

Somali 101:Language and Culture Roadmap

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1 Hordhac – Introduction

This document serves as a comprehensive guide for learners of the Somali language, designed to support both self-study and community-based instruction.

It is a central hub for:

- **Structured study notes** organized by theme
- **Essential vocabulary** relevant to everyday life
- **Practice exercises** for speaking, listening, reading, and writing
- **Cultural and generational engagement**, including Somali proverbs and dialogues
- **Progress tracking** for students over the course of their learning

The course is intended for learners at all levels and is structured as a series of thematic units that build gradually toward fluency. It is especially suited for summer intensives or weekend community classes.

Why Somali Matters

For many Somali youth raised in the West, the inability to speak their mother tongue is a source of quiet grief — a feeling of being **cut off from elders, stories, and the untranslatable richness of home**.

This course is not just about grammar and vocabulary. It's about **reconnection**. It's about helping a generation **recover what was almost lost** — and proudly carry it forward.

Oral Heritage Lives Through Language

Somali has been called a “**nation of poets**” — not because every Somali writes books, but because the oral transmission of wisdom, history, and values has traditionally been **carried through language**.

Learning Somali is not just learning a language — it's entering a cultural archive.

Language and Identity

When a generation loses its tongue, it also loses its memory.

Preserving Somali is preserving identity — not only for individuals, but for families, mosques, and communities seeking continuity.

Somali Proverb

Nin aan dhul marin, dhaayo ma leh.

He who has not traveled has no eyes.

This widely quoted proverb reminds learners that **exposure expands understanding** — just as travel opens the eyes, **language opens doors** to culture, connection, and insight.

1.1 Xarafka iyo Laxanka – Somali Alphabet and Pronunciation

The Somali alphabet uses Latin script with 21 consonants and 5 vowels. It was standardized in 1972 and is written **left to right** like English. Pronunciation is phonetic, meaning words are typically pronounced as they are spelled.

1.2 Xarafka Af Soomaaliga – The Somali Alphabet

Letter	Example	Pronunciation Guide
ʾ	abuur	Glottal stop — like a soft pause, similar to in Arabic
B	buug	Like b in “book”
T	tufaax	Like t in “top”
J	jeer	Like j in “job”
KH	khamiis	Like Arabic , a rough “kh” from the throat
DH	dhakhtar	A voiced retroflex (tongue curled back), not found in English
R	roob	Rolled or tapped r , like in Spanish
S	subax	Like s in “sun”
SH	sheeko	Like sh in “shoe”
D	dheer	Like d in “door”
C	cunto	A voiced pharyngeal sound (like in Arabic)
G	guri	Like g in “go”
F	furan	Like f in “fun”
Q	qalin	Deep k sound from the throat (like in Arabic)
K	kabo	Like k in “kite”
L	lacag	Like l in “light”
M	meel	Like m in “man”
N	naag	Like n in “name”
W	webi	Like w in “water”
H	hoy	Like h in “hat”
Y	yar	Like y in “yes”

1.3 Shaqalka – Somali Vowels

Somali has **5 vowels**: **A, E, I, O, U**, and each can be:

- **Short** (e.g., *run* – “true/truth”)
- **Long** (e.g., *ruun* – “home/settlement”)

Long vowels are marked by doubling the letter (**aa, ee, ii, oo, uu**) and are pronounced **longer and more forcefully**. They can **change the meaning** of a word:

Short	Long	Meaning (Short vs. Long)
u	uu	<i>bur</i> = flour, <i>buur</i> = mountain
a	aa	<i>gal</i> = enter, <i>gaal</i> = non-Muslim
i	ii	<i>bir</i> = metal, <i>biir</i> = increase/multiply

Listen and Repeat

The Somali language is best learned **by listening**. Repeating after a native speaker helps train your ear to subtle sounds like **C**, **DH**, and **KH**.

1.4 Laxanka iyo Dhawaaqa – Notes on Pronunciation

- **ʾ** (**Glottal stop**) represents a **brief pause** or a sound from the throat, like a soft catch in the breath — similar to Arabic (hamzah).
 - **C** is not like the English “see” — it’s a voiced **pharyngeal** sound from the throat (like Arabic).
 - **DH** is pronounced by curling the tongue back (retroflex). This sound **does not exist in English**.
 - **KH** is like Arabic — a rough “kh” from the upper throat.
 - **Q** is pronounced **deep in the throat** — not like “k”, but more forceful (like Arabic).
 - **R** is lightly rolled, similar to Spanish.
 - **Double vowels** (aa, ee, etc.) are **longer** and often stressed.
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Tip for Arabic Speakers

If you know Arabic, Somali letters **C**, **Q**, **KH**, and **DH** will sound familiar to you. But even native Arabic speakers need to adjust their ear for **DH**, which is distinct from Arabic sounds.

1.5 Isbarasho – Introducing Yourself

Isbarasho wanaagsan waxay ku bilaabataa salaan iyo su’aalo aasaasi ah. Baabkani wuxuu soo bandhigayaa erayada muhiimka ah iyo weedho si aad u isticmaasho marka aad qof cusub la kulanto.

A good introduction begins with greetings and basic questions. This chapter presents essential words and phrases for you to use when meeting someone new.

Start With What You Know

You don't need to memorize every word immediately.

Focus on 5–7 phrases that you can **say confidently** — like your name, where you're from, and how you're doing. Then build from there.

1.6 Kalmado Muhiim ah iyo Weedho – Key Vocabulary and Phrases

English	Somali
Peace be upon you	Asalaamu Calaykum
And peace be upon you	Wa Calaykum Salaam
Good morning	Subax wanaagsan
How are you?	Sidee tahay / See tahay / Ii waran?
I am fine	Waan fiicanahay
Welcome	Soo dhowoow
What is your name?	Magacaa?
My name is ...	Magacaygu waa ...
Where are you from?	Xagee baad ka timid?
I am from Somalia	Waxaan ka imid Soomaaliya
Nice to meet you	Kulan wanaagsan
Goodbye	Nabadeey / Macsalaamo
Teacher	Macallin
Student	Arday
Phone	Telefoon
Address	Adrees / Cinwaan

Cultural Insight

Somalis often greet with **a warm tone and repeated blessings**. Learning to pronounce greetings **clearly and kindly** is one of the most respected signs that you're reconnecting with the culture.

1.7 Magacyada iyo Erayada Shaqada – Professions and Work-Related Terms

English	Somali
Teacher	Macallin
Student	Arday
Worker	Shaqaale
Carpenter	Farshaxanle
Retired	Hawlgab
Translator	Turjubaan
Accountant	Xisaabiye
Unemployed	Shaqo la'aan

1.8 Isku Day: Tarjum Weedhahan – Try Translating These Sentences

1. Magacaygu waa ... waxaan ka imid ...
2. Magacaa? (Wiil/Gabar)
3. Waxaan ahay Soomaali.
4. Waxaan ka imid Mareykanka.
5. Xaggee baad ka timid?
6. Waa maxay shaqadaada?
7. Waxaan ahay macallin.
8. Waan fiicanahay, mahadsanid.
9. Subax wanaagsan!
10. Nabadeey! Waa inoo mar kale haddii uu Ilaahay idmo!

! Practice With a Partner

Language is meant to be spoken. If you can, practice introducing yourself with a family member, elder, or friend — even if they answer in English.

Your confidence grows **with repetition and real interaction.**

1.9 Erayo u gaara Qofka – Personal Pronouns


English	Somali
I	Aniga
You (m)	Adiga (Wiil)

English	Somali
You (f)	Adiga (Gabar)
He	Isaga
She	Iyada

1.10 Qabiil iyo Qaranimo – Nationalities and Languages

Country	Nationality	Language
Soomaaliya	Soomaali	Af Soomaali
Masar	Masri	Carabi
Mareykanka	Mareykan	Ingiriis

1.11 Sheeko Dheer oo Isbarasho – Extended Introductory Dialogue

 Click to Practice a Conversation

Qof 1: Iska warran!

Qof 2: Waan fiicanahay. Soo dhowoow!

Qof 1: Sidee tahay?

Qof 2: Waan fiicanahay, Alxamdulillaah. Adiguna?

Qof 1: Magacaa?

Qof 2: Magacaygu waa Axmed. Adiga?

Qof 1: Waxaan ahay Saara. Xaggee baad ka timid?

Qof 2: Waxaan ka imid Muqdisho. Adiguna?

Qof 1: Waxaan ka imid Nairobi. Shaqadaada?

Qof 2: Waxaan ahay macallin. Adiguna?

Qof 1: Waxaan ahay ardayad. Cinwaankaagu?

Qof 2: Waa 12 Jidka Muqdisho. Kaaga na?

Qof 1: Waa 8 Waddada Wajeer. Nambarkaaga telefoonka?

Qof 2: 061-2345678. Kanaga?

Qof 1: 061-8765432. Emailkaagu?

Qof 2: ahmed@gmail.com. Kaaga na?

Qof 1: sarah@email.com.

Qof 2: Aad baan ugu faraxsanahay inaan ku kulmo!

Qof 1: Aniguna sidoo kale!

1.12 Fiir Gaar ah – Special Note

Baabkani wuxuu xoogga saarayaa fahamka isbarasho, isticmaalka erayada aasaasiga ah, iyo kalmadaha shakhsiyeed. Soo koobidda weedho iyo ficillada maalinlaha ah waxay gacan ka geysanayaan xoojinta xirfadaha luqadda.

This chapter focuses on understanding introductions, using basic vocabulary, and personal terms. Summarizing daily expressions and actions helps reinforce language skills.