How Somali sounds af Soomaali

The spelling: this sheet uses the official Somali alphabet, the Latin letters you'll see in books, on signs and in subtitles.

The trick: every letter is said, and a letter written twice is held longer.
The alphabet: b t j x kh d r s sh dh c g f q k l m n w h y a e i o u

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a, e, i, o, u	short: a in father but quick, e in bed, i in sit, o in hot, u in put	**nin / qof** man / person
aa, ee, ii, oo, uu	the same vowel, held twice as long	**aabbe / hooyo** father / mother
c	a sound squeezed from deep in the throat, like the Arabic ayn; never k or s	**caano / cunto** milk / food
x	a breathy h from deep in the throat; never ks	**xun / madax** bad / head
q	like k, but made much further back in the throat	**qalin / suuq** pen / market
dh	a d with the tip of the tongue curled back; between vowels it can sound a little like r	**dhagax / gabadh** stone / girl
kh	a rough h, like ch in Scottish loch; only in borrowed words	**dhakhtar / makhaayad** doctor / restaurant
sh	sh in shop	**shaah / shan** tea / five
j	j in jam	**jawaab / jaamacad** answer / university
g	always hard, g in go	**geed / gacan** tree / hand
r	rolled or tapped with the tip of the tongue	**roob / bariis** rain / rice
h	always said, even at the end of a word	**hooyo / shaah** mother / tea
' apostrophe	a short catch in the voice, like the break in uh-oh	**su'aal / la'aan** question / without
w, y	w in wet, y in yes	**wiil / yar** boy / small
b, d, f, k, l, m, n, s, t	much as in English	**buug / lacag** book / money

aa · ee · ii · oo · uu

long vowels: hold them

the length can change the word:

bur flour · **buur** hill

qado lunch · **qaado** take

no p · v · z

not in Somali words

borrowed words swap p for b:

boolis police

baasto pasta

Double letters too: a consonant written twice is held a little longer: aabbe, father; waddo, road; sannad, year. And h is never silent: say it at the end of shaah, tea.

Tone and stress: Somali has a rise in pitch that isn't written, and a few words differ only in it; you'll pick it up by listening. For now, keep the stress light and give long vowels their full length.

How words work nin, naag

Every noun is masculine or feminine, and the ending for the shows which. There's no word for a: buug is a book, or just book.

masculine

the: -ka, or -ga, -ha, -a

nin, a man · ninka, the man

buug, a book · buugga, the book

guri, a house · guriga, the house

feminine

the: -ta, or -da, -sha

naag, a woman · naagta, the woman

hooyo, a mother · hooyada, the mother

il, an eye · isha, the eye

The ending changes with the last sound

ninka
the man: -ka after most consonants

guriga
the house: -ga after a vowel

buugga
the book: -ga after g

aabbaha
the father: an -e turns into -aha

madaxa
the head: just -a after c, x, q, h

naagta
the woman: -ta after most consonants

hooyada
the mother: an -o turns into -ada

bisadda
the cat: -da after d

qorraxda
the sun: -da after c, x, q, h

isha
the eye: il, and l with -ta makes -sha

Learn the gender with the word: words for men are masculine, words for women feminine, and most nouns ending in -o are feminine: hooyo, magaalo, cunto. For the rest, the next pages give every noun its colour.

I, you, he, she

aniga I	adiga you, one person	isaga he	iyada she
annaga we, without you	innaga we, with you	idinka you, all	iyaga they

Two we's: annaga leaves out the person you're talking to, innaga takes them in. And see the endings: isaga, he, ends in -ga, iyada, she, in -da.

Who: cun, to eat

Waan cunaa I eat	Waad cuntaa you eat	Wuu cunaa he eats	Way cuntaa she eats
Waannu cunnaa we eat, without you	Waynu cunnaa we eat, with you	Waad cuntaan you all eat	Way cunaan they eat

Waa in plain statements: Waan cunaa, I eat, is waa and aan, I. You and she share a form, Waad cuntaa, Way cuntaa, and the little word says who. **Baa** (or ayaa) points at the word before it, and the verb comes last: Bariis baan cunaa, it's rice I eat. **Saying no:** ma before the verb, and no waa: Ma aqaan, I don't know; ma and aan often join as maan. **Questions:** ma before the verb, or just let your voice rise: Hilib ma cuntaa? Do you eat meat?

More than one: there's no single ending. Some add -o (naag, naago; guri, guryo), some -ooyin (hooyo, hooyooyin; magaalo, magaalooyin), short words repeat their last letter (buug, buugag; miis, miisas; wiil, wiilal), and a few are a word of their own (il, eye; indho, eyes). Learn them as you meet them.

The first 245 words Aniga, adiga

How: learn five a day, then listen for them in Somali songs, videos and series. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Me and you

aniga
I, me

adiga
you, one person

isaga / iyada
he / she

annaga / innaga
we: without you / with you *(page 2)*

idinka
you, more than one

iyaga
they

kan / tan
this one, for a masculine / a feminine noun

Question words

maxaa
what

yaa
who

xaggee
where

sidee
how

goorma
when

Little words

iyo
and, between nouns *(shaah iyo sonkor, tea and sugar)*

ama
or

laakiin
but

halkan / halkaas
here / there

sidoo kale
also, too

mar kale
again

aad u
very, before a describing word *(aad u fiican, very good)*

waa
is, are; starts a plain statement *(page 2)*

ma
not; also asks a question *(page 2)*

Family

hooyo
mother, mum

aabbe
father, dad

wiil
boy, son

gabadh
girl, daughter

walaal
brother or sister *(see page 6)*

ayeeyo
grandmother

awoowe
grandfather

adeer
uncle, your father's brother

eeddo
aunt, your father's sister

abti
uncle, your mother's brother

habaryar
aunt, your mother's sister

qoys
family

People

nin
man

naag
woman

qof
person

dad
people

saaxiib
friend

saaxiibad
friend, a woman

macallin
teacher

macallimad
teacher, a woman

arday
pupil, student

dhakhtar
doctor

deris
neighbour

carruur
children *(a plural word)*

Two colours: **blue** nouns are masculine, **pink** nouns feminine (page 2). Words that are already plural, like carruur, children, stay black, and so do verbs and describing words.

Time and things Maanta, berri

When

hadda
now

maanta
today

berri
tomorrow

shalay
yesterday

maalin
day

galab
afternoon

fiid
evening

habeen
night

toddobaad
week

bil
month

sannad
year

saacad
hour; also clock, watch

The body

madax
head

il
eye *(indho, eyes)*

dheg
ear

san
nose

af
mouth; also language

ilig
tooth

timo
hair *(a plural word)*

gacan
hand, arm

lug
leg

cag
foot

wadne
heart

calool
stomach, tummy

Things

lacag
money

dhar
clothes

albaab
door

daaqad
window

kursi
chair

sariir
bed

miis
table

buug
book

baabuur
car

diyaarad
plane

kab
shoe

qalin
pen

fure
key

koob
cup

Weather and nature

qorrax
sun

dayax
moon

roob
rain

dabayl
wind

bad
sea

webi
river

buur
mountain, hill

geed
tree

ubax
flower

dhagax
stone

dab
fire

dhul
earth, ground, land

cir
sky

Animals

eey
dog

bisad
cat

geel
camels, a herd

sac
cow

shimbir
bird

kalluun
fish

faras
horse

dameer
donkey

libaax
lion

maroodi
elephant

bakayle
rabbit, hare

Numbers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
kow	laba	saddex	afar	shan	lix	toddoba	siddeed	sagaal	toban

20	30	40	50	100	1,000
labaatan	soddon	afartan	konton	boqol	kun

Counting: one is kow when you count, but hal before a noun: hal buug, one book. Eleven is kow iyo toban, one and ten, and 21 is labaatan iyo kow.

Food, places, verbs Cunto, guri, tag

Food and drink

cunto
food

biyo
water *(a plural word)*

caano
milk *(a plural word)*

shaah
tea

qaxwo
coffee

bariis
rice

hilib
meat

rooti
bread

canjeero
a soft pancake bread, often for breakfast

baasto
pasta

sonkor
sugar

cusbo
salt

ukun
egg

muus
banana

quraac
breakfast

qado
lunch

casho
dinner, supper

Places

guri
house, home

magaalo
town, city

waddo
road, street

dugsi
school

jaamacad
university

suuq
market

dukaan
shop

makhaayad
restaurant, café

isbitaal
hospital

beer
garden; also a farm

waddan
country

af Soomaali
Somali, the language

Verbs

cun
eat

cab
drink

seexo
sleep

tag
go

kaalay
come!

arag
see

maqal
hear

eeg
look

hadal
speak, talk

fahan
understand

baro
learn

akhri
read

qor
write

samee
do, make

shaqee
work

iibso / iibi
buy / sell

sii
give

keen
bring

qaado
take

doon
want

sheeg
say, tell

weydii
ask

caawi
help

sug
wait

fadhiiso
sit down

orod
run

soco
walk

fur / xir
open / close

ciyaar
play

Describing words

weyn / yar
big / small

wanaagsan / xun
good / bad

fiican
good, fine

qurux badan
beautiful *(much beauty)*

cusub
new

kulul / qabow
hot / cold

macaan
sweet; also nice, tasty

daallan
tired

fog / dhow
far / near

badan
a lot, many

dheer / gaaban
long, tall / short

adag / fudud
hard / easy

qaali / jaban
expensive / cheap

cas / cagaar
red / green

madow / cad
black / white

faraxsan
happy

gaajaysan
hungry

Verbs as you'd say them to one person: cun, eat!, tag, go!. That's the form dictionaries use; page 2 shows how cun changes: Waan cunaa, I eat; Way cuntaa, she eats.

Describing words go after the noun and stay the same for both genders: guri weyn, a big house; bisad yar, a small cat.

Phrases and show words Iska warran?

Hello and goodbye

Assalaamu calaykum
hello, the greeting you'll hear most *(see below)*

Wacalaykum salaam
the answer to it

Iska warran?
how are you? what's new? *(friendly)*

Waan fiicanahay
I'm fine, the answer

Ma nabad baa?
is all well? *(it asks is it peace?)*

Waa nabad
all is well, the answer

Subax wanaagsan
good morning

Galab wanaagsan
good afternoon

Habeen wanaagsan
good night

Soo dhawoow
welcome

Magacaa?
what's your name?

Magacaygu waa ...
my name is ...

Nabad gelyo
goodbye

Please, thanks and help

Haa / Maya
yes / no

Mahadsanid
thank you

Fadlan
please

Raalli ahow
sorry, excuse me

Waa hagaag
OK, all right

Ma aqaan
I don't know

Ma fahmin
I don't understand

Reactions

Hambalyo!
congratulations!

Aad u fiican!
very good! great!

Waa run
it's true, that's right

Haye
OK, sure

The big scenes

Waan ku jeclahay
I love you

Kaalay halkan!
come here!

I sug!
wait for me!

Iska jir!
be careful!

I caawi!
help me!

Ha ooyin
don't cry

Aan tagno!
let's go!

Greetings: salaan means a greeting. The one you'll hear most, from everyone and all day, is Assalaamu calaykum, and the answer is Wacalaykum salaam. Iska warran? is the friendly hi, and the answer is Waan fiicanahay.

Times of day: Subax wanaagsan until around midday, then Galab wanaagsan; in the evening you'll also hear the word fiid.

Walaal and adeer: people often call a friend, or someone their own age, walaal, brother or sister, and an older man adeer, uncle. It's warm and polite.

Practice Aan tagno!

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

I am: before a noun, say Waxaan ahay: Waxaan ahay arday, I'm a student. With a name or he and she, waa does it: Hodan waa macallimad, Hodan is a teacher.

Read every letter: hold the long vowels, say the h at the end of shaah, and give c and x their throat sounds.

Read these sentences

1. Iska warran? Waan fiicanahay, mahadsanid.
   How are you? I'm fine, thank you.

2. Magacaygu waa Hodan.
   My name is Hodan.

3. Waxaan ahay macallin.
   I'm a teacher.

4. Hooyaday waa macallimad.
   My mum is a teacher.

5. Shaah ma cabtaa?
   Do you drink tea?

6. Haa, waan cabbaa.
   Yes, I do. (Word for word yes, I drink.)

7. Bariis baan cunaa.
   I eat rice. (It's rice that I eat.)

8. Shalay canjeero baan cunay.
   Yesterday I ate canjeero.

9. Waxaan baranayaa af Soomaali.
   I'm learning Somali.

10. Ma fahmin. Mar kale, fadlan.
    I don't understand. Again, please.

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