

Essential Italian

A beginner phrasebook



What's in this phrasebook?

1	Italian pronunciation	02
2	Numbers, days, months, and time	04
3	The basics	06
4	Personal details	08
5	At the restaurant	11
6	At the shop	13
7	On the bus/train	15
8	Asking for directions	17

ITALIAN PRONUNCIATION

Italian is easy!

Italian pronunciation can seem anything but simple as a beginner. But though it might seem intimidating, it is actually very easy. Italian is indeed a phonetic language and this means that once you learn the rules, you can correctly pronounce any Italian word you see!

The Italian alphabet

Italian uses the same alphabet as English, so there are no new symbols for you to memorize. Let's take a look at it letter by letter!

A is always pronounced like the a in the word "*bar*"

B is pronounced exactly the same sound as in English

C is a bit tricky:

- if followed by "e" and "i" it sounds like the "ch" in "*cheese*"
- if followed by "h" or other vowels it sounds like the "c" in "*cut*"

D is pronounced exactly the same as in English

E can be open like the "e" in "*net*" or closed like the "a" in "*say*"

F is pronounced exactly the same as in English

G is tricky like letter "c":

- if followed by "i" it will be pronounced like the "j" in "*jumble*"
- if followed by "n" they will sound like the Spanish "ñ" (think of "ny" in "*onion*")
- if followed by other letters it is pronounced the same as in English

H is only ever used to define the pronunciation of letters "c" and "g"

I is always pronounced like the "ee" sound in "*see*"

J is exactly the same as in English

K is exactly the same as in English

L is exactly the same as in English

M is exactly the same as in English

N is exactly the same as in English, except when used in the "gn" combination

O is always pronounced like the "o" in "*horse*"

P is exactly the same as in English

Q is always pronounced like the letter "k" in the English word "*make*"

R is slightly rolled with the top of the tongue touching the roof of the mouth

S is exactly the same as in English

T is exactly the same as in English

U is always pronounced like the "oo" sound in "*boo*"

V is exactly the same as in English

W is exactly the same as in English

X is exactly the same as in English

Y is exactly the same as in English

Z is always pronounced like the “ts” sound in the English word “mats”

The three most common mistakes foreigners make in Italian pronunciation

When new Italian speakers get tripped up, it's almost always on just a handful of letter combos, which I'll go over here.

1. The GN sound

If you freeze up every time you try to order gnocchi in a restaurant, you are not alone. But this combination is easier than it looks: just think of it as the sound “ny” in “onion”. That's more or less what “gn” in Italian sounds like!

E.g. Gnocchi, agnello, bagno

2. The GLI sound

You will find this letter combination in many words. One thing you should remember is that it's not pronounced how it looks, but is instead more similar to “lli” in the English word “million”.

E.g. Figlio, neglio, dagli, maglietta

3. The SCE/SCI sound

This sound is not actually hard to pronounce, but it takes time to build the habit of pronouncing it the Italian way and not like in English. When “sc” is followed by an “e” or an “i”, “sc” is pronounced the way you pronounce “sh” in English.

E.g. Conoscere, scena, pesce

NUMBERS, DAYS, MONTHS & TIME

Let's talk numbers

Welcome to the chapter about numbers! We're diving into the world of Italian numbers, from counting to telling time. It's gonna be fun, easy, and super useful!

Numbers up to 10

1 uno	2 due	3 tre	4 quattro	5 cinque	6 sei
7 sette	8 otto	9 nove	10 dieci		

Numbers up to 20

11 undici	12 dodici	13 tredici	14 quattordici	15 quindici	16 sedici
17 diciassette	18 diciotto	19 diciannove	20 venti		

Tens from 10 to 100

10 dieci	20 venti	30 trenta	40 quaranta	50 cinquanta	60 sessanta
70 settanta	80 ottanta	90 novanta	100 cento		

Deep-dive: How to build the other numbers?

Numbers beyond 20 are constructed by combining the words for the tens with the units. Let's make an example: 36 is "trentasei", where "trenta" (thirty) is followed by "sei" (six). This pattern continues with numbers up to 99.

Days of the week

monday lunedì	tuesday martedì	wednesday mercoledì	thursday giovedì	friday venerdì
saturday sabato	sunday domenica			

Months of the year

january gennaio	february febbraio	march marzo	april aprile	may maggio
june giugno	july luglio	august agosto	september settembre	october ottobre
november novembre	december dicembre			

Being able to express time in Italian is an essential skill for navigating daily life. Therefore, we'll learn how to ask for and tell the time in Italian. From "Che ora è?" (What time is it?) to discussing morning, afternoon, and evening, let's dive into the world of Italian timekeeping!

Useful sentences

What time is it?	Che ora è?
It's [TIME]	Sono le [HOUR] e [MINUTES]
It's noon	È mezzogiorno
It's midnight	È mezzanotte
It's early / late	È presto / tardi
Can we meet at [TIME]?	Possiamo incontrarci alle [TIME]?
The lesson starts at [TIME]	La lezione inizia alle [TIME]

Vocabulary: Days

day: giorno
week: settimana
month: mese
year: anno
today: oggi
yesterday: ieri
tomorrow: domani
morning: mattina
afternoon: pomeriggio
evening: sera
night: notte

hour: ora
minute: minuto
second: secondo
noon: mezzogiorno
midnight: mezzanotte
sharp: in punto
early: presto
late: tardi
next (week): la prossima (settimana)
last (week): la scorsa (settimana)
this (week): questa (settimana)

THE BASICS

The very beginning

In this section, we'll cover the essential phrases and expressions you need to kick off conversations and interact comfortably in Italian-speaking environments. From greetings to asking how someone is doing, and expressing thanks, mastering these basics will set a solid foundation for your Italian journey. Let's start building those skills!

Useful sentences

Hello!	Ciao!
Hi!	Salve!
Good morning!	Buongiorno!
Good afternoon!	Buon pomeriggio!
Good evening!	Buonasera!
Good night!	Buonanotte!
How are you?	Come stai?
How's it going?	Come va?
Everything okay?	Tutto bene?
I'm good, thanks	Sto bene, grazie
Not bad, and you?	Non male, e tu?
So-so	Così così
Thank you!	Grazie!
Thanks a lot!	Grazie mille!
Many thanks!	Molte grazie!
And you?	E tu?
Sorry	Scusa
I apologize	Mi scuso
It's okay	Non fa niente

Please

Per favore

Excuse me

Con permesso

Deep-dive: Formal VS Informal

In Italian, there's an important distinction between formal and informal language, which impacts communication in various social contexts.

Formal language, often used with older individuals, authorities, or strangers, is characterized by the use of the pronoun "Lei" instead of "tu" and the use of more complex verb forms. This type of language is accompanied by a respectful and polite tone and often includes courtesy expressions like "per favore" (please) and "grazie" (thank you).

Informal language, on the other hand, is more colloquial and is used with friends, family, or younger individuals. In this case, the pronoun "tu" is used, and verb forms are simpler and more direct. The tone is usually more relaxed and friendly, and courtesy expressions may be less frequent.

Understanding when to use formal and informal language to ensure appropriate and respectful communication in different situations is really important. But to start, let's just make a simple example:

Formal language

Good morning, Mrs. Rossi. How are you today? *Buongiorno, signora Rossi. Come sta oggi?*

Informal language

Hi, Maria! How are you? *Ciao, Maria! Come va?*

PERSONAL DETAILS

Introductions

Whether you're meeting new friends, colleagues, or acquaintances, being able to exchange basic personal information is essential for establishing connections and building relationships. From sharing your name and nationality to discussing where you live, your family, and your occupation, this section will equip you with the language skills needed to navigate introductions with confidence!

Discussing names

What's your name?	Come ti chiami?
Can you tell me your name?	Mi puoi dire il tuo nome?
My name is...	Il mio nome è....
I'm called...	Mi chiamo...
I am...	Sono...

Discussing age

How old are you?	Quanti anni hai?
I'm [AGE] years old	Ho [AGE] anni

Deep-dive: The verb "avere" when discussing age

In Italian, when discussing age, the verb "avere" (to have) is used instead of "essere" (to be). For instance, when asking someone how old they are, one would say "Quanti anni hai?" rather than "Quanti anni sei?" As a response, the verb "avere" is used followed by the age. For example, "Ho 25 anni" literally means "I have 25 years," but it translates to "I am 25 years old."

This construction may seem slightly different from English, but it's essential to remember that in Italian, "avere" is used for age, whereas "essere" is used for other personal characteristics such as name, nationality, and profession.

Discussing nationalities

What nationality are you?	Di che nazionalità sei?
What's your nationality?	Qual è la tua nazionalità?

Where are you from?

Da dove vieni?

I am [NATIONALITY]

Io sono [NATIONALITY]

I come from [COUNTRY]

Vengo da [COUNTRY]

Vocabulary: Countries and Nationalities

Italy: Italia

France: Francia

Germany: Germania

Spain: Spagna

United Kingdom: Regno Unito

United States: Stati Uniti

Mexico: Messico

Brazil: Brasile

Argentina: Argentina

India: India

Canada: Canada

Australia: Australia

Italian: italiano/a

French: francese

German: tedesco/a

Spanish: spagnolo/a

English: inglese

American: americano/a

Mexican: messicano/a

Brazilian: brasiliano/a

Argentinean: argentino/a

Indian: indiano/a

Canadian: canadese

Australian: australiano/a

Discussing jobs

What do you do for a living?

Che lavoro fai?

What's your profession?

Qual è la tua professione?

Where do you work?

Dove lavori?

I am a/an [JOB TITLE]

Sono un/una [JOB TITLE]

I work as a/an [JOB TITLE]

Lavoro come [JOB TITLE]

I work for a [JOB] company

Lavoro per una società di [JOB]

Vocabulary: Jobs

entrepreneur: imprenditore

teacher: insegnante

lawyer: avvocato

architect: architetto

programmer: programmatore/trice

artist: artista

musician: musicista

writer: scrittore/trice

doctor: medico

nurse: infermiere/a

engineer: ingegnere

employee: impiegato/a

journalist: giornalista

actor: attore/trice

painter: pittore/trice

plumber: idraulico

photographer: fotografo/a
waiter: cameriere/a
police officer: poliziotto/a
pharmacist: farmacista

electrician: elettricista
carpenter: falegname
bricklayer: muratore
gardener: giardiniere

Discussing housing

Where do you live?

Dove abiti?

What's your address?

Qual è il tuo indirizzo?

In which city do you live?

In quale città vivi?

I live in [CITY]

Vivo a [CITY]

My address is...

Il mio indirizzo è...

Discussing family

Do you have siblings?

Hai fratelli o sorelle?

Are you married?

Sei sposato/a?

Do you have children?

Hai figli?

I have a brother/sister

Ho un fratello/sorella

I'm an only child

Sono figlio/a unico/a

Vocabulary: Family

family: famiglia

parents: genitori

father: padre

mother: madre

son/daughter: figlio/figlia

brother: fratello

sister: sorella

grandfather: nonno

grandmother: nonna

husband: marito

wife: moglie

uncle: zio

aunt: zia

cousin: cugino/a

FOOD & RESTAURANTS

At the restaurant

Dining out at a restaurant is a common and enjoyable experience. This chapter will guide you through the various stages of a restaurant dinner, learning how to interact with restaurant staff politely and effectively.

Useful sentences

I'd like to make a reservation	Vorrei fare una prenotazione
Do you have a free table for two?	Avete un tavolo libero per due?
I have a reservation for two	Ho una prenotazione per due
What do you recommend?	Cosa consiglia?
I would like the dish of the day	Vorrei il piatto del giorno
What's the house specialty?	Qual è la specialità della casa?
Do you have vegetarian options?	Avete opzioni vegetariane?
What's in this dish?	Cosa c'è in questo piatto?
I would like the [DISH]	Vorrei il [DISH]
I would like to pay	Vorrei pagare
Can we split the bill?	Possiamo dividere il conto?
Do you accept credit cards?	Accettate carte di credito?

Vocabulary: Allergies & Intolerances

allergy: allergia

intolerance: intolleranza

celiac disease: celiachia

gluten: glutine

lactose: lattosio

nuts: noci

soy: soia

seafood: pesce

vegetarian: vegetariano

vegan: vegano

sugar-free diet: dieta senza zuccheri

Vocabulary: Foods & Utensils

appetizer: antipasto

first course: primo piatto

main course: secondo piatto

side dish: contorno

dessert: dolce

beverages: bevande

menu: menù

table: tavolo

chair: sedia

cutlery: posate

fork: forchetta

knife: coltello

spoon: cucchiaio

glass: bicchiere

bottle: bottiglia

carafe: caraffa

saucer: piattino

napkin: tovagliolo

bill/check: conto

to pay: pagare

ingredient: ingrediente

service: servizio

pasta: pasta

risotto: risotto

soup: zuppa

salad: insalata

meat: carne

fish: pesce

poultry: pollame

vegetables: verdure

potatoes: patate

rice: riso

bread: pane

cheese: formaggio

fruit: frutta

ice cream: gelato

cake: torta

wine: vino

beer: birra

soft drink: bibita

water: acqua

juice: succo

coffee: caffè

tea: tè

SHOPS & SHOPPING

At the shop

This chapter will guide you through the various stages of a shopping experience, from searching for products to selecting and making final purchases. Whether you're shopping for clothes, gifts, or household items, you'll be ready to tackle every situation with confidence.

Useful sentences

Can you help me please?	Mi puoi aiutare per favore?
How much does it cost?	Quanto costa?
Where are the fitting rooms?	Dove sono i camerini?
Where can I try it on?	Dove posso provarlo?
Can I try it on?	Posso provarlo?
I would like to try it on	Vorrei provarlo
Do you have this in another size?	Ce l'avete in un'altra taglia?
Do you have it in another color?	Ce l'avete in un altro colore?
Can you recommend me [ITEM]?	Puoi consigliarmi [ITEM]?
Where can I pay?	Dove posso pagare?
Where is the cash register?	Dov'è la cassa?
Do you accept credit cards?	Accettate carte di credito?
Can I pay in cash?	Posso pagare in contanti?
How much does it cost?	Quanto costa?
How much is it in total?	Quanto è in totale?
Is there a warranty on this?	C'è la garanzia su questo?
Could you give me the receipt?	Puoi farmi lo scontrino?
What should I do if it's defective?	Cosa devo fare se è difettato?
Can I return this article?	Posso restituire questo articolo?

I would like to return it

Dove sono i camerini?

Where can I try it on?

Vorrei restituirlo

Vocabulary: Clothes & Payments

t-shirt: maglietta

shirt: camicia

trousers/pants: pantaloni

jeans: jeans

skirt: gonna

dress: abito/vestito

jacket: giacca

coat: cappotto

sweater: maglione

sweatshirt: felpa

tank top: canottiera

pajamas: pigiama

shoes: scarpe

boots: stivali

socks: calzini

hat: cappello

belt: cintura

gloves: guanti

scarf: sciarpa

bag: borsa

backpack: zaino

wallet: portafoglio

sunglasses: occhiali da sole

watch: orologio

necklace: collana

bracelet: bracciale

ring: anello

earrings: orecchini

cash: contanti

credit card: carta di credito

debit card: carta di debito

receipt: scontrino/ricevuta

discount: sconto

price: prezzo

total: totale

change: resto

warranty: garanzia

fitting room: camerino

shopping bag: borsa della spesa

size: taglia

color: colore

return: reso/restituzione

exchange: cambio

sale: saldi

MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION

On the bus / train

Traveling by bus or train is convenient for getting around in many cities and countries. This is why you'll have to learn how to ask for information, find your seat, and communicate with drivers and conductors!

Useful sentences

I would like a one-way ticket	Vorrei un biglietto di sola andata
How much does the ticket cost?	Quanto costa il biglietto?
Does this train go to [CITY]?	Questo treno va a [CITY]?
What time does the bus arrive?	A che ora arriva il bus?
Where can I find the platform?	Dove posso trovare il binario?
Does the train for [CITY] leave from this platform?	Il treno per [CITY] parte da questo binario?
How many stops are there before the last station?	Quante fermate ci sono prima dell'ultima stazione?
Is this seat taken?	Questo posto è occupato?
Excuse me, this is my seat	Mi scusi, questo è il mio posto
This is my stop	Questa è la mia fermata
I get off at the next stop	Scendo alla prossima fermata
Where do I need to get off to go to [DESTINATION]?	Dove devo scendere per andare a [DESTINATION]?
What time does the bus leave?	A che ora parte il bus?
Is the station far from here?	La stazione è lontana da qui?
Is the train running late?	Il treno è in ritardo?
How long does it take to get to [DESTINATION]?	Quanto tempo ci vuole per arrivare a [DESTINATION]?
What time will we arrive to our destination?	A che ora arriveremo a destinazione?

Vocabulary: Means of transportation

bus: autobus

train: treno

car: macchina

bicycle: bicicletta

motorcycle: moto

ship: nave

ferry: traghetto

airplane: aereo

taxi: taxi

subway: metro

tram: tram

cable car: funivia

stop: fermata

ticket: biglietto

schedule: orario

platform: binario

destination: destinazione

departure: partenza

arrival: arrivo

seat: posto

conductor: controllore

driver: autista

delay: ritardo

transfer: cambio

DIRECTIONS

Learning directions

When we find ourselves in a new or unfamiliar place, asking for directions is essential to orient ourselves and reach our destination. This chapter will provide you with the phrases and skills necessary to ask for and give directions effectively and clearly!

Useful sentences

Excuse me, can you tell me how to get to [PLACE]?	Mi scusi, mi può dire come arrivare a [PLACE]?
Could you point me to the way to the [PLACE]?	Puoi indicarmi la strada per [PLACE]?
Where is the nearest [PLACE]?	Dov'è [PLACE] più vicino?
Where can I find [PLACE]?	Dove trovo [PLACE]?
Do you know where [PLACE] is?	Sai dov'è [PLACE]?
Go straight until [PLACE]	Vai dritto fino a [PLACE]
Turn left/right	Gira a sinistra/destra
Continue straight for [N] meters	Continua dritto per [N] metri
Take the first left/right	Prendi la prima a sinistra/destra
Cross the [PLACE]	Attraversa [PLACE]
You'll find it on your left/right	Lo trovi alla tua sinistra/destra
It's in front of the [PLACE]	Si trova di fronte a [PLACE]
It's nearby the [PLACE]	Si trova vicino a [PLACE]
It's on the corner with [PLACE]	Si trova all'angolo con [PLACE]
It's next to the [PLACE]	Si trova di fianco a [PLACE]
Is this the way to [PLACE]	Questa è la strada per [PLACE]?
Are we on the right road to the [PLACE]?	Siamo sulla giusta strada per [PLACE]?

Vocabulary: Directions

direction: direzione

destination: destinazione

right: destra

left: sinistra

straight: dritto

intersection: incrocio

straight ahead: sempre dritto

to turn: girare

to cross: attraversare

to follow: seguire

route: percorso

road/street: strada

square: piazza

bridge: ponte

roundabout: rotonda

exit: uscita

entrance: ingresso

post office: ufficio postale

supermarket: supermercato

station: stazione

bus stop: fermata dell'autobus

hospital: ospedale

museum: museo

theater: teatro

downtown: centro città

airport: aeroporto

train station: stazione del treno