - Wär	140. Pocket-ኪስ -Kis
62. Shop-ሱቅ -suk'	141. Practice -ልምምድ-Limimid
63. Similar-ተመሳሳይ-tämäsasay	142. Price -ዋጋ-Waga
64. Sister- እህት- ihit	144. Question-ጥያቄ-T'iyak'e
65. Slowly -በዝግታ -Bäzigita	145. Ready-ዝግጁ -Zigiju
66. Small -ትንሽ-tiniš	146. Reason -ምክንያት-Mikniyat
67. Smile-ቻግግታ -Fägägita	147. Regulation-ደንብ-Dänb
68. Soft drink- ሆስላሳ- läslasa	148. Review-ክሆሳ-Kiläsa
69. Special -ልዩ - Liyu	149. Safe-አስተማማኝ Astämamañ
70. Speech-ንግግር -Nigigir	150. Salt-ጨው - č'aw
71. Stepfather -እንጀራ አባት- injära abbat	151. Water- ውሃ weha
72. Stepmother -እንጀራ እናት- injära innat	152. Week -ሳምንት -Samint
73. Student -ተማሪ -tamari	153. Why -ሆምን -lämin
74. Sugar- ስኳር- sīkuar	154. With out-ያሁ-Yalä
75. Tea -ሻይ -šay	155. Word -ቃል-k'al
76. Time /O'clock-ሰዓት -sä'at	156. Work -ሰራ -Sira
77. Today-ዛሬ-Zare	157. Worker -ሰራተኛ -Säratáñ
78. Together-ብጋራ - Bägära	158. Yesterday -ትናንት -tinant

Verbs you need the most

1. To ask-መጠየቅ- Mät'äyäk'	11. To read -ማንበብ - Manbäb
2. To be -መሆን- Mahon	12. To run-መሮጥ - Märot'
3. To brush-መቦረሽ mäboräš	13. To send/mail -መላክ- Mälak
4. To drink -መጠጣት- Mät'ät'at	14. To show-ማሳየት -Masayät
5. To go-መሄድ - Mähed	15. To speak-መናገር -Mänagär
6. To learn -መማር-mämar	16. To spend the day -መዋልmäwal
7. To like-መውደድ- Mäwdäd	17. To spend the evening-ማምሽት- mamsät
8. To listen-ማዳመጥ-Madamät'	18. To spend the night -ማደር-ma
9. To look for/to want -መጾሆግ- Mäfäläg	19. To study - ማጥናት - Mat'inat
10. To play/to chat -መጫወት-Mäc'awät	20. To take-መውሰድ- Mäwäsäd

VI. Expressing Needs and Emotions

I don't understand -አልገባኝም- algäbañim	I like -እወዳለሁ iwädalähu
I'm tired - ደክመኝ- däkämäñ	I drink - እጠጣለሁ it'ätalähu
I'm thirsty - ጠማኝ- tämäñ	I eat -እበላለሁ ibälalähu
I'm hungry -ራብኝ rabäñ	I don't want- አልፈልግም alfäligm
I'm full - ቦቃኝ bäk'añ	I don't like - አልወድም alwädim
I am sick-Amämäñ	I don't drink - አልጠጣም alt'ät'am
I want አፈልጋለሁ ifälgalähu	I don't eat- አልበላም albälam

General Greetings in Amharic

How do you do?	T'ena yist'iliñ	ጤና ይስጥልኝ
Hi!	Sälam näw?	ሰላም ነው?

How are you? (♂)	Dähna näh?	ደሀና ነሀ?
How are you? (♀)	Dähna näš?	ደሀና ነሽ?
How are you? polite	Dähna näwot?	ደሀና ነዎት?
How are you? Plural	Dähna načihu	ደሀና ነትህ?

Common Cultural Faux Pa that Foreigners commit in Ethiopia

- While greeting and taking leave, bowing, shaking hands and removing hats are common.
- Using both hands when shaking hands with elders and officials indicates respect (the left hand to support the right forearm).
- Upon the entry or arrival of elders or officials, it is expected to stand and say, ‘nor’ signifying welcome and respect.
- When you eat with elders, wait for the elders to start before eating yourself.
- You don’t have to eat all the food served. You can eat as much as you can and return what remains. There is usually someone else who will eat it.
- Smelling food served to you can offend your host (You can explain to your host that in America it is a compliment to smell the food).
- When somebody serves you water for your hands, it is polite to stand up to wash, but your host usually asks you to sit down. You can then insist and wash standing up, or choose to wash sitting down depending on the age of the person who helps you to wash (relative to you). If the person seems to be younger than you, you may choose to sit down. But generally since standing up is a sign of respect for your hosts, it is the safer thing to do.
- While eating food on the same plate with somebody else, you may be offered ‘gursha’ (feeding with hands). If you don’t want the gursha, you can politely refuse to have it.
- It is not polite to lick your fingers at meals.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart”. Nelson Mandela