

17 Minute Languages

Italian grammar in a nutshell



 **Welcome to the Italian Language!** 

We will be discussing Italian grammar, starting with nouns and gender, articles, adjectives, verbs, tenses, prepositions, pronouns, sentence structure, conjunctions and interrogatives, to name a few grammar terms. Let's start with pronunciation.

Italian Pronunciation

Here, we discuss the differences between Italian and English letters. Please, read through this section carefully and try to pronounce all the examples out loud.

The Letter **C**

In Italian, “c” is pronounced differently depending on the following vowel.

Before “e” and “i”, it's pronounced as [tʃ], like the “ch” in “**che**ese”.

Before “a”, “o”, and “u”, it's pronounced as [k], like the “c” in “**c**at”.

☰ Examples:

ciao [tʃa.o] – hello

casa [ka.za] – house

The Letter **G**

Similar to “c”, the pronunciation of “g” in Italian depends on the vowel that follows after the “g”.

Before “e” and “i”, it's pronounced as [dʒ], like the “j” in “jump”.

Before “a”, “o”, and “u”, it's pronounced as [g], like the “g” in “go”.

Examples:

gelato [dʒe'la.to] – ice cream

gonna [gon.na] – skirt

The letter combination **GN**

If “g” and “n” meet, they form a new sound.

This sound is pronounced like “ny” [ɲ] in “canyon”.

Examples:

gnocchi: [ˈɲɔk.ki] – Gnocchi, small dumplings, typical Italian dish

montagna [mon'taɲ.na] – mountain

The letter combination **GLI**

If these three letters come together, they also form a new sound that is very typical of the Italian language.

“Gli” is pronounced like “ly” [ʎ] in “million”.

This [ʎ] sound should feel like a soft, flowing blend of “l” and

“y”.

Examples:

famiglia [fa'miʎ.ʎa] – family

migliore [miʎ'ʎo.re] – better

The Letter **H**

In Italian, “h” is always **silent**.

It's used to modify the pronunciation of certain letters or to distinguish between homophones (a word that sounds the same as another word but has a different meaning and/or spelling, like write and right).

Examples:

ho [o] – (I) have

ha [ai] – (you) have

The Letter **Z**

In Italian, “z” is pronounced as [dz] or [ts] depending on the region within Italy.

It's similar to the “ts” sound in “hats” or “cats”.

Examples:

zaino [dzai.no] – backpack

zucchero [tʃuk.ke.ro] – sugar

The Letter **S**

In Italian, “s” is generally pronounced as [s] like in English, but it can also be pronounced as [z] between vowels or in certain consonant clusters.

☞ Examples:

sole [ˈso.le] – sun

rosa [ˈrɔ.za] – rose

The Letter **R**

The Italian “r” is often pronounced more strongly than in English, with a rolling or trilled sound [r]. It can be a challenging sound for English speakers to master. But, please, don’t give up. You will master this!

☞ Example

ragazza [raˈgat.tsa] – girl

Roma [ˈrɔ.ma] – Rome, capital of Italy

correre [ˈkor.re.re] – to run

Pronouncing Italian Vowels

Italian vowels are generally pronounced more consistently than in English.

Each vowel typically has one sound, unlike in English where vowel sounds can vary depending on the word and context.

The Vowel **A**

Pronounced like the “a” in “father”.

☞ Example

casa [ˈka:za] – house

The Vowel **E**

Pronounced like the “e” in “bet”.

☞ Example

cane [ˈka:ne] – dog

The Vowel **I**

Pronounced like the “ee” in “feet”.

☞ Example

pizza [ˈpit.tsa] – pizza

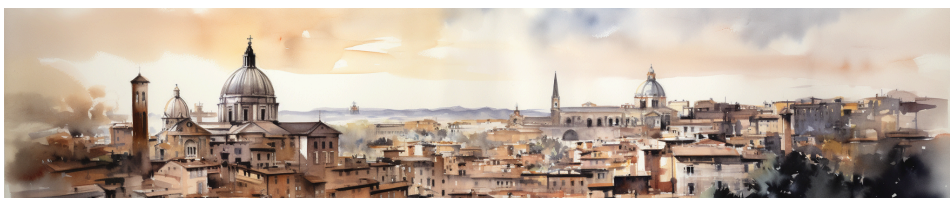
The Vowel **O**

Pronounced like the “o” in “hot”.

Example
gatto ['gat.to] – cat

The Vowel **U**
Pronounced like the “oo” in “boot”.

Example
luna ['lu:na] – moon



The Article in Italian

Italian distinguishes between definite and indefinite articles. The article adapts to the noun in gender (masculine, feminine) and number (singular, plural). Additionally, the article changes based on the initial letter of the following word.

The Definite Article (*articolo determinativo*)

In Italian, the definite article corresponds to “the” in English and has different forms depending on the gender and number of the noun it accompanies.

The definite article in the singular is “il” for masculine nouns and “la” for feminine nouns.

Examples

il libro (m) – the book

il bambino (m) – the boy

la casa (f) – the house

la bambina (f) – the girl

If the next word starts with a vowel, the definite article is

shortened to “l’” with an apostrophe at the end.

☞ Examples

l'uomo (m) – the man

l'amica (f) – the friend

A masculine noun starting with “x”, “y”, “z”, or a double consonant, takes the article “lo”.

☞ Examples

lo zio – the uncle

lo psicologo – the psychologist

lo studente – the student

Building the plural form of the definite article

The plural of the definite article is “i” for masculine nouns and “le” for feminine nouns.

☞ Examples

i libri (m) – the books

i bambini (m) – the boys

le case (f) – the houses

le bambine (f) – the girls

le amiche (f) – the girlfriends

For masculine nouns that begin with a vowel, “x”, “y”, “z” or a double consonant, the plural form is “gli”.

☞ Examples

gli amici (m) – the friends

gli uomini (m) – the men

gli zii (m) – the uncles

gli yogurt (m) – the yogurts

gli studenti (m) – the students

gli psicologi (m) – the psychologists

The Indefinite Article (*articolo indeterminativo*)

The indefinite article corresponds to “a” or “an” in English and also has different forms based on gender and number.

The indefinite article in the singular is “un” for masculine nouns and “una” for feminine nouns.

... Examples

un libro – a book

una casa – a house

If the following word is feminine and begins with a vowel, the indefinite article is shortened to “un'”, with an apostrophe at the end. In the case of a masculine noun, nothing changes.

(With English being your mother tongue, you already are familiar with this concept of making changes here for reasons of pronunciation.)

... Examples

un'**a**mica (f) – a friend

un'**i**dea (f) – an idea

un'**o**ra (f) – an hour

un uomo (m) – a man

A masculine noun beginning with “x”, “y”, “z” or a double consonant (such as “ps”, “gn”, “sc”, or “st”) has the indefinite article “uno”.

... Examples

uno **y**ogurt (m) – a yogurt

uno **z**io (m) – an uncle

uno **p**sicologo – a psychologist

uno **s**tudente – a student

Building the plural form of the indefinite article

The plural of the indefinite article is “dei” for masculine nouns and “delle” for feminine nouns.

Translating the plural form into English is not that easy, as English does not have the plural form of the indefinite article. But you have options, like just translating the plural form of the noun or adding “some”.

... Examples

delle case (f) – houses, some houses

delle bambine (f) – girls, some girls

delle amiche (f) – girlfriends, some girlfriends

delle idee (f) – ideas, some ideas
delle ore (f) – hours, some hours

dei libri (m) – books, some books
dei bambini (m) – boys, some boys
dei cani (m) – dogs, some dogs

For masculine nouns that begin with a vowel, “x”, “y”, “z” or a double consonant, the plural form is “degli”.

💬 Examples

degli **u**omini (m) – men, some men
degli **y**ogurt (m) – yogurts, some yogurts
degli **z**ii (m) – uncles, some uncles
degli **p**sicologi (m) – psychologists, some psychologists
degli **s**tudenti (m) – students, some students

The Noun in Italian

Masculine and Feminin – the Two Genders of Italian Nouns

Italian nouns are either masculine or feminine, which is a fundamental aspect of the language.

This gender affects not only the form of the nouns themselves but also the forms of adjectives and articles that are used together with them.

How can I detect the gender of an Italian noun?

💡 In Italian, most nouns have one of the following three endings in the singular.

These first two rules will give you good and clear pointers:

Nouns that end in “-o” in the singular are usually masculine.

💬 Examples

il ragazzo**o** – the boy
l'albero**o** – the tree
il libro**o** – the book

Nouns that end in “-a” in the singular are usually feminine.

💬 Examples

la ragazza – the girl

la casa – the house

la lettera – the letter

Only the third group of nouns might put you in a pickle.

Nouns that end in “-e” or “-è” in the singular can be masculine or feminine.

So, in this case, it would be best to always learn the noun together with the article.

This way, you will always know the gender of the word.

💬 Examples

il pesce (m) – the fish

il pane (m) – the bread

il caffè (m) – the coffee

la torre (f) – the tower

la notte (f) – the night

Formation of the Plural of Italian Nouns

Just like in English, nouns can be singular or plural.

The plural form in Italian, however, isn’t always as simple as adding an “-s” at the end of the word as in English.

Instead, the plural form of a noun usually involves changing the ending vowel.

If a feminine noun ends in “-a” in the singular, it ends in “-e” in the plural.

💬 Examples

 la *bambina → le bambine

 the girl → the girls

 la *ragazza → le ragazze

 the girl → the girls

 la casa → le case

 the house → the houses

 la lettera → le lettere

 the letter → the letters

* Maybe, you were (just like us) wondering when to use which noun? A “bambina” is a young female child, typically under the age of 12. The noun “ragazza” refers to a girl or young woman from adolescence

through early adulthood, and can also mean girlfriend.

 Have a go now at applying the new rule: look for feminine nouns that end in “-a” in the singular and put them in the plural.

If a masculine noun ends in “-o” in the singular, it ends in “-i” in the plural.

 Examples

 il bambino → i bambini

 the boy → the boys

 il ragazzo → i ragazzi

 the boy → the boys

 il libro → i libri

 the book → the books

 l'albero → *gli alberi

 the tree → the trees

* Why do we find “gli” here - instead of “i” as the plural form of the definite article?

It's because “albero” starts with a vowel.

Please go back to the chapter on building the plural form of the definite article in Italian, if you need to revise more

examples.

 Try the rule for yourself : look for masculine nouns that end in “-o” in the singular and put them in the plural.

If a noun ends in “-e” in the singular, it ends in “-i” in the plural.

 Examples

 il pesce (m) → i pesci

 the fish → the fishes

 il pane (m) → i pani

 the bread → the bread loaves

 la torre (f) → le torri

 the tower → the towers

 la notte (f) → le notti

 the night → the nights

 Please try to apply the new rule right now: look for nouns that end in “-e” in the singular and build their plural.

Exceptions to the Formation of Plurals

Italian has – when it comes to building the plural of nouns – many exceptions. So, please, pay special attention to this chapter.

Some nouns are **invariable**, i.e. they have the same form in singular and plural.

These are often nouns that end in a stressed vowel or monosyllabic nouns that end in a consonant.

The same applies to feminine nouns ending in “-i”.

Examples

-  il caffè (m) → i caffè
-  the coffee → the coffees
-  il film (m) → i film
-  the film → the films
-  la città (f) → le città
-  the city → the cities
-  la crisi (f) → le crisi
-  the crisis → the crises

Masculine nouns ending in “-a”, have an “-i” in the plural.

Examples

-  il problema (m) → i problemi
-  the problem → the problems
-  il poeta (m) → i poeti
-  the poet → the poets

Some nouns **change gender** between their singular and plural forms.

Examples

-  l'uovo (m) → le uova (f)
-  the egg → the eggs
-  il braccio (m) → le braccia (f)
-  the arm → the arms
-  il dito (m) → le dita (f)
-  the finger → the fingers

Some Italian nouns **only** exist in the **plural** form.

Examples

- le forbici (f, pl) – the scissors
- le mutande (f, pl) – the underwear

gli occhiali (m, pl) – the glasses
i pantaloni (m, pl) – the pants, the trousers

Finally, there are some **irregular** nouns.
Please, try to learn them by heart.

💬 Examples

 il dio (m) → gli dei
 the god → the gods
 l'uomo (m) → gli uomini
 the man → the men
 la mano (f) → le mani
 the hand → the hands

The Italian Adjective

What is Important to Know about Italian Adjectives?

Italian adjectives must agree in gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural) with the nouns they modify.

The adjective always harmonises with the noun to which it refers to, even if it is not directly next to the noun.

The adjective must agree with the noun in terms of grammatical gender (masculine, feminine) and number (singular, plural).

💬 Examples

l'amica gentile (f, sg) – the nice friend
il maestro affabile (m, sg) – the friendly teacher
le amiche gentili (f, pl) – the nice friends
i maestri affabili (m, pl) – the friendly teachers

In Italian, predicative adjectives i.e. adjectives that are used together with the verb “essere” (to be) are also harmonised with the noun.

 Examples

La bicicletta è rapida (f, sg). – The bicycle is fast.
Le biciclette sono rapide (f, pl). – The bicycles are fast.
Il ragazzo è bravo (m, sg). – The boy is well behaved.
I ragazzi sono bravi (m, pl). – The boys are well behaved.

Italian knows four types of adjectives.

Descriptive adjectives

They describe qualities or states.

 Examples

alto – tall
vecchio – old

Possessive adjectives

This type indicates possession.

 Examples

mio – my
tuo – your

Demonstrative adjectives

They point out specific items.

 Examples

questo – this
quello – that

Quantitative Adjectives

The fourth type indicates quantity.

 Examples

molto – much, many
poco – few, little

Two Groups of Italian Adjectives

Many adjectives have a feminine form (ending in “-a”) and a masculine form (ending in “-o”).

The plural ends in “-e” for feminine adjectives and in “-i” for masculine adjectives.

These adjectives with four forms (two gender, singular and plural form) are known as “adjectives with four endings”.

If you want to learn more and you are working with Italian grammar, the term to search for is: **aggettivi a quattro uscite**.

 Examples

bello (m, sg) – beautiful
bella (f, sg) – beautiful
belli (m, pl) – beautiful
belle (f, pl) – beautiful

alto (m, sg) – tall
un uomo alto – a tall man
alta (f, sg) – tall
una donna alta – a tall woman
alti (m, pl) – tall
dei ragazzi alti – some tall boys
alte (f, pl) – tall
delle ragazze alte – some tall girls

Adjectives with the singular ending “-e” end in “-i” in the plural belong to the second group of Italian adjectives. If you want to learn more and you are working with a grammar in Italian, the term to search for is: **aggettivi a due uscite**.

☞ Examples
grande (m, sg) – big
un libro grande – a big book
grande (f, sg) – big
una casa grande – a big house
grandi (m, pl) – big
libri grandi – big books
grandi (f, pl) – big
case grandi – big houses

Some adjectives are invariable and are the same in the singular and in the plural, regardless of whether they are masculine or feminine.

Adjectives that only exist in one form are referred to as “**aggettivi invariabili/monofinite**”.

☞ Examples
un vestito blu (m, sg) – a blue dress
una camicia blu (f, sg) – a blue shirt
dei vestiti blu (m, pl) – some blue dresses
delle camicie blu (f, pl) – some blue shirts

The Position of Adjectives within Italian Sentences

Italian adjectives can stand before or after the noun. Adjectives that describe colours, shapes, nationalities, political or religious affiliations are placed after the noun.

⚠ Please, pay attention here: this is the opposite to how the English language works.

Even if several adjectives describe a noun in more detail, they are placed after the word they refer to.

 Examples

il ragazzo americano – the American boy

il ministro democratico – the democratic minister

la suora cattolica – the catholic nun

la macchina bianca, bella e veloce – the white, beautiful and fast car

Some adjectives change their meaning depending on whether they come before or after the noun.

 Examples

una macchina **cara** – an **expensive** car

un caro amico – a dear friend

una casa **grande** – a **big** house

una grande donna – a great woman

The adjective has a distinctive function before the noun and a **descriptive** function after the noun.

The Comparison of Italian Adjectives

The Comparative Form

The comparative is used to compare two entities.

The first form of comparison of Italian adjectives is formed by placing “più” (more) or “meno” (less) in front of the adjective.

 Examples

più bello di/che – more beautiful than

meno bello di/che – less beautiful than

The comparative word “di” (than) is used before names, the indefinite article + noun and before pronouns.

 Examples

Roberto è **più** simpatico **di** te. – Roberto is nicer than you.

Roberto è **più** alto **di** Carlo. – Roberto is taller than Carlo.

The comparative word “che” (than) is used when comparing two adjectives, before infinitives, prepositions and numbers.

 Examples

Luisa è **più** bella **che** simpatica. – Luisa is more beautiful than

nice.

Preferisco stare a Roma **che** a Milano. – I'd rather be in Rome than in Milan.

The Superlative of Italian Adjectives

In Italian, there is a relative and an absolute superlative. Let's start out with learning about the relative superlative first.

The relative superlative of Italian adjectives

Formation of the relative superlative

definite article + comparative

 Examples

Oxford è **la città più bella dell'**Inghilterra. – Oxford is the most beautiful city in England.

Il mio gatto è **il più carino di** tutti. – My cat is the sweetest of them all.

The absolute superlative of Italian adjectives

The absolute superlative expresses that a quality exists to a great extent.

It is formed by adding the ending “-issimo/a/i/e” to the stem of the adjective.

Formation of the absolute superlative

stem of the adjective + -issimo /a/i/e

 Examples

Gli spaghetti sono **buonissimi**. – The spaghetti is very delicious / very good.

Queste macchine sono **velocissime**. – These cars are extremely / very fast.

Irregular Italian Adjectives

Some adjectives have irregular comparative and superlative forms, and these need to be memorised.

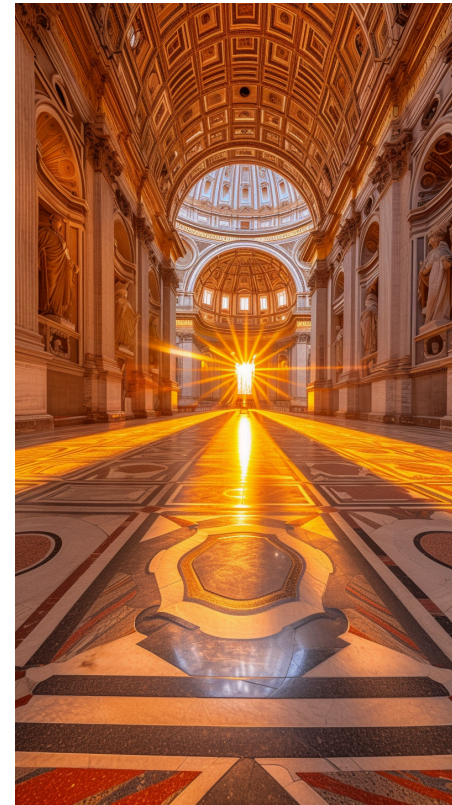
The most important irregular comparative forms of adjectives			
	comparative	relative superlative	absolute superlative
buono (good)	migliore (better)	il/la migliore (the best)	ottimo (very good)
cattivo (bad)	peggiore (worse)	il/la peggiore (the worst)	pessimo (very bad)
grande (large)	maggiore (larger)	il/la maggiore (the largest)	massimo (very large)
piccolo (small)	minore (little)	il/la minore (the smallest)	minimo (very small)

In general, it can be said that the irregular intensified form of adjectives tends to be used in a figurative sense.

Examples

Lui è mio fratello maggiore. – This is my big brother.

Mio fratello è più grande di me. – My brother is taller than me.
(or also: My brother is older than me.)



The Adverb in Italian

Italian adverbs are words that modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or entire sentences, providing information about how, when, where, or why something happens.

They play a crucial role in adding detail and nuance to the sentence.

How can I distinguish an Italian adverb from an adjective?

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, while adjectives modify nouns.

In English, many words (e.g. “fast”) can be both: adjectives and adverbs. But in Italian, the adverbial form usually ends in “-mente”.

Examples

Il treno è veloce. – The train is fast.

Il treno viaggia **velocemente**. – The train travels **quickly**.

Formation of Italian Adverbs

Many Italian adverbs are formed by adding “-mente” to the feminine singular form of an adjective.

Examples

 lento → lentamente

 slow → slowly

 attento → attentamente

 careful → carefully

For adjectives ending in “-le” or “-re”, drop the final “-e” before adding “-mente”.

Examples

 facile → facilemente

 easy → easily

 regolare → regolamente

 regular → regularly

The Comparison of Italian Adverbs

The Comparative Form

Adverbs can be compared in the same way as adjectives. The comparative is formed by placing “più” (more) or “meno” (less) in front of the adverb.

☞ Examples

Sei arrivata **più tardi** di Laura. – You arrived later than Laura.
In Italia si parla **più velocemente** che negli Stati Uniti. – In Italy, people speak faster than in the United States.

The Superlative of Italian Adverbs

Here, again, we have to distinguish between a relative and an absolute superlative.

The relative superlative of Italian adverbs

The second grade of comparison actually looks the same as the first.

To make it clear that the superlative is meant here, you can add “**di tutti/tutte**” (of all).

☞ Example

Roberto corre più **rapidamente di tutti**. – Roberto runs the fastest of all.

The absolute superlative of Italian adverbs

The absolute superlative of adverbs is derived from the absolute superlative of adjectives.

Here too, the ending “-mente” is added to the feminine singular form.

☞ Example

Roberto corre **velocissimamente**. – Roberto runs very fast.

Irregular Italian Adverbs

The irregular comparison forms of adverbs			
	comparative	relative superlative	absolute superlative
bene (well)	meglio (better)	meglio di tutti/e (best)	benissimo (very good)
male (badly)	peggio (worse)	peggio di tutti/e (worst)	malissimo (very bad)
molto (much)	più (more)	più di tutti/e (most)	moltissimo (very much)
poco (little)	meno (less)	meno di tutti/e (least)	pochissimo (very little)

Different Types of Italian Adverbs

Adverbs in Italian are generally classified based on the information they convey.

Let's take a look at some of these different types of adverbs.

Avverbi di modo – adverbs of manner

These describe how an action is performed.

They are often formed by adding “-mente” to the feminine form of an adjective.

☞ Examples

 rapido → **rapidamente**

 fast → quickly

 facile → **facilmente**

 easy → easily

Avverbi di tempo – adverbs of time

Adverbs of time tell when an action takes place.

☞ Examples

adesso – now

ieri – yesterday

domani – tomorrow

spesso – often

Avverbi di luogo – adverbs of place

Adverbs of place specify where an action occurs.

💬 Examples

qui – here

là – there

dentro – inside

fuori – outside

Avverbi di quantità – adverbs of quantity

Adverbs of quantity indicate how much or to what extent something happens.

💬 Examples

molto – a lot

poco – a little

abbastanza – enough

troppo – too much

quasi – almost

The Italian Verb

Italian verbs can be a bit complex because they change form based on various factors, such as tense, mood, and the person performing an action.

However, the following pages will ease you in and you will be able to form sentences very quickly.

Italian verbs can be found in different moods

Italian verbs are divided into several moods.

Each mood indicates a different way an action is being expressed.

The **infinitive** shows the base form of a verb.

The **indicative** is used for statements of facts.

The subjunctive (ital. **congiuntivo**) expresses wishes, possibilities, or doubts.

The **conditional** mood tells about hypothetical actions or polite requests.

Use the **imperative** for your Italian commands and requests!

Italian verbs can be grouped in three classes

Italian verbs can be divided into three conjugation classes. There are verbs ending in “-are”, “-ere” and “-ire”.

💡 If you remove these endings, you get the **verb stem**.

Please keep in mind: you need the verb stem to be able to form different tenses.

💬 Examples

mand**are** – to send

scriv**ere** – to write

part**ire** – to leave, to depart

⚠ Please note that Italian has regular and several **irregular** verbs.

We advise you to pay special attention to the irregular verbs and memorise them by heart.

That will provide you with a solid basis for expressing everything you want to talk about in Italian.

Building the Present Tense in Italian

The present tense is used for describing actions in the present, general statements, and actions that will happen in the near future.

The present is formed by adding typical endings to the verb stem, depending on the conjugation class.

Present tense of regular Italian verbs

	cant are to sing	scriv ere to write	sent ire to listen
io (I)	cant o	scriv o	sent o
tu (you)	cant i	scriv i	sent i
lui / lei / Lei (he/she/it)	cant a	scriv e	sent e
noi (we)	cant iamo	scriv iamo	sent iamo
voi / Voi (you)	cant ate	scriv ete	sent ite
loro (they)	cant ano	scriv ono	sent ono

💬 Examples

Scrivi una lettera? – Are you writing a letter?

Domani la **mandiamo**. – We'll send it tomorrow.
Il postino **parte** alle nove. – The postman leaves at nine.
Io **canto** una canzone. – I sing a song.
Loro **cantano** alla festa. – They sing at the party.
Lei **sente** la musica. – She hears the music.
Senti il vento? – Do you feel the wind?
Sento un rumore. – I hear a noise.

Why are some personal pronouns missing in some examples?
Please note that in Italian personal pronouns are not mandatory.
In the chapter on [personal pronouns](#) you will find more information on that.

Irregular Verbs in the Italian Present Tense

An easy to remember rule for some verbs ending in “-ire”

Some verbs ending in “-ire” add an “-isc-” between the stem and the ending in the singular forms and in the 3rd person plural.

Irregular verbs ending in “-ire” capire (to understand)			
singular		plural	
io (I)	cap <u>is</u> co	noi (we)	capiamo
tu (you)	cap <u>is</u> ci	voi/Voi (you)	capite
lui/lei/Lei (he, she, it)	cap <u>is</u> ce	loro (they)	capis <u>co</u> no

 Please try the rule for yourself and practice with these verbs. The rule also applies here.

finire (to finish), preferire (to prefer), pulire (to clean)

Three commonly used irregular Italian verbs in the present tense

For some irregular verbs in Italian you cannot find a rule that will help you remember the pattern.

Important irregular verbs in the present tense

	avere to have	essere to be	andare to go
io	ho I have	sono I am	vado I go
tu	hai you have	sei you are	vai you go
lui/lei/Lei	ha he/she/it has	è he/she/it is	va he/she/it goes
noi	abbiamo we have	siamo we are	andiamo we go
voi/Voi	avete you have	siete you are	andate you go
loro	hanno they have	sono you are	vanno you go

The Imperative in Italian

The Italian imperative is used to express commands, requests and demands.

The imperative forms for the “tu”-form (2nd singular), the “voi”-form (2nd plural) and the “noi”-form (1st plural) correspond to the forms of the present.

Examples

Aspetta! (sg) – (you) Wait!
Aspettate! (pl) – (you) Wait!
Aspettiamo! – Let’s wait!

You only need to rethink the “lei”-form (polite form, 3rd sg): Here, an “-i” is added to the stem of verbs ending in “-are”, whereas an “-a” is added to verbs ending in “-ere” and “-ire”.

Examples

Aspetti! – Wait! (formal)
Parti! – Leave! (formal)

The **negation** of the imperative is formed by placing a “non” in front of the imperative form.

Please note, there is one exception: the negated “tu”-form is

formed with “non” and the infinitive. Here, the verb stays in the infinitive and is not conjugated.

Examples

Non **aspettare!** (sg) – (you) Don’t wait!

Non aspettate! (pl) – (you) Don’t wait!

Non aspettiamo! – Let’s not wait!

Non aspett! – Don’t wait! (formal)

Non parta! – Don’t leave! (formal)

Non ascoltarlo! – Do not listen to him!

The Past Participle of Italian Verbs

The past participle (**participio passato**) in Italian is an important verb form, mainly used in compound tenses, such as the present perfect (passato prossimo), and in passive voice constructions.

It's equivalent to the English past participle forms like “eaten”, “gone”, or “spoken”.

Building the Past Participle of Italian verbs

With regular Italian verbs, the past participle is formed by adding the past participle suffixes “-ato” (with verbs ending in “-are”), “-uto” (with verbs ending in “-ere”) and “-ito” (with verbs ending in “-ire”) to the verb stem.

Infinitive	Past participle
and <u>a</u> re (to go)	and <u>ato</u> (gone)
vend <u>e</u> re (to sell)	vend <u>uto</u> (sold)
part <u>i</u> re (to depart)	part <u>ito</u> (departed)

Italian verbs with irregular past participle

There are some verbs in Italian that form the past participle in an irregular way.

Please, learn them by heart!

Italian verbs with an irregular past participle

dire (to say)	detto (said)
essere (to be)	stato (been)
fare (to make)	fatto (made)
leggere (to read)	letto (read)
rispondere (to answer)	risposto (answered)
scribere (to write)	scritto (written)
vedere (to see)	visto (saw)
vincere (to win)	vinto (won)

The Present Perfect of Italian Verbs

The present perfect (**passato prossimo**) is used for one off and completed actions that have taken place recently and are usually limited in time.

Formation of the past tense

present tense of essere/avere (to be/to have)
+
past participle

Most verbs in Italian form the past tense with “avere” (to have).

Examples

(io) ho cantato – (I) sang / have sung
(tu) hai cantato – (you, sg) sang / have sung
(lei) ha cantato – (she) sang / has sung
(voi) avete sentito – (you, pl) heard / have heard
(loro) hanno sentito – (they) heard / have heard
(lui) ha scritto – (he) wrote / has written
(noi) abbiamo scritto – (we) wrote / have written
Abbiamo scritto una lettera ai nostri genitori. – We wrote /

have written a letter to our parents.

💡 If the examples did not seem familiar to you, please, revise the chapters on [irregular verbs in the present tense](#) (there you can look up “avere” and “essere” once more) and the one about the [past participle](#).

When do I build the passato prossimo with “avere” – and when do I use “esse”?

When putting a **transitive verb** (a verb that takes a direct object) into the passato prossimo, you use the auxiliary verb “**avere**”.

⚠ When built with “avere” the **past participle** of the main verb **doesn’t change** according to the subject of the sentence.

We know, that’s a lot to take in within two sentences...
So, let’s break it down.

First question: what is a transitive verb?

A transitive verb describes an action that is performed on someone or something. So, it takes a direct object for this description. When analysing a sentence, you will find this

direct object by asking “what” or “whom”.

💬 Examples

Io **ho** mangiato una pizza. – I ate a pizza.

In this sentence the direct object is “una pizza”: what did I eat? A pizza.

Abbiamo scritto una lettera. – We wrote a letter.

Lei **ha** visto un film. – She saw a movie.

✍ Now, it’s your turn: build the passato prossimo of the following verbs with “avere” and write down sentences for each example. Please, tell me about the things you did yesterday in short sentences.

Mangiare – to eat, leggere – to read, fare – to do.

The auxiliary verb “**essere**” is used with **intransitive verbs** and **reflexive verbs**.

An intransitive verb is a verb that expresses a movement or a certain state or changes within a certain state (e.g. (be)coming, going).

⚠ Here, the past participle **changes**.

It has to agree in gender and number with the subject (comparable to an adjective that adopts to the subject of the sentence).

 Examples

Ieri sera **sono andata** (f) al cinema. – Last night I (f) went to the cinema.

Ieri **sono andato** (m) al cinema. – Yesterday I (m) went to the cinema.

Ieri mi sono incontrata (f) con Sara. – Yesterday I (f) met with Sara.

Sono stata (f) felice. – I (f) have been happy.

Ieri mi sono incontrato (m) con Matteo. – Yesterday I (m) met with Matteo.

Sono stato (m) felice. – I (m) have been happy.

Loro si sono svegliati (m) tardi. – They (m) woke up late.

Loro si sono svegliate (f) tardi. – They (f) woke up late.

Lei è nata a Milano. – She was born in Milano.

Noi siamo rimasti a casa. – We stayed home.



Now, it's your turn: build the passato prossimo of the following verbs with “essere” and write down sentences for each example.

Andare – to go, arrivare – to arrive, diventare – to become.

How can I translate the passato prossimo into English?

In the examples above, we used both verb tenses (simple past and present perfect) in English to translate the passato prossimo.

Both is correct.



Here are two easy to follow rules, when using English verb tenses in your translations.

- a) If the action of the sentence is connected to the present or has an ongoing relevance → use the present perfect.

 Example

Ho studiato per l'esame. – I **have studied** for the exam.

- b) If the action happened at a specific point in the past → use the simple past. You can find markers like “ieri” (yesterday), “scorsa settimana” (last week), “dieci anni fa” (ten years ago) in these sentences.

 Example

Ieri ho studiato per l'esame. – Yesterday, I **studied** for the exam.

The Italian Imperfect (*imperfetto*)

The imperfect (**imperfetto**) is another past tense that is used in Italian for actions that have not yet been completed or are repeated regularly.

The imperfetto is formed by adding specific endings for the imperfect to the stem of the verb.

Formation of the imperfect

verb stem + **ending** of the imperfect tense

Endings of the imperfect tense			
	abitare (to live)	sapere (to know)	partire (to leave)
1. Sg.	abit avo	sape vo	part ivo
2. Sg.	abit avi	sape vi	part ivi
3. Sg.	abit ava	sape va	part iva
1. Pl.	abit avamo	sape vamo	part ivamo
2. Pl.	abit avate	sape vate	part ivate
3. Pl.	abit avano	sape vano	part ivano

Examples

 I miei genitori **venivano** a trovarmi ogni anno.

 My parents visited me every year.

 Mia sorella **andava** in vacanze almeno tre volte all'anno.

 My sister used to go on holiday at least three times a year.

 Noi **abitavamo** in una casa grande.

 We were living in a big house.

The imperfetto is often translated into English with expressions like “used to”, “was/were + -ing”, or the simple past depending on the context.



Imperfetto of “avere” and “essere”

It's best to learn the imperfetto of the two most commonly used auxiliary verbs by heart.

The imperfect tense of “avere” and “essere”

avere (to have)

essere (to be)

(io) **avevo** – I had

(io) **ero** – I was

(tu) **avevi** – you had

(tu) **eri** – you were

(lui/lei) **aveva** – he/she/it had

(lui/lei) **era** – he/she was

(noi) **avevamo** – we had

(noi) **eravamo** – we were

(voi) **avevate** – you had

(voi) **eravate** – you were

(loro) **avevano** – they had

(loro) **erano** – they were

Examples

Ieri **era** freddissimo. – It was very cold yesterday.

Voi **avevate** una bella casa in campagna. – You (pl) used to have a beautiful house in the countryside.

The Trapassato Prossimo in Italian

The “**trapassato prossimo**” is used for actions that happened before another action in the past.

This tense corresponds in general use with the **past perfect** in English.

Formation of the trapassato prossimo

imperfect form of “essere” (to be) or “avere” (to have)

+

past participle of the main verb

Maybe you want to revise some of the “ingredients” you need to build the trapassato prossimo?

You can look up the [imperfetto of “avere” and “essere”](#) following this link.

The chapter on [building the past participle](#) in Italian is waiting here for your revision.

When do I build the trapassato prossimo with “avere” – and when do I use “esse”?

You already came across these rules, so a quick revision here will be sufficient.

When putting a **transitive verb** into the trapassato prossimo, you use the auxiliary verb “**avere**”.

When built with “avere” the past participle of the main verb doesn’t change according to the subject of the sentence.

☞ Example

Io **avevo mangiato** una pizza. – I had eaten a pizza.

The auxiliary verb “**essere**” is used with **intransitive verbs** and **reflexive verbs**.

Here, the past participle changes.

☞ Examples

Ieri sera **ero andata** (f) al cinema. – Last night I (f) had gone to the cinema.

Ieri **ero andato** (m) al cinema. – Yesterday I (m) had gone to the cinema.

Now, let’s focus on the usage of this tense.

The trapassato prossimo is used when talking about an event or action that happened before another event in the past.

☞ Examples

 Dopo che **aveva pranzato**, Paolo dormiva per due ore.

 After Paolo had lunch, he slept for two hours.

 **Eravamo partiti** prima che cominciasse a piovere.

 We had left before it started to rain.

Future Tense(s) in Italian

Let’s talk about plans for tomorrow! Look at these two examples.

☞ Examples

Domani **vado** al cinema. – I’m going to the cinema tomorrow.

Domani **andrò** al cinema. – Tomorrow I will go to the cinema.

The first sentence with the verb “vado” (present tense) talks about something that is certainly going to happen in the near future. We can translate this sentence with the “going to-future” into English. These types of sentences often come together with a “timer marker” like “domani” (tomorrow) or “prossima semana” (next week).

This sentence is typical for spoken, everyday Italian.

The second sentence shows the future with a verb tense, the “futuro semplice”. Translation into English, you use the “will future”.

This sentence is typical for written Italian.

Building the Simple Future in Italian

The **futuro semplice** (simple future) in Italian is used to describe future actions.

However, the present tense can also be used for the immediate future, especially in spoken language.

The simple future is formed by removing the last vowel from the infinitive of the verb and replacing it with the corresponding endings.

Verbs ending in “-are” are an exception. Here, the “-a” ending is replaced by an “-e”.

Examples

aspetterò – I will wait

scriveremo – we will write

partiranno – they will leave

Viaggerò in Italia l'anno prossimo. – I will travel to Italy next year.

Loro verranno alla riunione? – Will they come to the meeting?

Endings of simple future in Italian verbs

	aspettare (to wait)	credere (to believe)	finire (to finish)
1. Sg.	aspetterò I will wait	crederò I will believe	finirò I will finish
2. Sg.	aspetterai you will wait	crederai you will believe	finirai you will finish
3. Sg.	aspetterà he/she/it will wait	crederà he/she/it will believe	finirà he/she/it will finish
1. Pl.	aspetteremo we will wait	crederemo we will believe	finiremo we will finish
2. Pl.	aspetterete you will wait	crederete you will believe	finirete you will finish
3. Pl.	aspetteranno they will wait	crederanno they will believe	finiranno they will finish

Simple future of “avere” to have and “essere” to be

avere (to have)

 avrò, avrai, avrà, avremo, avrete, avranno

 I will have, you (sg) will have, he/she will have, we will have, you (pl) will have, they will have

essere (to be)

 sarò, sarai, sarà, saremo, sarete, saranno

 I will be, you (sg) will be, he/she will be, we will be, you (pl) will be, they will be

Building the Future Perfect in Italian

The “futuro anteriore” (future perfect) is used to describe actions that will have already happened in the future.

This tense is formed with the simple future forms of “avere” (to have) or “essere” (to be) and the [past participle](#).

Formation of the future perfect

simple future form of “avere”/”essere” + past participle

 Examples

avrò mangiato – (I) will have eaten

sarà arrivata – (she) will have arrived

Avrò finito questo importante progetto entro domani. – I will have finished this important project by tomorrow.

Domani a quest'ora **sarò** già **arrivata** (f) a Roma. – By this time tomorrow, I (f) will have already arrived in Rome.

The Present Conditional of Italian verbs

The **condizionale presente** (present conditional) in Italian is used for polite requests, suggestions, wishes or possibilities.

It is formed by removing the last vowel from the infinitive of the verb and replacing it with the corresponding endings. With verbs ending in “-are”, however, the “-a” of the ending is replaced by an “-e”.

Examples

Mi **potrebbe** aiutare? – Could you help me?

Vorrei un cappuccino. – I would like a cappuccino.

Al tuo posto mi **scuserei**. – If I were you, I would apologise.

Formation of the condizionale presente

	aspettare (to wait)	credere (to believe)	finire (to finish)
1 st sg	aspetter ei I would wait	credere i I would believe	finire i I would finish
2 nd sg	aspetter esti you would wait	credere esti you would believe	finire esti you would finish
3 rd sg	aspetter ebbe he/she would wait	credere ebbe he/she would believe	finire ebbe he/she would finish
1 st pl	aspetter emmo we would wait	credere emmo we would believe	finire emmo we would finish
2 nd pl	aspetter este you would wait	credere este you would believe	finire este you would finish
3 rd pl	aspetter ebbero they would wait	credere ebbero they would believe	finire ebbero they would finish

The Past Conditional of Italian verbs

The **condizionale passato** (past conditional) is used to express wishes, possibilities or polite requests in the past that could have happened but did not.

Formation of the past conditional

condizionale presente of “avere” or “essere” (to be, to have)
+
past participle

Examples

Ieri ti **avrei potuto aiutare**. – I could have helped you yesterday.

Al tuo posto mi **sarei scusata**. – I would have apologised if I were you.

Sarei venuto alla festa, ma avevo troppo da fare. – I would have come to the party, but I had too much to do.

Italian Pronouns

Personal Pronouns in Italian

Italian verbs change depending on who is performing the action (expressed by a personal pronoun) and whether it's singular or plural.

Personal pronouns (pronomi soggetto) in Italian are **not** obligatory.

They are mostly used to emphasise or clearly differentiate between identical verb forms.

Personal pronouns in Italian

singular	plural
io (I)	noi (we)
tu (you, informal)	voi (you)
lui/lei (he, she, it) Lei (you, formal)	loro (they)

Examples

(Io) Vado al mare. – I'm going to the sea.

(**Tu**) Parli Italiano. – You speak Italian.
(**Lei**) parla Italiano. – She speaks Italian.
(**Lui**) parla Italiano. – He speaks Italian.
(**Noi**) Siamo al mare. – We are at the sea.
(**Voi**) vivete a Udine. – You (pl) live in Udine.
(**Loro**) Vivono a Roma. – They live in Rome.

Tricky for English natives – the formal and informal “you” in Italian

In English, we know only one form of “you” for both formal and informal situations.

In Italian, when showing respect or expressing politeness, there is a distinction between the informal “tu” and the formal “Lei”.

Please note, that in the formal usage, the “Lei” is capitalized.

... Examples

Tu parli bene. – You speak well. (informal context)

Lei parla bene. – You speak well. (formal context)

Object Pronouns in the Italian Language

When pronouns in the function of a direct or indirect object in a sentence refer to a thing or a person, they are called object pronouns.

... Example

Leggo **un libro**. – I read a book.

In Italian, we have to distinguish between **direct** (pronomi complemento oggetto diretto) and **indirect** object pronouns (pronomi complemento oggetto indiretto).

The indirect object is usually attached to the verb with the preposition “a” and often corresponds to the dative object.

... Example

Do un libro **a mia sorella**. – I give my sister a book.

Please, take a close look at the following information and learn everything by heart.

Overview: object pronouns in Italian

direct object pronouns		indirect object pronouns	
me	mi		(to) me
you	ti		(to) you
him, it	lo	gli	(to) him
her, it	la	le	(to) her
you (formal)	La	Le	(to) you (form.)
us	ci		(to) us
you (pl)	vi		(to) you (pl)
you (pl, form)	Vi		(to) you (pl, form)
them (m)	li		(to) them
them (f)	le	loro/ (gli)	

Examples with direct object pronouns

Mi vedi? – Do you see me?

Ti ascolto. – I’m listening to you.

La invito alla festa. – I invite her to the party.

Lo amo. – I love him.

Vi sento bene. – I hear you (pl, formal) well.

Examples with indirect object pronouns

Mi dai una mano? – Can you give me a hand? / Can you help me?

Ti racconto una storia. – I (will) tell you a story.

Le credo. – I believe her.

Gli piace Roma. – He likes Rome.

Ci scrivono spesso. – They often write to us.

Now, we have to take a closer look at the third person plural. The grammatically correct pronoun is “loro”. You will find this pronoun in written Italian and it is commonly placed behind the verb.

Porto **loro** il caffè. – I (will) bring them the coffee.

But in modern and spoken Italian the ungrammatical pronoun “gli” is used.

Gli porto il caffè. – I (will) bring them the coffee.

Combination of direct and indirect object pronouns

When direct and indirect object pronouns occur together in a sentence, their forms change.

Combining direct and indirect object pronouns in Italian

	mi	ti	gli	ci	vi/ Vi
lo	me lo	te lo	glielo	ce lo	ve lo
la	me la	te la	gliela	ce la	ve la
li	me li	te li	glieli	ce li	ve li
le	me le	te le	glielle	ce le	ve le

Examples

Do un libro a mia sorella. – I give my sister a book.

Glielo do. – I give it to her.

Michele ti fa un regalo. – Michele gives you a present.

Te lo dà. – He gives it to you.

Le la mando domani. – I will send it to her tomorrow.

Ti ci porto. – I will take you there.

The Reflexive Pronoun

Reflexive verbs come together with reflexive pronouns (pronomi riflessivi) that refer back to the subject of the sentence.

Reflexive pronouns in Italian

singular	plural
mi myself	ci ourselves
ti yourself	vi yourselves
si himself, herself	si themselves (m/f)
si yourself (polite form)	si themselves (polite form)

Examples

Mi vesto – I get dressed

Mi sono vestita. – I have dressed myself (f).

Ci eravamo vestiti. – We (m) had got dressed.

Mi lavo le mani. – I wash my hands.

ci alziamo – we stand up

Si incontrano ogni settimana. – They meet each other every week.

Possessive pronouns in Italian

Possessive pronouns (**pronomi possessivi**) express ownership and mark possession.

⚠ Here is a key difference between Italian and the English language: in Italian the possessive pronoun agrees in **gender** and **number** with the noun it refers to.

In English the possessive noun agrees with the owner on the object.

To understand the concept quickly, please take a look at the following examples.

💬 Examples

🇮🇹 **Le nostre** case sono grandi.

🇬🇧 Our houses are big. (lit. “The our” houses are big.)

🇮🇹 **Il mio** libro è molto vecchio.

🇬🇧 My book is very old.

Possessive pronouns in Italian

	singular		plural
il mio libro	my book	i miei libri	my books
la mia casa	my house	le mie case	my houses
il tu o libro	your book	i tuoi libri	your books
la tua casa	your house	le tue case	your houses
il suo / Suo libro	his, her, your (form.) book	i suoi / Suoi libri	his, her, your (form.) books
la sua / Sua casa	his, her, your (form.) house	le sue / Sue case	his, her, your (form.) houses
il nostro libro	our book	i nostri libri	our books
la nostra casa	our house	le nostre case	our houses
il vostro / Vostro libro	your (inform., form.) book	i vostri / Vostri libri	your (pl. inform., form.) books
la vostra / Vostra casa	your (inform., form.) house	le vostre / Vostre case	your (pl. inform., form.) houses
il loro libro	their book	i loro libri	their books
la loro casa	their house	le loro case	their houses

💡 Please note, when talking about family members, an exception applies.

If you talk about one (a single) member of your family, the definite article is left out.

💬 Examples

Mio padre è simpatico. – My father is nice.

Tua nonna è una cuoca fantastica! – Your grandmother is a fantastic cook!

sua madre – his, her mother

The Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns (**pronomi dimostrativi**) refer to an object or a person.

It can stand alone or replace a noun.

When it is used together with a noun, it adapts to it in gender and number.

There are several demonstrative pronouns in Italian, but the most commonly used are “quello” (that) and “questo” (this).

“Questo” (this) is used for people, things and events that are close to the speaker (in time or space).

“Quello” (that), on the other hand, is used for people, things and events that are far away in space or time - in comparison to the person speaking.

💬 Examples

Questa settimana andiamo al mare. – This week we are travelling to the sea.

Queste scarpe (f) sono nuove! – These shoes are new!

Quelle scarpe sono vecchie. – Those shoes are old.

Queste scarpe sono mie, **quelle** sono tue. – These shoes are mine, those are yours.

Quel pomeriggio faceva molto freddo. – It was very cold that afternoon.

Quello zaino è pesante. – That backpack is heavy.

Mi piace **questo** vino più di **quello**. – I like this wine, more than that.

Demonstrative pronouns in Italian

singular		plural	
m	questo	m	questi
f	questa	f	queste
m	quello, quell', quel*	m	quelli, quegli*
f	quella, quell'*	f	quelle

* If you wonder, when to use which of these forms, please look up the chapter on the [definite article in Italian](#). Here, the same rules apply.

The Interrogative Pronouns in Italian

Interrogative pronouns are words used to ask questions in Italian. They replace the noun or pronoun in a sentence, allowing you to inquire about something specific.

The most commonly used interrogative pronouns in Italian are:

- Chi? – Who?
- Che? / Cosa? / Che cosa? – What?
- Quale? / Quali? – Which? / Which ones?
- Quanto? / Quanta? / Quanti? / Quante? – How much? / How many?

Here's how these pronouns work:

“**Chi**” is an essential interrogative pronoun in Italian, used to ask questions about people.

It remains the same for both singular and plural, as well as for masculine and feminine nouns.

Examples

Chi è quella ragazza? – Who is that girl?

Chi ha telefonato? – Who called?

Chi sono i tuoi amici? – Who are your friends?

Che? / Cosa? / Che cosa? – What?

These three interrogative pronouns are interchangeable and used to ask questions about things or actions.

They do not change according to gender or number.

💬 Examples

Che/Cosa/Che cosa fai? – What are you doing?

Che/Cosa/Che cosa vuoi mangiare? – What do you want to eat?

“**Quale**” and “**quali**” are used to ask questions about a specific choice or selection.

“Quale” is used for singular nouns, while “quali” is used for plural nouns.

These pronouns agree in gender and number with the noun they replace.

💬 Examples

Quale libro preferisci? – Which book do you prefer?

Quali film ti piacciono? – Which movies do you like?

Quale strada devo prendere? – Which road should I take?

Quanto? / Quanta? / Quanti? / Quante? – How much? / How many?

These interrogative pronouns are used to ask questions about quantities or amounts.

They change according to the gender and number of the noun they refer to.

💬 Examples

Quanto zucchero vuoi nel caffè? – How much sugar do you want in your coffee?

Quanta pasta abbiamo? – How much pasta do we have?

Quanti amici hai? – How many friends do you have?

Quante persone ci sono alla festa? – How many people are at the party?

Combining Interrogative Pronouns with Prepositions

In Italian, it is common to combine interrogative pronouns with [prepositions](#), such as “di,” “a,” “da,” “in,” and “con.”

... Examples

Di chi è questa penna? – Whose pen is this?

A che ora inizia il film? – At what time does the movie start?

Da quale stazione parte il treno? – From which station does the train leave?

In quale città vivi? – In which city do you live?

Con chi vai al cinema? – With whom are you going to the cinema?

The Relative Pronouns in Italian

Relative pronouns (**pronomi relativi**) are used in Italian to connect two sentences.

They also specify the previously mentioned subject of a main clause in a subordinate clause.

The pronoun “**che**” (who, which, that) is the most frequently used relative pronoun.

It is used to replace the subject or the object of a sentence.

It does not change its form.

... Examples

La ragazza **che** vedi è mia sorella. – The girl who you see is my sister.

Questa è la spiaggia **che** abbiamo scoperto l'anno scorso. – This is the beach that we discovered last year.

The relative pronoun “**chi**” (who) is only used for people.

... Example

Parli con **chi** è responsabile per la prenotazione. – Speak to the person responsible for the booking.

The Italian relative pronoun “**cui**” (whom, which) is used after prepositions and refers to people or things.

Example

Queste sono le mie amiche con **cui** esco oggi. – These are the friends who I'm going out with today.

Il film di **cui** stiamo parlando è famoso. – The movie which we are talking about is famous.



Sentence Structure in Italian

Please understand that this chapter is a compilation of many facts and rules that you have studied so far.

Here, we will give you an overview of key points to remember about sentence structure in Italian.

We will mostly focus on differences between Italian and English and point out what you need to keep in mind.

In the chapter with the [personal pronouns](#) in Italian, you read that subject pronouns in Italian are often omitted.

Do you remember these examples?

Please, read through them carefully and get acquainted with this unfamiliar topic.

Examples

(**Io**) Vado al mare. – I'm going to the sea.

(**Tu**) Parli Italiano. – You speak Italian.

Lei parla Italiano. – She speaks Italian.

Lui parla Italiano. – He speaks Italian.

(**Noi**) Siamo al mare. – We are at the sea.

(**Voi**) vivete a Udine. – You (pl) live in Udine.

(**Loro**) Vivono a Roma. – They live in Rome.

Italian also distinguishes between formal and informal speech and uses different [personal pronouns](#) (“tu” and “Lei”).

“Tu” is used among family and friends and between people of the same age.

“Lei” is more formal and is used between people that do not know each other or in a professional context. It’s also common to address someone who is older.

Please, remember the verb form is different with each pronoun.

💬 Examples

Tu vuoi un caffè? – Would you (informal) like a coffee?

Lei desidera un caffè? – Would you (formal) like a coffee?

When both, direct and indirect [object pronouns](#), are used within the Italian sentence, both pronouns will be found before the verb.

💬 Examples

Do un libro a mia sorella. – I give my sister a book.

Glielo do. – I give it to her.

Michele ti fa un regalo. – Michele gives you a present.

Te lo dà. – He gives it to you.

When thinking about word order in an Italian sentence, please remember that [Italian adjectives](#) often stand behind a noun.

💬 Examples

il ragazzo **americano** – the **American** boy

il ministro **democratico** – the **democratic** minister

la suora **cattolica** – the **Catholic** nun

la macchina **bianca, bella e veloce** – the **white, beautiful** and **fast** car



The Negation in Italian Sentences

In Italian, we use the word “non” (no, not) to negate a sentence.

☞ Example

Parlo inglese. – I speak English.

Non parlo italiano. – I do not speak Italian.

Non capisco. – I don’t understand.

⚠ Please, note that “non” is placed in front of the Italian verb. In English the word “not” is used after an auxiliary verb to form the negation.

☞ Examples

Non voglio andare. – I don’t want to go.

Non abbiamo tempo. – We don’t have time.

That’s new - Italian knows a double negation!

Unlike in English, in Italian a double negative is grammatically correct.

☞ Examples

Non ho **niente** da dire. – I have nothing to say.

A literal translation of this Italian sentence would be:

I do not have nothing to say.

Non ha **ancora** finito. – He, She has not finished yet.

Please, remember these words. They are most commonly used to form double negations.

ancora – yet, still

mai – never

nessuno – nobody, no one

niente – nothing

nulla – nothing

Italian Prepositions

Italian prepositions (**preposizioni**) can be a bit tricky for English speakers since the usage doesn't always align perfectly with English.

When do we use prepositions?

Prepositions in Italian, just like in English, are words that link nouns, pronouns, or phrases to other words in a sentence. They often describe relationships in space, time, or logic.

The most commonly used prepositions in Italian

The Italian preposition “**a**” is used to ...

... name the locations of persons and things.

☞ Example

Mangiamo **al** ristorante. – We eat at the restaurant.

... talk about cities.

☞ Example

Sono **a** Roma. – I'm in Rome.

Vivo **a** Milano. – I live in Milan.

... tell the time.

☞ Example

Vengo **alle** tre. – I will come at three (o'clock).

... together with specific dates, like public holidays.

☞ Example

Che cosa fai **a** Pasqua? – What do you do at Easter?

The Italian preposition “**in**” is used to ...

... describe places.

☞ Example

Sono **in** biblioteca. – I'm in the library.

... talk about countries or regions.

☞ Example

Vivo **in** Italia. – I live in Italy.

... name months, years and seasons.

☞ Examples

Andiamo al mare **in** agosto. – We are going to the sea in August.

nel 2030 – (in the year) 2030

in estate – in summer

... refer to all means of transport.

☞ Example

Vengo **in** macchina. – I'm coming by car.

The Italian preposition “**di**” is used to ...

... name possessions.

☞ Example

la casa **di** Maria – Maria's house

... describe material.

☞ Example

un vestito **di** lana – a woolen dress

... name the origin of persons and things.

☞ Example

Siamo **di** Inghilterra. – We are from England.

... describe content and contents.

☞ Example

una bottiglia **di** latte – a bottle of milk

The Italian preposition “**da**” is used to ...

... describe places together with people.

☞ Example

Vado **dal** medico. – I'm going to the doctor's office.

... name the starting point of a movement.

☞ Example

Vengo **dal** cinema. – I'm coming from the cinema.

... talk about the purpose of persons and things.

☞ Example

lo spazzolino **da** denti – the toothbrush (brush for the teeth)

When Italian prepositions and articles meet ...

When Italian prepositions and articles meet, something happens: they contract into one word.

When some simple prepositions (especially “di”, “a”, “da”, “in” or “su”) combine with [definite articles](#) (il, la, lo, i, gli, le), they create new, so-called “contracted prepositions”.

Here, you will find some examples from which you can deduct all the rules for the contracted forms.

a + il → **al**

 al parco

 to the park, at the park

a + la → **alla**

 alla casa

 to the house, at the house

di + il → **del**

 del libro

 of the book

di + la → **della**

 della casa

 of the house

di + lo → **dello**

 dello zaino

 of the backpack

di + i → **dei**

 dei bambini

 of the children

di + gli → **degli**

 degli amici

 of the friends

di + le → **delle**

 delle ragazze

 of the girls

Italian numbers from zero to ten

Let's learn to count to ten in Italian!

0	zero	zero
1	uno	one
2	due	two
3	tre	three
4	quattro	four
5	cinque	five
6	sei	six
7	sette	seven
8	otto	eight
9	nove	nine
10	dieci	ten

In Italian, all numbers except for the number one are invariable, i.e. they do not change to match the gender of the noun that follows.

Examples

due libri – two books

cinque libri – five books

The number one, on the other hand, behaves like the [indefinite article](#) in Italian.

It agrees with the noun to which it refers in terms of grammatical gender.

Examples

un libro – a book

uno studente – a student

un albero – a tree

una sedia – a chair

un'amica – a girlfriend

Let's learn to count in Italian: numbers eleven to twenty

Learn to count to twenty in Italian!

11	undici	eleven
12	dodici	twelve
13	tredici	thirteen
14	quattordici	fourteen
15	quindici	fifteen
16	sedici	sixteen
17	diciassette	seventeen
18	diciotto	eighteen
19	diciannove	nineteen
20	venti	twenty

Italian numbers from eleven to sixteen are formed by adding the suffix “-dici”.

For numbers 17 to 19, “dici-” is placed **before** the number, so (diciassette) is pronounced like ‘ten-seven’.

Also note that numbers 17 and 19 carry a double consonant.

Examples

Ho due fratelli e tre sorelle. – I have two brothers and three sisters.

Ho comprato cinque mele. – I have bought five apples.

Giovanni ha diciannove anni. – Giovanni is nineteen years old.

Vorrei duecentocinquanta grammi di pomodori. – I would like two hundred and fifty grams of tomatoes.

L'albergo costa duecento euro a notte. – The hotel costs two hundred euros per night.

Mio padre ha sessantadue anni. – My father is sixty-two years old.

Devi comprare un chilo di fragole e cinquecento grammi di prosciutto cotto. – You have to buy a kilo of strawberries and five hundred grams of cooked ham.

Abbiamo bisogno di tre sedie a sdraio e due ombrelloni. – We need three deckchairs and two parasols.