Prepositions Le preposizioni

A handful of little words does most of the work: di, a, da, in, con, su, per and tra or fra. They rarely match English one to one: in Rome is a Roma, at home is a casa, by car is in macchina. So learn each one in chunks, with the words around it.

The main ones and their everyday jobs

di
of, 's, from (a town), about

il libro **di** Marco
Marco's book

Sono **di** Roma.
I'm from Rome.

Parliamo **di** calcio.
We're talking about football.

a
to, at, in (a town)

Abito **a** Torino.
I live in Turin.

Sono **a** casa.
I'm at home.

Scrivo **a** Luca.
I'm writing to Luca.

da
from, since, at someone's

il treno **da** Napoli
the train from Naples

Vado **da** Marta.
I'm going to Marta's.

Ti aspetto **da** un'ora!
I've been waiting for you for an hour!

in
in, into, to (a country), by

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

Vado **in** macchina.
I'm going by car.

Metti tutto **in** valigia.
Put everything in the suitcase.

con
with

Esco **con** Anna.
I'm going out with Anna.

Pago **con** la carta.
I'll pay by card.

il ragazzo **con** gli occhiali
the boy with glasses

su
on, about, out of

un film **su** Leonardo
a film about Leonardo

Cercalo **su** internet.
Look it up online.

tre **su** dieci
three out of ten

per
for, through, in order to

Parto **per** Londra.
I'm leaving for London.

Passiamo **per** Firenze.
We're going via Florence.

Sono qui **per** lavorare.
I'm here to work.

tra, fra
between, among, in (from now)

tra Roma e Napoli
between Rome and Naples

fra amici
among friends

tra cinque minuti
in five minutes

Small changes before a vowel: di often becomes d': d'accordo, all right, d'estate, in summer. And a can become ad before another a: ad Ancona, ad andare.

tra or fra? They mean exactly the same. Pick whichever sounds better: tra fratelli, fra tre giorni. That way you don't stack two tr or fr sounds.

After a preposition, I and you are me and te

con me with me · **per te** for you · **da lui** at his place · **tra noi** between us · **di voi** about you all · **per loro** for them

Not mi and ti: Vieni con me? Are you coming with me? Questo è per te, this is for you. He, she, we, you all and they stay lui, lei, noi, voi and loro.

More you'll meet, with no tricks

senza without · **sopra** on top of · **sotto** under · **dentro** inside · **fuori** outside · **dopo** after · **prima di** before

vicino a near · **davanti a** in front of · **dietro** behind · **verso** towards · **secondo** according to

The next page: when di, a, da, in or su meets the, the two words join into one: di + il is **del**, a + la is **alla**. That's where most mistakes happen, so page 2 has the whole table.

Joined forms Le preposizioni articolate

When a preposition meets the, they join. di + il is always **del**, never di il. Five prepositions do this every time, di, a, da, in and su, so here are all thirty-five forms in one table.

The whole table: the preposition, then the article

+ the	il most masculine words	lo s + consonant, z, gn, ps	l' before a vowel	la feminine	i plural of il	gli plural of lo and l'	le feminine plural
di of	del	dello	dell'	della	dei	degli	delle
a to, at	al	allo	all'	alla	ai	agli	alle
da from, at	dal	dallo	dall'	dalla	dai	dagli	dalle
in in	nel	nello	nell'	nella	nei	negli	nelle
su on	sul	sullo	sull'	sulla	sui	sugli	sulle

The recipe: di turns into de- and in into ne-, then the article goes on the end. If the article starts with l, the l doubles: de + la = **della**, a + lo = **allo**, su + l' = **sull'**. With il, just add an l: **del**, **al**, **nel**. With i and gli, nothing changes: **dei**, **negli**.

Which article? the same one the word takes on its own: lo zaino, so **nello** zaino; l'ufficio, so **dall'**ufficio; gli amici, so **agli** amici; le amiche, so **delle** amiche, as le never shortens.

In real sentences

La casa **dei** nonni è **in** campagna.
My grandparents' house is in the country.

Stasera vado **al** supermercato.
I'm going to the supermarket tonight.

Torno **dall'**ufficio **alle** sei.
I get back from the office at six.

Le chiavi sono **nella** borsa.
The keys are in the bag.

Il gatto dorme **sul** divano.
The cat is asleep on the sofa.

Ceniamo **dallo** zio Paolo.
We're having dinner at Uncle Paolo's.

Ho lasciato il telefono **sull'**autobus.
I left my phone on the bus.

Ho paura **degli** esami.
I'm scared of exams.

Metti il latte **nel** frigo.
Put the milk in the fridge.

Lo dico **alla** mamma!
I'm telling Mum!

Prendo il treno **delle** otto.
I'm getting the eight o'clock train.

Cosa c'è **nello** zaino?
What's in the rucksack?

con and per mostly stay apart

Write con il, con la, per il, per la. You will still meet col and coi, in speech and in writing: col tempo, over time, coi bambini, with the kids. The rest are old: collo and colla now mean neck and glue, and pel and pei live only in old books.

No article, nothing to join

Names, towns and many fixed phrases have no article, so the preposition stays as it is: di Marco, a Roma, in Italia, in macchina. With mio, tuo and suo the article stays and joins: **nella** mia borsa. Not with one family member: a mia madre, da mio padre.

Places and travel Dove?

a for towns, cities and small islands

a Roma in or to Rome **a Londra** London **a Parigi** Paris

a Capri Capri **a Cuba** Cuba

Abito **a** Milano ma lavoro **in** Svizzera.
I live in Milan but I work in Switzerland.

in for countries, regions, big islands

in Italia Italy **in Francia** France **in Toscana** Tuscany

in Sicilia Sicily, a big island **in Europa** Europe

Ad agosto andiamo **in** Sicilia.
We're going to Sicily in August.

Going or being, same word: vado a Roma, I'm going to Rome. Sono a Roma, I'm in Rome. Vado in Italia, sono in Italia. English switches between to and in, Italian doesn't.

How you get there: in, with no article

in treno by train **in macchina** by car

in aereo by plane **in autobus** by bus **in bici** by bike

a piedi on foot

Anything with wheels or wings takes in. Walking is the odd one out.

With the, in joins

Mia sorella vive **negli** Stati Uniti.
My sister lives in the United States.

Sono cresciuto **nell'**Italia **del** Sud.
I grew up in the south of Italy.

Lavoro **nel** centro **di** Roma.
I work in the centre of Rome. But: lavoro in centro.

Plural countries keep their article: **negli** Stati Uniti, **nei** Paesi Bassi. So do places with a describing word after them.

Everyday places: learn each one with its little word

a

a casa home

a scuola school

a letto bed

a teatro the theatre

in

in ufficio the office

in banca the bank

in centro the town centre

in biblioteca the library

in palestra the gym

in farmacia the chemist's

in montagna the mountains

in campagna the country

al, allo, all'

al mare the seaside

al cinema the cinema

al bar the café

al ristorante the restaurant

al parco the park

allo stadio the stadium

all'aeroporto the airport

all'università university

da

dal medico the doctor's

dal dentista the dentist's

dal parrucchiere the hairdresser's

da Marco Marco's place

da me my place

Shops ending in -ia take in: in farmacia, in pizzeria, in libreria, the bookshop. And da + a person or a job means at their place: **dal** medico, da Marco, da me, at my place.

No pattern for the rest: a scuola but in ufficio, **al** cinema but in palestra. Italians just know them, so learn them as chunks. They work for going and being: vado in banca, sono in banca.

Where from: di or da?

di + a town, with essere

Sono **di** Milano.
I'm from Milan. Where you belong, with essere.

Di dove sei?
Where are you from?

da + a place, on the move

Arrivo **da** Milano.
I'm coming from Milan. On the move.

Da dove vieni?
Where do you come from? Also where are you from?

For a country, use the adjective: sono italiana, sono inglese. Or say where you come from: vengo **dall'**Italia, vengo **dalla** Francia. Never sono di Italia.

Time Quando?

English uses for and in for nearly everything. Italian splits them up, depending on whether it's still going, already over, still to come, or how long it took.

	Examples		Good to know
da since, for: still going	Abito qui **da** tre anni. I've lived here for three years.	Studio italiano **dal** 2022. I've been learning Italian since 2022.	with the present: abito, I live, because it's still true
fa ago	L'ho visto due giorni **fa**. I saw him two days ago.	È uscita poco **fa**. She went out a little while ago.	it comes after the time, like ago
tra, fra in, from now	Arrivo **tra** dieci minuti. I'll be there in ten minutes.	Ci vediamo **fra** una settimana. See you in a week.	how long until it happens
in in, how long it takes	L'ho letto **in** due giorni. I read it in two days.	**In** inverno qui nevica spesso. It often snows here in winter.	also seasons and months: in estate, in maggio
per for: a set time, now over	Ho vissuto **a** Londra **per** due anni. I lived in London for two years.	Ho dormito dieci ore. I slept for ten hours.	often left out, like for in English
a at a time, in a month	Ci vediamo **alle** otto. See you at eight.	Parto **a** maggio. I'm leaving in May.	a maggio and in maggio are both fine
nel in a year	Sono nato **nel** 1990. I was born in 1990.	**Negli** anni Ottanta ero piccolo. I was little in the eighties.	years take il, so in + il = **nel**
di parts of the day	Lavoro **di** notte. I work nights.	**D'**estate andiamo **al** mare. In summer we go to the seaside.	di mattina, di sera, di notte, d'estate, d'inverno

The clock and the day

a + the hour: alle, all'

all'una at one **alle** due at two

alle otto e mezza at half past eight

a mezzogiorno at midday **a** mezzanotte at midnight

A che ora? at what time?

Hours take le, so a + le = **alle**. One o'clock is l'una, so **all'**una. Midday and midnight have no article.

di + a part of the day or a season

di mattina in the morning

di pomeriggio in the afternoon **di** sera in the evening

di notte at night **d'**estate in summer

d'inverno in winter

You'll also hear la mattina, la sera, with the same meaning.

da or per? abito qui **da** due anni: I still do. Ho abitato lì **per** due anni: that's over. Use da with the present for anything that hasn't stopped.

tra or in? arrivo **tra** dieci minuti: ten minutes from now. Lo faccio **in** dieci minuti: it takes me ten minutes to do.

From … to: lavoro **dalle** nove **alle** cinque, I work from nine to five. **Dal** lunedì **al** venerdì, Monday to Friday. Until: fino a domenica, fino **alle** sei.

No little word at all: lunedì, this Monday. Il lunedì, on Mondays. Il 3 marzo, on 3 March. Stamattina, stasera, l'anno prossimo. And ieri, oggi, domani.

Easy to mix up Di o da?

di or da? Both can be from and of

di	da
whose la macchina **di** Paolo Paolo's car	**what it's for** una tazza **da** caffè a coffee cup
what's in it una tazza **di** caffè a cup of coffee	**what it's for** le scarpe **da** ginnastica trainers
what it's made of una maglia **di** lana a wool jumper	**what it's for** una maglia **da** calcio a football shirt
where you're from Sono **di** Torino. I'm from Turin.	**moving from** Torno **da** Torino. I'm coming back from Turin.

Same cup, two meanings: una tazza di caffè is full of coffee. Una tazza da caffè is the kind of cup, and it may be empty.

Before a verb: a, di, da or nothing

a
after going, starting, learning, helping

andare a, venire a, cominciare a, imparare a, aiutare a, riuscire a, continuare a

Vado **a** dormire.
I'm off to bed.

Non riesco **a** capire.
I can't work it out.

Mi aiuti **a** portare le borse?
Can you help me carry the bags?

di
after finishing, trying, deciding, stopping

finire di, cercare di, decidere di, smettere di, dimenticare di, sperare di

Ho finito **di** lavorare.
I've finished work.

Cerco **di** dormire.
I'm trying to sleep.

Smettila **di** ridere!
Stop laughing!

da
something to do

qualcosa da, niente da, tanto da

Ho tanto **da** fare.
I've got loads to do.

C'è qualcosa **da** mangiare?
Is there anything to eat?

un film **da** vedere
a film worth seeing

nothing
after can, want, must, know how

potere, volere, dovere, sapere, mi piace

Voglio andare **a** casa.
I want to go home.

So nuotare.
I can swim.

Mi piace cucinare.
I like cooking.

No rule tells you which: learn the verb with its little word, cominciare a, finire di, the way you learn a word with il or la.

stare per + a verb, about to: sto per uscire, I'm just about to go out. Il film sta per finire, the film's nearly over.

Ten lines you'll hear in shows and every day

Da quanto tempo!
Long time no see!
since how long

In bocca al lupo!
Good luck!
into the wolf's mouth. Answer: Crepi!

Di niente.
You're welcome.
of nothing

A domani!
See you tomorrow!
a for when

Tocca a te.
Your turn.
it falls to you

Per sempre.
Forever.
for always

Di sicuro.
For sure.
di in a fixed phrase

Alla prossima!
Till next time!
till the prossima volta, next time

Non c'è niente da fare.
Nothing can be done.
da + a verb

Sei di qui?
Are you from here?
di: where you're from

Practice Esercizi

How: the grey word is the English. Pick the Italian little word, and join it to the article if there is one. Cover the right side with a strip of paper, say each whole line out loud, then slide the strip down to check. **Pink**: a joined form. **Orange**: a little word on its own.

1	Abito _____ (in) Firenze.	**a** · I live in Florence. a town: a
2	Lavoro _____ (in) Germania.	**in** · I work in Germany. a country: in
3	Stasera vado _____ (to the) cinema.	**al** · I'm going to the cinema tonight. a + il
4	Domani vado _____ (to the) dentista.	**dal** · I'm going to the dentist's tomorrow. da + a person or job
5	Il portafoglio è _____ (in the) zaino.	**nello** · The wallet is in the rucksack. lo zaino, so nello
6	Studio italiano _____ (for) due anni.	**da** · I've been learning Italian for two years. still going: da + the present
7	Ci siamo conosciuti tre anni _____ (ago).	**fa** · We met three years ago. fa comes after the time
8	Il treno parte _____ (in) dieci minuti.	**tra** · The train leaves in ten minutes. tra or fra: from now
9	La lezione comincia _____ (at) nove.	**alle** · The lesson starts at nine. le nove, so alle
10	Sono nata _____ (in) 1998.	**nel** · I was born in 1998. years take il: nel
11	Il cane _____ (of the) vicini abbaia sempre.	**dei** · The neighbours' dog is always barking. di + i
12	Ho lasciato gli occhiali _____ (on the) sedia.	**sulla** · I left my glasses on the chair. su + la
13	Vengo _____ (from the) Stati Uniti.	**dagli** · I'm from the United States. gli Stati Uniti, so dagli
14	Vado _____ (to the) università in autobus.	**all'** · I go to university by bus. l'università, so all'
15	Hai qualcosa _____ (to) bere?	**da** · Have you got anything to drink? qualcosa da + a verb
16	Ho deciso _____ (to) partire.	**di** · I've decided to leave. decidere di
17	Mi aiuti _____ (to) cucinare?	**a** · Will you help me cook? aiutare a
18	Esco _____ (from the) ufficio alle sette.	**dall'** · I leave the office at seven. l'ufficio, so dall'
19	Questo regalo è _____ (for) te.	**per** · This present is for you. per te
20	Quest'estate andiamo _____ (to the) montagna.	**in** · We're going to the mountains this summer. in montagna, no article

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.