SO

SOMALI LESSON

Basic Conversation 1 · Chapter 1 · Greetings & Goodbyes

Somali Basic Conversation 1

Chapter 1 · Greetings & Goodbyes

👋 Greetings & Goodbyes — Salaan iyo nabad gelyo

Welcome to your first Somali conversation lesson. By the end of this chapter you will be able to greet people at different times of day, ask how they are, answer, thank them, apologise and say goodbye. Somali is written in the ***Latin alphabet****, so you can read it as it stands, but a few letters do not sound the way an English reader expects, so this chapter starts with the sounds. Every dialog line has a* ***respelling beneath it****, with the syllable to lean on in CAPITALS.* ***I found little reliable guidance on Somali stress, and Somali has a pitch accent that a respelling cannot show, so treat the CAPITALS as a learner's guide only*** *and listen to a native speaker.* ***Please read the Not Yet Verified box at the end: the sources I could reach for this chapter were thin, and most of the Somali here comes from general knowledge.***

🔤 The Sounds You Need First — Dhawaaqyada

Most Somali letters sound close to English. These do not. In the respelling lines below, ***c*** *and* ***x*** *are left as* ***c*** *and* ***x*** *because English has no sound to match them; learn them from this table.*

aa, ee, oo, uu long vowels (hold them) **c** throaty “ayn” sound **x** breathy, from the throat **q** a “k” made further back **dh** a “d” with the tongue curled back **kh** like *ch* in Scottish *loch* **sh** as in *ship* **'** a catch in the throat (glottal stop)

LETTER(S)	ROUGH SOUND	EXAMPLE WORD	SAY IT	ENGLISH
aa	long *a*	**shaah**	*shaah*	tea
ee	long *e*	**habeen**	*hah-BEEN*	night
c	throaty, as in Arabic *ʿayn*	**cunto**	*cUN-to*	food
x	breathy *h* from the throat	**xafiis**	*xah-FEES*	office
q	deep *k*	**qaxwo**	*QAHX-wo*	coffee

LETTER(S)	ROUGH SOUND	EXAMPLE WORD	SAY IT	ENGLISH
dh	curled-back *d*	**dhaqan**	*DHAH-qahn*	culture, custom
kh	Scottish *ch*	**khamiis**	*khah-MEES*	Thursday
sh	English *sh*	**shaah**	*shaah*	tea

> **Say It Right — Don't Panic About *c*, *x* and *q***
>
> The search I ran noted that many beginners struggle with the throaty *x* and *c*, and that Somali uses pitch accent, so tone can matter. It gave no detail on *q*, *dh*, *kh* or *sh*. My descriptions of those sounds are general knowledge: listen to a Somali speaker, and expect to need many tries. The sound descriptions are rough guides, not phonetics.

Six Conversations — Wada hadal

*Read each one aloud. Somali does not split "you" into a polite and an informal form the way German or Greek does; the main difference is **one person** (sidee tahay) or **several** (sidee tihiin). Dialog 3 shows the group form.*

① Peace Be With You — Salaan

A:

Assalaamu calaykum!

as-sah-LAA-moo cah-LAY-koom!

Peace be upon you!

B:

Wacalaykum salaam! Sidee tahay?

wah-cah-LAY-koom sah-LAAM! SEE-dee tah-HAY?

And upon you peace! How are you?

A:

Waan fiicanahay, mahadsanid. Adiguna?

waan fee-chah-nah-HAY, mah-hahd-SAH-nid. ah-dee-GOO-nah?

② Good Morning — Subax wanaagsan

A:

Subax wanaagsan!

SOO-bahx wah-NAAG-sahn!

Good morning!

B:

Subax wanaagsan! Iska warran?

SOO-bahx wah-NAAG-sahn! IS-kah WAR-rahn?

Good morning! How are you? (casual)

A:

Waan fiicanahay, mahadsanid.

waan fee-chah-nah-HAY, mah-hahd-SAH-nid.

I'm well, thank you.

I'm well, thank you. And you?

B:

Waan fiicanahay.

waan fee-chah-nah-HAY.

I'm well.

③ A Group in the Afternoon — Galab wanaagsan

A:

Galab wanaagsan!

GAH-lahb wah-NAAG-sahn!

Good afternoon!

A:

Sidee tihiin?

SEE-dee tee-HEEN?

How are you all? (to several people)

B:

Waan fiicannahay, mahadsanid.

waan fee-chahn-nah-HAY, mah-hahd-SAH-nid.

We're well, thank you.

④ Is It Peace? — Ma nabad baa?

A:

Ma nabad baa?

mah NAH-bahd BAA?

Is all well? (literally: is it peace?)

B:

Haa, waa nabad.

HAA, waa NAH-bahd.

Yes, it is peace. (all is well)

A:

Mahadsanid.

mah-hahd-SAH-nid.

Thank you.

⑤ Thanks and Sorry — Mahadsanid iyo raali ahow

A:

Fadlan, hal shaah.

fahd-LAHN, hahl shaah.

One tea, please.

B:

Haa. Raali ahow, waan daahay.

HAA. raa-LEE ah-HOW, waan DAA-hay.

Yes. Sorry, I'm late.

⑥ Goodbye — Nabad gelyo

A:

Nabad gelyo!

NAH-bahd GEL-yo!

Goodbye! (go in peace)

B:

Nabad gelyo! Macsalaama.

NAH-bahd GEL-yo! mah-cah-sah-LAA-mah.

Goodbye! Goodbye. (with peace)

A:

A:

Waa hagaag. Mahadsanid!

waa hah-GAAG. mah-hahd-SAH-nid!

It's fine. Thank you!

B:

Mahad ma leh.

MAH-hahd mah LEH.

Don't mention it.

Habeen wanaagsan!

hah-BEEN wah-NAAG-sahn!

Good night!

B:

Habeen wanaagsan!

hah-BEEN wah-NAAG-sahn!

Good night!

🔑 Key Phrases — Weedho muhiim ah

*Somali has no "sir / madam" split in the everyday greetings I found. The useful difference is between **one person** and **a group**. Where the two are the same, the table says so.*

SITUATION	TO ONE PERSON	TO SEVERAL PEOPLE
Peace greeting	**Assalaamu calaykum!** *as-sah-LAA-moo cah-LAY-koom*	the same
Reply to it	**Wacalaykum salaam!** *wah-cah-LAY-koom sah-LAAM*	the same
Good morning	**Subax wanaagsan!** *SOO-bahx wah-NAAG-sahn*	the same
Good afternoon	**Galab wanaagsan!** *GAH-lahb wah-NAAG-sahn*	the same
Good night	**Habeen wanaagsan!** *hah-BEEN wah-NAAG-sahn*	the same
How are you?	**Sidee tahay?** *SEE-dee tah-HAY*	**Sidee tihiin?** *SEE-dee tee-HEEN*
How are you? (casual)	**Iska warran?** *IS-kah WAR-rahn*	the same

SITUATION	TO ONE PERSON	TO SEVERAL PEOPLE
I'm well	**Waan fiicanahay.** *waan fee-chah-nah-HAY*	**Waan fiicannahay.** (we) *waan fee-chahn-nah-HAY*
And you?	**Adiguna?** *ah-dee-GOO-nah*	**Idinkuna?** *ee-deen-KOO-nah*
Thank you	**Mahadsanid.** *mah-hahd-SAH-nid*	the same
Please	**Fadlan.** *fahd-LAHN*	the same
Sorry / excuse me	**Raali ahow.** *raa-LEE ah-HOW*	the same
Goodbye	**Nabad gelyo! / Macsalaama.** *NAH-bahd GEL-yo / mah-cah-sah-LAA-mah*	the same

Peace Is the Word

The word **nabad** means “peace”, and it turns up in greetings (*Ma nabad baa?*) and in goodbye (*Nabad gelyo*, “go in peace”). The Arabic *Assalaamu calaykum* is also widely used; Somalia is a largely Muslim country. The “peace” meanings come from my general knowledge, not from the sources I found (one result showed *Nabad gelyo* only as a practice card without explaining it).

Somaliland, Djibouti and Everywhere Else

The greetings in this chapter are Standard (Northern) Somali, which is the base of most course material. I found no source on how these particular greetings differ in Somaliland or Djibouti, and I would rather say that than guess. From general knowledge: Somali is spoken in all three places, Arabic greetings are used throughout, and in Djibouti French greetings are common in daily life alongside Somali. Later chapters will mark regional differences where I can find a source for them; if you know of one, tell me.

🕐 Which Greeting When — Marka kee lagu salaamo

WHEN	SAY	NOTES
Any time	**Assalaamu calaykum!** *as-sah-LAA-moo cah-LAY-koom*	the all-purpose greeting; the reply is *Wacalaykum salaam*
Morning	**Subax wanaagsan!** *SOO-bahx wah-NAAG-sahn*	literally “good morning”
Afternoon	**Galab wanaagsan!** *GAH-lahb wah-NAAG-sahn*	from my general knowledge, not from the search
Going to bed	**Habeen wanaagsan!** *hah-BEEN wah-NAAG-sahn*	one search result gave this as “good night”

> **One Word, Many Greetings**
>
> *Wanaagsan* (“good”) follows the time of day: *subax wanaagsan*, *galab wanaagsan*, *habeen wanaagsan*. It is the Somali pattern that matches English “good ____”. A word order tip: Somali puts the describing word **after** the noun. In Chapter 2 you will meet *ah* (“to be”) in full.

🔤 To Be Well — Fiican ahaan

*Somali needs only **one** verb to say how you are: ah (“to be”), which changes with the person. The Basic 1 format gives a three-verb table, but for this chapter the better lesson is **one verb with three words for how you feel**: fiican (well), wanaagsan (good) and faraxsan (happy). The forms below are the simple present, shown as one word as they are usually written after waan, waad. **These forms are from general knowledge and I could not check them against a source**, so treat them as a first pass; Chapter 2 revisits them.*

WHO	FIICAN (WELL)	WANAAGSAN (GOOD)	FARAXSAN (HAPPY)
I (*aniga*)	**waan fiicanahay** *waan fee-chah-nah-HAY*	**waan wanaagsanahay** *waan wah-naag-sah-nah-HAY*	**waan faraxsanahay** *waan fah-rahx-sah-nah-HAY*
you, one person (*adiga*)	**waad fiicantahay** *waad fee-chahn-*	**waad wanaagsantahay** *waad wah-naag-sahn-*	**waad faraxsantahay** *waad fah-rahx-sahn-*

WHO	FIICAN (WELL)	WANAAGSAN (GOOD)	FARAXSAN (HAPPY)
	tah-HAY	*tah-HAY*	*tah-HAY*
he	**waa fiican yahay** *waa fee-CHAAN yah-HAY*	**waa wanaagsan yahay** *waa wah-NAAG-sahn yah-HAY*	**waa faraxsan yahay** *waa fah-RAHX-sahn yah-HAY*
she	**waa fiican tahay** *waa fee-CHAAN tah-HAY*	**waa wanaagsan tahay** *waa wah-NAAG-sahn tah-HAY*	**waa faraxsan tahay** *waa fah-RAHX-sahn tah-HAY*
we (*annagu*)	**waan fiicannahay** *waan fee-chahn-nah-HAY*	**waan wanaagsannahay** *waan wah-naag-sahn-nah-HAY*	**waan faraxsannahay** *waan fah-rahx-sahn-nah-HAY*
you, several (*idinku*)	**waad fiicantihiin** *waad fee-chahn-tee-HEEN*	**waad wanaagsantihiin** *waad wah-naag-sahn-tee-HEEN*	**waad faraxsantihiin** *waad fah-rahx-sahn-tee-HEEN*
they (*iyagu*)	**waa fiican yihiin** *waa fee-CHAAN yee-HEEN*	**waa wanaagsan yihiin** *waa wah-NAAG-sahn yee-HEEN*	**waa faraxsan yihiin** *waa fah-RAHX-sahn yee-HEEN*

Notice the Gender

Yahay is “he is” and *tahay* is “she is” (and also “you are” in *sidee tahay*). This is the first place Somali shows **gender**; masculine and feminine come up again with nouns from Chapter 2. General knowledge, not from the search.

📖 Vocabulary — Ereyada

20 key words. Nouns are given without their article this chapter; the article ending (-ka, -ta and so on) is introduced in Chapter 2.

#	SOMALI	SAY IT	ENGLISH	TYPE
1	**nabad**	*NAH-bahd*	peace	noun

#	SOMALI	SAY IT	ENGLISH	TYPE
2	**salaan**	*sah-LAAN*	a greeting	noun
3	**subax**	*SOO-bahx*	morning	noun
4	**galab**	*GAH-lahb*	afternoon	noun
5	**habeen**	*hah-BEEN*	night	noun
6	**mahadsanid**	*mah-hahd-SAH-nid*	thank you	phrase
7	**fadlan**	*fahd-LAHN*	please	phrase
8	**raali ahow**	*raa-LEE ah-HOW*	sorry; excuse me	phrase
9	**haa**	*HAA*	yes	phrase
10	**maya**	*MAH-yah*	no	phrase
11	**sidee**	*SEE-dee*	how	adv
12	**fiican**	*fee-CHAAN*	well; good	adj
13	**wanaagsan**	*wah-NAAG-sahn*	good	adj
14	**faraxsan**	*fah-RAHX-sahn*	happy	adj
15	**aniga**	*ah-nee-GAH*	I; me	pronoun
16	**adiga**	*ah-dee-GAH*	you (one person)	pronoun
17	**idinka**	*ee-deen-KAH*	you (several people)	pronoun
18	**macsalaama**	*mah-cah-sah-LAA-mah*	goodbye	phrase
19	**nabad gelyo**	*NAH-bahd GEL-yo*	goodbye (go in peace)	phrase
20	**waa hagaag**	*waa hah-GAAG*	it's fine; OK	phrase

A Word That Changes Shape

> You may see *adiga* and *adigu*, or *aniga* and *anigu*, for “you” and “I”: Somali pronouns take a different ending depending on their job in the sentence, which is why dialog 1 has *Adiguna* (“and you”). That is the focus-and-ending system, which this course introduces one piece at a time. General knowledge, not from the search; check it before relying on it.

✍️ Try It Yourself — Layliyo

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. You meet a colleague in the morning. What do you say?

▼ Show answer

Subax wanaagsan! (SOO-bahx wah-NAAG-sahn)

2. Ask a friend how they are, then ask a group.

▼ Show answer

One person: **Sidee tahay?** · several: **Sidee tihiin?** (SEE-dee tah-HAY · SEE-dee tee-HEEN)

3. Say “I'm well, thank you. And you?”

▼ Show answer

Waan fiicanahay, mahadsanid. Adiguna? (waan fee-chah-nah-HAY, mah-hahd-SAH-nid. ah-dee-GOO-nah)

4. You bump into someone. What do you say, and how might they reply?

▼ Show answer

Raali ahow! → **Waa hagaag.** (raa-LEE ah-HOW → waa hah-GAAG)

5. Say goodbye, then good night.

▼ Show answer

Nabad gelyo! · **Habeen wanaagsan!** (NAH-bahd GEL-yo · hah-BEEN wah-NAAG-sahn)

6. Say “we are happy” using the table.

▼ Show answer

Waan faraxsannahay. (waan fah-rahx-sahn-nah-HAY)

Not Yet Verified

Checked (two web searches on 2026-11-25; I read only the titles and summaries, from learner blogs and lesson sites): that *Subax wanaagsan* means “good morning” (given with the respelling “soo-bahx wah-nahg-sahn”); that *Habeen wanaagsan* is “good night”; that *Iska warran?* and *Sidee tahay?* are used for “how are you?”; that *Mahadsanid* is “thank you”; that *Macsalaama* is a goodbye; that the throaty *x* and *c* trouble beginners; that Somali is written in the Latin alphabet (adopted in 1972); and that Somali has a pitch accent.

Not found: a reliable account of *q*, *dh*, *kh* and *sh*; any source on *nabad* as “peace”, on *Nabad gelyo* or *Ma nabad baa?*; any difference in greetings between Somalia, Somaliland and Djibouti; and any source on stress.

Not checked, from general knowledge: *Assalaamu calaykum* and its reply, *Galab wanaagsan*, *Sidee tihiin*, *Adiguna / Idinkuna*, *Fadlan*, *Raali ahow*, *Waa hagaag*, *Mahad ma leh*, *Haa / Maya*, *waan daahay*, the whole “to be well” table, the example words in the sound table (*cunto, xafiis, qaxwo, dhaqan, khamiis*), the word-shape tip, every respelling and every stress mark, and the notes on Djibouti. No dictionary or native speaker was consulted. **Please have a Somali speaker check this chapter before you rely on it.**

Sources for This Chapter

Search results (2026-11-25): Polyglot Club, Somali basic greetings; Preply, How to learn Somali; Preply, Somali travel phrases; Ling, Somali phrases; Wikipedia, Somali grammar (listed by the first search). Only the titles and short summaries in the search results were used.

Coming Up in Chapter 2

Introducing yourself: **Magaceygu waa …** (“my name is …”), asking someone's name, the verb *ah* (“to be”) in full, and the article endings on names and nouns. (These phrases are from general knowledge and will be checked when the chapter is written.)

