Amharic script ፊደል

1 · letters on one page

The trick: Amharic is written left to right in fidel, ፊደል, with no capitals. Each symbol is a whole syllable: a consonant **plus** a vowel. Every letter has seven forms, one for each vowel, so learn the base letter first, then the small change each vowel makes.

One letter, seven vowels

1 e	2 u	3 i	4 a	5 ie	6 ə	7 o
ለ le	ሉ lu	ሊ li	ላ la	ሌ lie	ል l(ə)	ሎ lo
በ be	ቡ bu	ቢ bi	ባ ba	ቤ bie	ብ b(ə)	ቦ bo
ሰ se	ሱ su	ሲ si	ሳ sa	ሴ sie	ስ s(ə)	ሶ so
መ me	ሙ mu	ሚ mi	ማ ma	ሜ mie	ም m(ə)	ሞ mo
ነ ne	ኑ nu	ኒ ni	ና na	ኔ nie	ን n(ə)	ኖ no

Read across: 1st form e, 2nd u, 3rd i, 4th a, 5th ie, 6th the letter alone (or with a quick ə), 7th o. The marks are mostly regular: u adds a little stroke on the right, i a foot at the bottom right, ie a small ring. The 4th, 6th and 7th forms change more, so learn them by sight. ሰላም selam, hello, is ሰ se + ላ la + ም m.

34 base letters (1st form)

ሀ h	ለ l	ሐ h	መ m	ሠ s	ረ r	ሰ s	ሸ sh	ቀ q'	በ b	ቨ v	ተ t	ቸ ch	ኀ h	ነ n	ኘ ny	አ a
ከ k	ኸ h	ወ w	ዐ a	ዘ z	ዠ zh	የ y	ደ d	ጀ j	ገ g	ጠ t'	ጨ ch'	ጰ p'	ጸ ts'	ፀ ts'	ፈ f	ፐ p

Same sound, different letter: ሀ ሐ ኀ ኸ all say h, ሰ ሠ say s, አ ዐ carry a vowel, and ጸ ፀ say ts'. They were different sounds long ago; today you just learn which one a word is spelt with. In the 1st form, ሀ ሐ ኀ say ha and አ ዐ say a, not e: ሐኪም hakim, doctor; አዎ awo, yes. ቨ v is only for borrowed words, and ዠ zh (the s in vision) is rare.

Pop sounds

ቀ q', ጠ t', ጨ ch', ጰ p', ጸ ts': hold your breath and say k, t, ch, p or ts, with a little pop in the throat. ጠ t'e is not ተ te: ጥሩ t'əru, good.

A wa form

Some letters add wa: ቋ q'wa, ጓ gwa, ኳ kwa, ሷ swa. ቋንቋ q'wanq'wa, language; ጓደኛ gwadenya, friend; እሷ əswa, she.

Spaces and stops

Words are split by spaces; older text uses ፡ instead. A sentence ends with ።, a comma is ፣, and the question mark is the same as in English.

Numbers

Everyday numbers are 0 to 9, as in English: prices, phones, buses. Ethiopic numerals also exist, with no zero; you'll see them on old books and formal dates.

፩ 1	፪ 2	፫ 3	፬ 4	፭ 5	፮ 6	፯ 7	፰ 8	፱ 9	፲ 10	፳ 20	፻ 100

How words work ሰዋስው

Romanization on this sheet: one simple spelling for each symbol: e, u, i, a, ie, ə, o for the seven forms, and q', t', ch', p', ts' for the pop sounds. ə is written only where you hear a vowel. Amharic doubles some sounds, but the script doesn't show it and neither do we, so learn each word by ear.

e	1st: like the u in but	ነገ nege tomorrow
u i a o	food, see, father, go	ቡና buna coffee
ie	5th: e in café, a hint of y	ቤት biet house
ə	6th: a quick uh, or silent	ብዙ bəzu many

q'	k with a pop in the throat	ቀን q'en day
t' ch' p' ts'	the same pop on t, ch, p, ts	ጥሩ t'əru good
ny	ny in canyon	ቀኝ q'eny right
sh ch j	shop, chat, jam	ሻይ shay tea

The verb goes last

እኔ ənie
I

ቡና buna
coffee

እጠጣለሁ ət'et'alehu
drink

I coffee drink: እኔ ቡና እጠጣለሁ ənie buna ət'et'alehu, I drink coffee. The verb ending already says who, so እኔ is often left out.
Describing words go before: ትልቅ ቤት tələq' biet, a big house.

Man or woman? It changes the words

to a man

አንተ ante
you. እንዴት ነህ? əndiet neh? how are you?
He is እሱ əsu.

to a woman

አንቺ anchi
you. እንዴት ነሽ? əndiet nesh? how are you?
She is እሷ əswa.

polite, to both

እርስዎ ərswo
for someone older or someone you don't know: እንዴት ነዎት? əndiet newot?

The verb changes too: want

እፈልጋለሁ əfeləgalehu	I want
ትፈልጋለህ təfeləgaleh	you want, to a man
ትፈልጊያለሽ təfeləgiyalesh	you want, to a woman
ይፈልጋል yəfeləgal	he wants
ትፈልጋለች təfeləgalech	she wants

To be: ነው and friends

ነኝ neny	I am
ነህ neh	you are, to a man
ነሽ nesh	you are, to a woman
ነው new	he is, it is
ናት nat	she is
ነን nen	we are
ናቸው nachew	they are
ነዎት newot	you are, polite

Is comes last: ተማሪ ነኝ temari neny, I'm a student; እሷ ሐኪም ናት əswa hakim nat, she's a doctor.

Endings do the work

ቤቱ
bietu
the house: ቤት + -u; after a vowel -w: ቡናው

ልጅቷ
ləjətwa
the girl: -wa for a woman or a girl

ቤቶች
bietoch
houses: -och; after a vowel -woch: ተማሪዎች

ቤቱን አየሁ
bietun ayehu
I saw the house: -n marks the thing you act on

No: the opposite of ነው is አይደለም aydelem, isn't. For a verb, wrap it in አል ... ም: አልፈልግም alfeləgəm, I don't want; አላውቅም alawq'əm, I don't know. **Questions:** keep the sentence and raise your voice at the end: ቡና ትፈልጋለህ? buna təfeləgaleh?, do you want coffee? (to a man). Question words go just before the verb or ነው: ገበያው የት ነው? gebeyaw yet new?, where's the market?

The first 248 words ቃላት

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *(Notes in brackets)* say how a word is used; **blue** is for talking to a man, **pink** to a woman.

Greetings and survival

ሰላም selam
hello; it also means peace

አመሰግናለሁ amesegənalehu
thank you

እንዴት ነህ? / ነሽ?
əndiet neh? / nesh?
how are you? *(to a man / to a woman)*

እንዴት ነዎት? əndiet newot?
how are you? *(polite, to anyone older)*

ደህና ነኝ dehna neny
I'm fine

እንኳን ደህና መጣህ / መጣሽ
ənkwan dehna met'ah / met'ash
welcome! *(to a man / to a woman)*

ደህና ሁን / ሁኚ dehna hun / hunyi
goodbye, take care *(to a man / to a woman)*

ቻው chaw
bye! *(casual)*

አዎ awo
yes

አይ ay
no

እሺ əshi
OK, all right

እባክህ / እባክሽ əbakəh / əbakəsh
please *(to a man / to a woman)*

ይቅርታ yəq'ərta
sorry; excuse me

ምንም አይደለም mənəm aydelem
never mind, it's nothing

ስምህ / ስምሽ ማን ነው?
səməh / səməsh man new?
what's your name? *(to a man / to a woman)*

ስሜ ... ነው səmie ... new
my name is ...

አልገባኝም algebanyəm
I don't understand

አላውቅም alawq'əm
I don't know

Question words

ምን mən
what

ማን man
who

የት yet
where *(የት ነው? where is it?)*

መቼ mechie
when

ለምን lemən
why

እንዴት əndiet
how

ስንት sənt
how many, how much

የትኛው yetənyaw
which one

Me, you, this

እኔ ənie
I, me

አንተ ante
you *(to a man)*

አንቺ anchi
you *(to a woman)*

እርስዎ ərswo
you *(polite, man or woman)*

እሱ əsu
he, him

እሷ əswa
she, her

እኛ ənya
we, us

እናንተ ənante
you *(more than one)*

እነሱ ənesu
they

ይህ yəh
this

ያ ya
that

እዚህ əzih
here

እዚያ əziya
there

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
ዜሮ	አንድ	ሁለት	ሶስት	አራት	አምስት	ስድስት	ሰባት	ስምንት
ziero	and	hulet	sost	arat	aməst	sədəst	sebat	səmənt

9	10	11	20	21	30	50	100	1,000
ዘጠኝ	አስር	አስራ አንድ	ሃያ	ሃያ አንድ	ሰላሳ	ሃምሳ	መቶ	ሺህ
zet'eny	asər	asra and	haya	haya and	selasa	hamsa	meto	shih

Numbers are Lego: ሃያ haya 20, ሃያ አንድ haya and 21. From 11 to 19, 10 becomes አስራ asra: አስራ አንድ asra and, 11. And yes, 1 is አንድ and. Prices come in ብር bər: መቶ ብር meto bər, 100 birr.

Time, people, food ቤተሰብ እና ምግብ

Time

አሁን ahun
now

ዛሬ zarie
today

ነገ nege
tomorrow

ትናንት tənant
yesterday

ጠዋት t'ewat
morning

ማታ mata
evening

ሌሊት lielit
night

ቀን q'en
day

ሳምንት samənt
week

ወር wer
month

ዓመት amet
year

ጊዜ gizie
time

Family

እናት ənat
mother, mum

አባት abat
father, dad

ወንድም wendəm
brother

እህት əhət
sister

ልጅ ləj
child

ወንድ ልጅ wend ləj
son; boy

ሴት ልጅ siet ləj
daughter; girl

ባል bal
husband

ሚስት mist
wife

ቤተሰብ bieteseb
family

አያት ayat
grandpa, grandma

People

ሰው sew
person

ሰዎች sewoch
people

ወንድ wend
man

ሴት siet
woman

ጓደኛ gwadenya
friend

አስተማሪ astemari
teacher

ተማሪ temari
student, pupil

ሐኪም hakim
doctor

Food and drink

ምግብ məgəb
food

ውሃ wəha
water

ቡና buna
coffee

ሻይ shay
tea

ወተት wetet
milk

ቢራ bira
beer

እንጀራ ənjera
injera, the soft flat bread

ዳቦ dabo
bread

ወጥ wet'
stew

ዶሮ doro
chicken

ዶሮ ወጥ doro wet'
chicken stew

ሽሮ shəro
shiro, chickpea stew

ስጋ səga
meat

አሳ asa
fish

እንቁላል ənq'ulal
egg

አትክልት atəkəlt
vegetables

ፍራፍሬ fərafərie
fruit

ሙዝ muz
banana

ብርቱካን bərtukan
orange

ጨው ch'ew
salt

ስኳር səkwar
sugar

በርበሬ berberie
berbere, the red spice mix

ቁርስ q'urs
breakfast

ምሳ məsa
lunch

እራት ərat
dinner

ጣፋጭ t'afach'
sweet; tasty

ርቦኛል rəbonyal
I'm hungry

ጠምቶኛል t'emətonyal
I'm thirsty

ሂሳብ hisab
the bill; also maths

Coffee is a get-together: ቡና እንጠጣ buna ənt'et'a, let's have a coffee, means sit down and talk. እንጀራ ənjera is the plate and the spoon: tear a piece with your right hand and scoop up the ወጥ wet'.

Hungry or thirsty: ርቦኛል rəbonyal, I'm hungry, and ጠምቶኛል t'emətonyal, I'm thirsty, are whole sentences. When it's good, say ጣፋጭ ነው! t'afach' new!

Places and verbs ቦታዎች

Places

ቤት biet
house, home

ትምህርት ቤት təmhərt biet
school

ገበያ gebeya
market

ሱቅ suq'
shop

ምግብ ቤት məgəb biet
restaurant *(it means food house)*

ሆስፒታል hospital
hospital

ሽንት ቤት shənt biet
toilet

ሆቴል hotiel
hotel

አውሮፕላን ማረፊያ awroplan marefiya
airport

ባንክ bank
bank

መንገድ menged
road, way

ከተማ ketema
town, city

ሀገር hager
country

አዲስ አበባ adis abeba
Addis Ababa *(it means new flower)*

ተራራ terara
mountain

Getting around, things

ቀኝ / ግራ q'eny / gəra
right / left

ቀጥታ q'et'əta
straight on

መኪና mekina
car

አውቶቡስ awtobus
bus

ታክሲ taksi
taxi

ባጃጅ bajaj
tuk-tuk

አውሮፕላን awroplan
plane

ገንዘብ genzeb
money

ብር bər
birr, the money

ስልክ səlk
phone

መጽሐፍ mets'haf
book

በር ber
door

ልብስ ləbs
clothes

ፎቶ foto
photo

ዘፈን zefen
song

ውሻ wəsha
dog

ድመት dəmet
cat

ቋንቋ q'wanq'wa
language

አማርኛ amarənya
Amharic

እንግሊዝኛ ənglizənya
English

Verbs

መብላት meblat
eat

መጠጣት met'et'at
drink

መሄድ mehied
go

መምጣት memt'at
come

መተኛት metenyat
sleep

ማየት mayet
see, look

መስማት mesmat
hear, listen

ማንበብ manbeb
read

መጻፍ mets'af
write

መናገር menager
speak

ማድረግ madreg
do

መስራት mesrat
work; make

መግዛት megzat
buy

መሸጥ meshet'
sell

መጠበቅ met'ebeq'
wait

ማወቅ maweq'
know

መረዳት meredat
understand

መውደድ mewded
like, love

መፈለግ mefeleg
want; look for

መማር memar
learn

መርዳት merdat
help

መቀመጥ meq'emet'
sit

መራመድ meramed
walk

መስጠት mest'et
give

መውሰድ mewsed
take

መጫወት mech'awet
play

ማሰብ maseb
think

መክፈት mekfet
open

መዝጋት mezgat
close, shut

መኖር menor
live

The dictionary form: a verb as you find it in a dictionary usually starts with መ or ማ: መሄድ mehied, to go. The endings change with who does it, so learn whole phrases: እሄዳለሁ əhiedalehu, I'm going; እንሂድ ənhid, let's go.

Feelings and show words በጣም ጥሩ!

Describing words

ትልቅ / ትንሽ təlәq' / tənəsh
big / small *(ትንሽ is also a little)*

ሞቃት / ቀዝቃዛ moq'at / q'ezq'aza
hot / cold

አዲስ / አሮጌ adis / arogie
new / old *(things)*

ርካሽ / ውድ rəkash / wəd
cheap / expensive

ቀላል / ከባድ q'elal / kebad
easy / hard; also light / heavy

ፈጣን / ቀርፋፋ fet'an / q'erfafa
fast / slow

ጥሩ / መጥፎ t'əru / met'fo
good / bad

ቆንጆ q'onjo
beautiful, pretty

ደስተኛ destenya
happy

ደክሞኛል dekəmonyal
I'm tired

Little words

እና ənа
and

ግን gən
but

ወይም weyəm
or

በጣም bet'am
very, really

ብዙ bəzu
many, a lot

አለ ale
there is; he is *(somewhere)*

የለም yelem
there isn't; no

ጋር gar
with *(after the word)*

ምክንያቱም məknəyatum
because

Reactions

በጣም ጥሩ! bet'am t'əru!
very good! great!

እውነት? əwnet?
really? is it true?

ጎበዝ! gobez!
well done! clever!

በቃ! beq'a!
enough! that's it!

አይዞህ! / አይዞሽ! ayzoh! / ayzosh!
chin up! *(to a man / to a woman)*

እንኳን ደስ አለህ! / አለሽ!
ənkwan des aleh! / alesh!
congratulations! *(to a man / to a woman)*

ጣፋጭ ነው! t'afach' new!
it's delicious!

እርዳታ! ərdata!
help!

What to call people

አቶ ato
Mr, with the first name

ወይዘሮ weyzero
Mrs, with the first name

ወይዘሪት weyzerit
Miss, with the first name

ጋሼ gashie
a friendly sir, for an older man

ውዴ wədie
my darling

ፍቅሬ fəq'rie
my love

The big scenes

እወድሃለሁ / እወድሻለሁ
əwedəhalehu / əwedəshalehu
I love you *(to a man / to a woman)*

ናፍቀኸኛል / ናፍቀሽኛል
nafq'ehenyal / nafq'eshənyal
I miss you *(to a man / to a woman)*

አትሂድ! / አትሂጂ! athid! / athiji!
don't go! *(to a man / to a woman)*

አትጨነቅ / አትጨነቂ
atch'eneq' / atch'eneq'i
don't worry *(to a man / to a woman)*

Useful phrases

ይሄ ምንድን ነው?
yəhie məndən new?
what's this?

ስንት ነው? sənt new?
how much is it?

በጣም ውድ ነው bet'am wəd new
it's very expensive

ሽንት ቤት የት ነው?
shənt biet yet new?
where's the toilet?

ውሃ እፈልጋለሁ wəha əfeləgalehu
I'd like some water

ቡና እንጠጣ buna ənt'et'a
let's have a coffee

እንሂድ! ənhid!
let's go!

አማርኛ ትንሽ እናገራለሁ
amarənya tənəsh ənageralehu
I speak a little Amharic

እንግሊዝኛ ትናገራለህ? / ትናገሪያለሽ?
ənglizənya tənageraleh? / tənageriyalesh?
do you speak English? *(to a man / to a woman)*

Man or woman, every time: in scenes, listen to the ending. ቆንጆ ነሽ q'onjo nesh, you're beautiful, is said to a woman; ነህ at the end would be to a man. Polite እርስዎ ərswo works for both.

Practice ልምምድ

How: cover the romanization and the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the Amharic out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Look at the ends: ነው new, ነኝ neny and ናት nat close many sentences, and ። is the full stop.

Read these sentences

1. ሰላም! ስሜ ሳራ ነው።
   selam! səmie sara new.
   Hello! My name is Sara.

2. እንዴት ነህ? ደህና ነኝ፣ አመሰግናለሁ።
   əndiet neh? dehna neny, amesegənalehu.
   How are you? I'm fine, thank you.

3. ገበያው የት ነው?
   gebeyaw yet new?
   Where's the market?

4. ውሃ እፈልጋለሁ።
   wəha əfeləgalehu.
   I'd like some water.

5. ዛሬ በጣም ሞቃት ነው።
   zarie bet'am moq'at new.
   It's very hot today.

6. ስጋ አልበላም።
   səga albelam.
   I don't eat meat.

7. ነገ ወደ አዲስ አበባ እሄዳለሁ።
   nege wede adis abeba əhiedalehu.
   Tomorrow I'm going to Addis Ababa.

8. እሱ ወንድሜ ነው።
   əsu wendəmie new.
   He's my brother.

9. እሷ እህቴ ናት።
   əswa əhətie nat.
   She's my sister.

10. ምግቡ በጣም ጣፋጭ ነው!
    məgəbu bet'am t'afach' new!
    The food is really tasty!

11. አማርኛ እየተማርኩ ነው።
    amarənya əyetemarku new.
    I'm learning Amharic.

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.