How Italian sounds La pronuncia

The trick: Italian is written the way it sounds. Every vowel is said clearly, even at the end of a word. Only c, g and a few letter pairs change, and double letters are held longer. Learn these, and you can read anything aloud.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a, i, u	ah, ee, oo: always clear, even at the end	**casa** house
e	e in bed, or a short ay	**bene** well
o	o in pot, or a short o in go	**notte** night
c + e, i	ch in church	**cena** dinner
ch	k	**che** what, that
g + e, i	j in jam	**gelato** ice cream
gh	g in go	**spaghetti** spaghetti
cia, gio, ciu	the i is silent, it only softens the c or g	**giorno** day
gli	lli in million	**figlio** son
gn	ny in canyon	**bagno** bathroom
sc + e, i	sh in shoe	**pesce** fish
sch	sk	**schermo** screen
z, zz	ts in cats, sometimes dz	**pizza** pizza
s	s in sun, often z between vowels	**rosa** rose
h	always silent	**ho** I have
qu	kw	**quando** when
r	a tap of the tongue tip, rolled when doubled	**terra** earth, ground
nn, tt, ll	double letters: hold the sound a moment longer	**nonno / nono** grandpa / ninth
stress	usually on the second to last syllable	**amico** friend
à, è, ì, ò, ù	an accent on the last vowel: stress it there	**città** city

il · lo

masculine

il padre, il libro, lo zio

la

feminine

la madre, la casa, la città

l'

before a vowel

l'acqua (f), l'amico (m)

il, lo or la: every noun is masculine or feminine, and the ending usually tells you. Words ending in -o are almost always masculine, and -a words are usually feminine. Words ending in -e can be either, so learn each noun with its article. lo replaces il before s plus a consonant, z, gn and ps: lo studente, lo zio.

The first 221 words Le prime parole

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Greetings and survival

Ciao
hi, bye *(casual)*

Buongiorno
good morning, hello

Buonasera
good evening

Buonanotte
good night

Salve
hello *(neutral)*

Arrivederci
goodbye

A presto
see you soon

Grazie
thanks

Grazie mille
thanks a lot *(a thousand thanks)*

Prego
you're welcome, go ahead

Per favore
please

Scusa
sorry, excuse me *(casual)*

Scusi
sorry, excuse me *(polite)*

Mi dispiace
I'm sorry

Sì
yes

No
no

Va bene
OK, fine

Come stai?
how are you? *(casual)*

Come sta?
how are you? *(polite)*

Bene, grazie
fine, thanks

Piacere
nice to meet you

Non capisco
I don't understand

Non lo so
I don't know

Cin cin!
cheers!

Buon appetito
enjoy your meal

Question words

cosa
what

chi
who

dove
where

di dove
where from

quando
when

perché
why, because

come
how

quanto
how much

quale
which

Me and you

io
I

tu
you *(casual)*

lui
he

lei / Lei
she / you *(polite)*

noi
we

voi
you all

loro
they

mio / mia
my *(il word / la word)*

tuo / tua
your *(casual)*

questo / quello
this / that

Little words

e
and

ma
but

o
or

anche
also, too

molto
very, a lot

solo
only

già
already

ancora
still, again

qui
here

lì
there

con
with

senza
without

per
for

più
more

meno
less

tu or Lei: tu is for friends, family, kids and anyone your age. Lei is for strangers, shops and work, and it takes the same verb as she: Come sta? If you're not sure, use Lei and wait to be offered tu.

People and time Le persone e il tempo

Family

la madre
mother

il padre
father

la mamma
mom

il papà
dad

il fratello
brother

la sorella
sister

il figlio
son

la figlia
daughter

la nonna
grandmother

il nonno
grandfather

lo zio
uncle

i genitori
parents

la famiglia
family

People

la persona
person

la gente
people *(singular in Italian)*

l'uomo
man *(m)*

la donna
woman

il bambino
child, little boy

la bambina
little girl

il ragazzo
boy, boyfriend

la ragazza
girl, girlfriend

l'amico
friend *(m)*

l'amica
friend *(f)*

lo studente
student

l'insegnante
teacher *(m or f)*

When

oggi
today

domani
tomorrow

ieri
yesterday

adesso
now

la mattina
morning

il pomeriggio
afternoon

la sera
evening

la notte
night

il tempo
time, weather

l'ora
hour, the time *(f)*

la settimana
week

il fine settimana
weekend

l'anno
year *(m)*

Days of the week

lunedì
Monday

martedì
Tuesday

mercoledì
Wednesday

giovedì
Thursday

venerdì
Friday

sabato
Saturday

domenica
Sunday

No need for io: the verb ending already says who: parlo is I speak, parli is you speak. io and tu are only added for stress.

Days are small: days and months have no capital letter: lunedì, a gennaio. Il lunedì means on Mondays.

Numbers and food I numeri e il cibo

Numbers

zero
0

uno
1

due
2

tre
3

quattro
4

cinque
5

sei
6

sette
7

otto
8

nove
9

dieci
10

undici
11

dodici
12

venti
20

trenta
30

cento
100

mille
1,000

Food and drink

l'acqua
water *(f)*

il caffè
coffee *(an espresso)*

il tè
tea

il latte
milk

la birra
beer

il vino
wine

il pane
bread

la pizza
pizza

il formaggio
cheese

la carne
meat

il pollo
chicken

il pesce
fish

la mela
apple

lo zucchero
sugar

la colazione
breakfast

il pranzo
lunch

la cena
dinner

buonissimo
delicious

Ho fame
I'm hungry

Il conto, per favore
the bill, please

Joining numbers: tens and units join into one word: ventidue is 22. Before uno and otto the last vowel drops: ventuno is 21, ventotto is 28.

l' before a vowel: il and la shrink to l' before a vowel: l'acqua, l'amico. That hides the gender, so those words carry (m) or (f). In the plural, il becomes i, lo and l' (m) become gli, and la and l' (f) become le: i libri, gli amici, le amiche.

Places, things, verbs Luoghi, cose, verbi

Two forms: most verbs end in -are, and for I you swap the ending for -o: parlare, parlo. Most -ere and -ire verbs do the same: vedere, vedo; dormire, dormo.

Places

la casa
house, home

a casa
at home

la scuola
school

il lavoro
work, job

l'ufficio
office *(m)*

il ristorante
restaurant

l'ospedale
hospital *(m)*

il bagno
bathroom, toilet

la stazione
train station

il negozio
shop

il bar
café, coffee bar

la città
town, city

la strada
street, road

l'Italia
Italy *(f)*

Things

il libro
book

il telefono
phone

i soldi
money *(plural in Italian)*

la chiave
key

la macchina
car

lo zaino
backpack

Verbs: dictionary / io form

essere / sono
be

avere / ho
have

andare / vado
go

venire / vengo
come

mangiare / mangio
eat

bere / bevo
drink

vedere / vedo
see

guardare / guardo
watch

fare / faccio
do, make

dormire / dormo
sleep

parlare / parlo
speak

imparare / imparo
learn

amare / amo
love

sapere / so
know *(a fact)*

conoscere / conosco
know *(a person, a place)*

volere / voglio
want

potere / posso
can

Describing words

buono / cattivo
good / bad

grande / piccolo
big / small

caldo / freddo
hot / cold

nuovo / vecchio
new / old

veloce / lento
fast / slow

bello / brutto
beautiful / ugly

facile / difficile
easy / hard

stanco
tired

I like: Italian says it pleases me: mi piace il caffè, I like coffee. For more than one thing it's mi piacciono: mi piacciono i gatti, I like cats.

Words every Italian show uses Le parole delle serie

Reactions

Davvero?
really?

Ma dai!
no way! come on!

Che bello!
how lovely!

Figo!
cool! *(slang)*

Esatto
exactly

Boh
dunno *(with a shrug)*

Allora
so, well then

Insomma
well, so-so

Magari!
I wish!

Non ne ho idea
no idea

Che ne so
how should I know

Andiamo!
let's go!

Aiuto!
help!

Basta!
enough! stop it!

Ti amo
I love you *(to a partner)*

Ti voglio bene
I love you *(family, friends)*

Mi manchi
I miss you *(you are missing to me)*

Lasciami in pace
leave me alone

Rude: on screen only

Accidenti!
darn! *(mild)*

Cavolo!
damn! *(mild, it means cabbage)*

Merda!
shit!

Cazzo!
f*** *(very common, strong)*

Stai zitto!
shut up!

Sei pazzo?
are you crazy?

What to call people

signore
Mr, sir

signora
Mrs, Ms, madam

tesoro
darling *(it means treasure)*

raga
guys *(slang, from ragazzi)*

Don't copy these: merda and cazzo are everywhere on screen, but rude. Cavolo and accidenti are the ones you can say in front of anyone.

Two kinds of love: ti amo is for a partner. For family and friends, Italians say ti voglio bene.

Practice Pratica

How: cover the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the Italian out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Hold the doubles: a double letter is held a beat longer, and it changes the word: nonno is grandpa, nono is ninth; caro is dear, carro is cart.

Questions by voice: a question looks just like a statement. Raise your voice at the end: Vieni? Are you coming?

Read these sentences

1. Ciao, mi chiamo Giulia.
   Hi, my name is Giulia.

2. Come ti chiami?
   What's your name?

3. Dov'è il bagno?
   Where is the bathroom?

4. Quanto costa?
   How much is it?

5. Un caffè, per favore.
   A coffee, please.

6. Mi piace la pizza.
   I like pizza.

7. Oggi fa molto caldo.
   It's very hot today.

8. Domani vedo il mio amico.
   Tomorrow I'm seeing my friend.

9. Questo è buonissimo!
   This is delicious!

10. Andiamo a casa!
    Let's go home!