

# COLLOQUIAL AMHARIC

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## WRITING THE AMHARIC SCRIPT

These pages are linked to the book *Colloquial Amharic The Complete Course for Beginners* by David Appleyard, originally published by Routledge 1995, and accompany the revised edition 2011.

What follows is not a discussion of how the Ethiopian script (or *fidäl*) works, which can be found in the course book, but will provide you with a description of the best way to form the letters of the script when writing by hand. Therefore, you should study the Introduction in the course book first to see how the Ethiopian *fidäl* works.

Today there is available a reasonable number of Ethiopian fonts for use both on Macs and PCs, but one of the best ways to learn the letters of the Ethiopian *fidäl* is to write them yourself as often as possible, first as single characters and in short words, and then in complete phrases and sentences. As good study practice, we advise you not only to write out by hand all the exercises in the course book as you do them, but also to copy out the dialogues and reading passages lesson by lesson. In this way you will soon familiarize yourself with the script. Remember, in Ethiopia only place names on roadside signs and a few business signs are regularly transcribed into Latin letters.

There is no one way of forming the characters or letters of the *fidäl*, and not everyone follows the principles described here in detail, especially in rapid handwriting. However, the steps advised here follow the manner of writing in a manuscript hand, the type of writing you will see in Ethiopian parchment manuscripts, which also forms the basis of the commonest printed typefaces, including computer fonts.





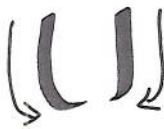



So, let's get started.







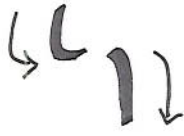





Each of the letters of the *fidäl* is formed by a number of strokes, usually from two to eight in number. These are written in a downwards direction and follow one another proceeding from right to left. This means you really shouldn't form circles or loops, for instance, in a single stroke.

In a good handwriting style all the letters are placed within a pair of imaginary lines, and none extends above or below; some letters like *om* do not reach either the top or the bottom line but are suspended between the two :

*om + go h L +*

Let's begin with some of the simplest letters that involve only two strokes. To begin with we'll just look at "first order" letters. You'll see first the printed letter and its value in the transcription used in the course book, followed by a handwritten version with the strokes separated, and then by the complete handwritten version :

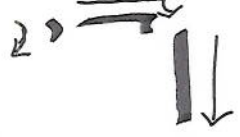

<b>n</b> <b>bä</b>		
<b>h</b> <b>lä</b>		
<b>u</b> <b>ha</b>		
<b>h</b> <b>kä</b>		

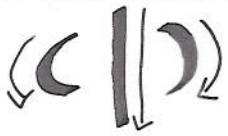



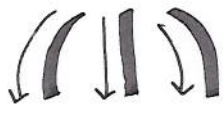




ñ sä		
ʟ rä		
ʑ yä		
ʎ nä		
ʒ gä		
ø a		



You need to take special care to distinguish **ʟ lä** from **ñ sä** – the former has a more pointed top; similarly, take care to distinguish **ʎ kä** from **ñ sä** – in the former the little top stroke is on the left, whilst in the latter it is in the middle.

The letter **ʎ nä** you can write in one zig-zag stroke:

Now let's look at the letters which require three strokes :







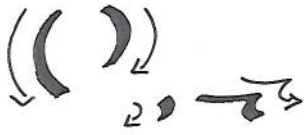



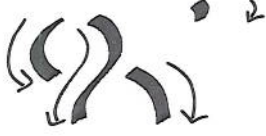

ʟ pä		
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Ɔ k'ä		Ɔ
H zä		H
ʁ s'ä		ʁ
ʎ a		ʎ
ᄁ t'ä		ᄁ
ᄃ ha		ᄃ
ᄅ wä		ᄅ
ᄇ s'ä		ᄇ
ᄉ sä		ᄉ

ᄒ fä		
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The little serifs on letters like ᄒ tǎ, ᄒ gǎ, ᄒ fǎ, ᄒ rǎ, and ᄒ pǎ are part of the letter and shouldn't be omitted except perhaps in rapid handwriting.

Now, let's look at those letters which require four strokes :

ᄒ mā		
ᄒ ha		
ᄒ tǎ		
ᄒ dǎ		
ᄒ žǎ		
ᄒ p'ǎ		



ñ šä		
ŋ nä		
ñ hä		





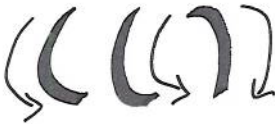

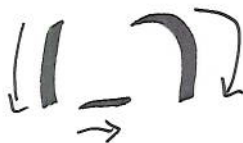

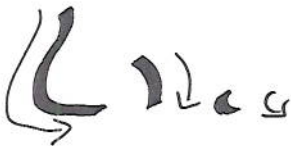

Now the remaining letters, variously with five, six, or eight strokes :

ƒ čä		
ž jä		
œ č'ä		

**Note**, some letters can be written differently; for example ʟ rä can be written with one large curving stroke and a small serif, or ñ šä can be written like ñ bā with a separate small stroke added at the top:

--	--	--	--

Here are a few more different ways of writing some of the basic shapes:

† tä		
ŋ bä		
œ wä		
ø a		
ɤ fä		

The other “orders” of the *fidāl* are written following the same procedures. Whether these involve the addition of short strokes to the left, right or top of the basic shapes, or small circles or loops, or shortening one of the “legs” of the basic shapes, or occasionally other devices, the principle remains the same: write with strokes moving from top to bottom and left to right.

This may mean that the additional strokes and loops are often added separately. At other times, the change made to mark the vowel may simply involve shortening, extending or re-shaping one of the strokes of the basic shape. Remember, however, that the overall letter should remain within the top and bottom “guidelines” and not extend above or below.






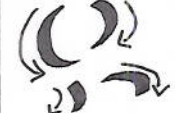
So, let's look first at the various other orders of a simple letter such as **Ბ** **bā** to see how they are written:

bu	bi	ba	be	bī	bo













Here are some of the letters that involve changing the shape of one of the strokes of the base shape rather than adding anything extra:

fu	ri	fi	k'a	ta	fa
da	ma	ha	o	po	so



mo	mī	sī	hī	yī	do
					
mo	mī	sī	hī	yī	do

Writing numbers follows exactly the same principles. Here are a few examples:

1	2	5	9	30	80
					
					

In conclusion, here are a few sentences from the Reading Passage in Lesson 9 written out by hand for you to see what a piece of handwritten text may look like.

የአቶ ንጉሠ ቤተሰብ ማታ ማታ  
 ቱሌ ሺኸን ከበው አስከ ፕሮግራም  
 መጠቀሚያ ደረሰ ማየት ይቻላል