Italian sounds La pronuncia

Good news: Italian is written almost exactly as it sounds. Learn these letters and you can read nearly any word aloud; only the stress sometimes needs learning (page 3). Orange hints spell the sound:

PAHL-lah	capitals: the part you stress	**sh**	sc before e and i, as in ship
ah eh ee oh oo	a e i o u: father, bed, see, hot, food; short and pure	**ly**	gli, like the lli in million
y w	i, u gliding into a vowel: piano is PYAH-noh	**ny**	gn, like the ny in canyon
ay eye oy ow	two vowels in one beat: say, eye, boy, how	**ts dz**	the z: ts in bits, dz in kids
k	c before a, o, u, and ch, q	**s z**	s as in see; z as in zoo (s before b, d, g, l, m, n, r, v)
ch	c before e and i, as in chip	**r rr**	r a tap or short roll, rr a long roll
g	always as in go: g before a, o, u, and gh	**tt ll nn**	a double letter: hold it, page 2
j	g before e and i, as in jet	◡	two words said as one, page 5

The alphabet: what the letters are called

A a **ah**	B bi **bee**	C ci **chee**	D di **dee**	E e **eh**	F effe **EHF-feh**	G gi **jee**	H acca **AHK-kah**	I i **ee**	L elle **EHL-leh**	M emme **EHM-meh**
N enne **EHN-neh**	O o **oh**	P pi **pee**	Q cu **koo**	R erre **EHR-reh**	S esse **EHS-seh**	T ti **tee**	U u **oo**	V vu **voo**	Z zeta **DZEH-tah**	
J i lunga **ee LOON-gah**	K cappa **KAHP-pah**	W doppia vu **DOHP-pyah voo**	X ics **eeks**	Y ipsilon **EEP-see-lohn**						

J, K, W, X, Y appear only in words from other languages: **jeans**, **weekend**, **taxi**, **yogurt**. You'll also hear **vi** for V, **vu doppia** for W, **i greca** for Y.

c, g and sc: hard or soft?

	+ a, o, u: hard	+ e, i: soft	+ i + a, o, u: soft, the i silent	+ h + e, i: hard again
c	**k** cane **KAH-neh** · caldo **KAHL-doh**	**ch** cena **CHEH-nah** · cinema **CHEE-neh-mah**	**ch** ciao **CHAH-oh** · cioccolato **chohk-koh-LAH-toh**	**k** chi **kee** · anche **AHN-keh**
g	**g** gatto **GAHT-toh** · gusto **GOOS-toh**	**j** gelato **jeh-LAH-toh** · giro **JEE-roh**	**j** giorno **JOHR-noh** · giallo **JAHL-loh**	**g** funghi **FOON-gee** · ghiaccio **GYAHT-choh**
sc	**sk** scuola **SKWOH-lah** · scarpa **SKAHR-pah**	**sh** pesce **PEH-sheh** · scena **SHEH-nah**	**sh** prosciutto **proh-SHOOT-toh** · sciarpa **SHAHR-pah**	**sk** schiena **SKYEH-nah** · scherzo **SKEHR-tsoh**

Other letters that don't sound like English

gli · gn	ly, like the lli in million · ny, like the ny in canyon figlio **FEE-lyoh**, gli **lyee** · bagno **BAH-nyoh**, gnocchi **NYOHK-kee**	**h**	always silent ho **oh** · hanno **AHN-noh** sounds like anno **AHN-noh**
qu · cq	kw · cq is a long k quattro **KWAHT-troh**, questo **KWEHS-toh** · acqua **AHK-kwah**	**z**	ts or dz, see below pizza **PEET-tsah**, grazie **GRAH-tsyeh** · zero **DZEH-roh**
s	s · z before b, d, g, l, m, n, r, v sole **SOH-leh**, casa **KAH-sah** · sbaglio **ZBAH-lyoh**, sveglia **ZVEH-lyah**	**r · rr**	a tap or short roll · a long roll mare **MAH-reh**, ora **OH-rah** · terra **TEHR-rah**, rosso **ROHS-soh**

z: ts or dz?

Dictionaries give each word one or the other. At the start of a word the north tends to say dz, the south ts. Both are understood.

s between vowels

In the north it's a z: casa sounds like KAH-zah. In much of the centre and south it stays s. Both are normal; the hints write s.

r: tap or roll

Always the tip of the tongue: a tap between vowels, a short roll at the start. A few speakers say a throaty r; it's understood.

Double consonants Le doppie

The big one: a double letter is said longer, and it changes the word. English has it too, across two words: the t in hot tea, the n in ten names. Italian does it inside a word.

Single or double: a different word

pala	PAH-lah	shovel	palla	PAHL-lah	ball		
caro	KAH-roh	dear, expensive	carro	KAHR-roh	cart		
fato	FAH-toh	fate	fatto	FAHT-toh	done, fact		
sono	SOH-noh	I am, they are	sonno	SOHN-noh	sleep, sleepiness		
pena	PEH-nah	pity, pain	penna	PEHN-nah	pen		
capello	kah-PEHL-loh	a hair	cappello	kahp-PEHL-loh	hat		

tt, pp, cc, bb, dd, gg: stop and wait

Close up for the sound, hold it shut for a moment, then let go: **fatto** **FAHT-toh** is FAHT, a tiny pause, then toh. Not two t's, one longer one.

ll, nn, mm, ss, ff, rr, vv: keep it going

Hold the sound itself a beat longer: the l of **palla** **PAHL-lah** hums on, and the rr of **carro** **KAHR-roh** is a longer roll than the tap in **caro** **KAH-roh**.

Listen to the vowel too: before a single consonant the stressed vowel stretches a little, so **pena** **PEH-nah** has a long eh. Before a double it's short, and the consonant takes the time.

Words English borrowed, every double kept

spaghetti **spah-GEHT-tee** spaghetti	cappuccino **kahp-poot-CHEE-noh** cappuccino	mozzarella **moht-tsah-REHL-lah** mozzarella	broccoli **BROHK-koh-lee** broccoli	tagliatelle **tah-lyah-TEHL-leh** tagliatelle

English says them with one t, one p, one z. Italian holds every double: say them the Italian way and you're already practising.

Long sounds you won't always see doubled

cc and gg before e, i: a long ch and j

faccia **FAHT-chah** · **oggi** **OHD-jee** · **spiaggia** **SPYAHD-jah**

And cq is a long k: **acqua** **AHK-kwah**.

Always long between vowels

gn, gli, sc before e or i, and z are said long between two vowels, even written once: **bagno** **BAH-nyoh**, **figlio** **FEE-lyoh**, **pesce** **PEH-sheh**, **grazie** **GRAH-tsyeh**. The hints write them once, like the spelling.

Doubles across words: in central and southern Italy a consonant can double at the start of a word too, after little words like a, che and è. Page 5 shows how.

Stress L'accento

Mostly the same place: most Italian words stress the second-to-last syllable. A written accent appears only when the stress is on the last vowel. Anywhere else it's never written, so learn it with the word. The stressed part is pink.

1 · Usually: the second-to-last syllable

amico	parola	montagna	vedere	giornata
ah-MEE-koh	**pah-ROH-lah**	**mohn-TAH-nyah**	**veh-DEH-reh**	**johr-NAH-tah**
friend	word	mountain	to see	day (all of it)

2 · Stress on the last vowel: always a written accent

città	perché	caffè	però	lunedì
cheet-TAH	**pehr-KEH**	**kahf-FEH**	**peh-ROH**	**loo-neh-DEE**
city, town	why, because	coffee	but, however	Monday

Short words too: a one-syllable word ending in two vowels takes the accent: **più** pyoo, **può** pwoh, **già** jah, **giù** joo. Two don't: **qui** and **qua**.

Two accents: à, ì, ò and ù always slope down like this. e has two: è is open, as in **caffè**, é closed, as in **perché**. Both are eh in these hints.

3 · Further back: never written, learn it with the word

telefono	pagina	camera	macchina	sabato
teh-LEH-foh-noh	**PAH-jee-nah**	**KAH-meh-rah**	**MAHK-kee-nah**	**SAH-bah-toh**
phone	page	room	car	Saturday

Verbs: the they-form keeps the stress of the I-form, so it lands further from the end: **parlo** PAHR-loh, **parlano** PAHR-lah-noh. And -ere verbs go both ways: **vedere** but **prendere** PREHN-deh-reh.

Dictionaries help: they mark an unexpected stress, like **àncora** for anchor. Everyday writing doesn't, so listen for it in shows.

Same letters, different stress, different word

ancora	ancora	principi	principi	capito	capito	capitò
AHN-koh-rah	**ahn-KOH-rah**	**PREEN-chee-pee**	**preen-CHEE-pee**	**KAH-pee-toh**	**kah-PEE-toh**	**kah-pee-TOH**
anchor	still, again	princes	principles	I happen to be	understood	it happened

Say the wrong syllable and you've said a different word, or one nobody recognises. When you learn a new word, learn where its stress goes too.

Vowels Le vocali

Every vowel, full and clear: every vowel is said, even at the end of a word. Keep them short and pure: English go ends in a little w and say in a little y; Italian o and e stop clean, so hold your mouth still.

The five vowels

a	a in father, short	pasta **PAHS-tah** pasta	carta **KAHR-tah** paper
e	open: e in bed · closed: nearer the start of say, with no y	bene **BEH-neh** well	sera **SEH-rah** evening
i	ee in see, short	vino **VEE-noh** wine	libri **LEE-bree** books
o	open: o in hot · closed: nearer go, with no w	olio **OH-lyoh** oil	dove **DOH-veh** where
u	oo in food, short	uva **OO-vah** grapes	luna **LOO-nah** moon

e and o: open or closed? each has two sounds: **bene** **BEH-neh** and **olio** **OH-lyoh** are open, **sera** **SEH-rah** and **dove** **DOH-veh** closed. Which word has which also changes from region to region, so Italians differ too, and either is understood. Writing shows it only in a final è or é.

Never uh: English blurs vowels it doesn't stress into uh. Italian never does: every o of **pomodoro** **poh-moh-DOH-roh** is a full o, every a of **patata** **pah-TAH-tah** a full a.

The last vowel matters: it often tells you who or how many, so say it clearly: **ragazzo** **rah-GAHT-tsoh** boy, **ragazza** **rah-GAHT-tsah** girl, **ragazzi** **rah-GAHT-tsee** boys, kids, **ragazze** **rah-GAHT-tseh** girls.

Two vowels in one beat

i and u are the soft vowels: next to a, e or o they glide into the same beat, i as a y and u as a w.

ie yeh
piede **PYEH-deh**
foot
ieri **YEH-ree**
yesterday

uo woh
buono **BWOH-noh**
good
uomo **WOH-moh**
man

ia yah
piano **PYAH-noh**
slowly, floor
Italia **ee-TAH-lyah**
Italy

ua wah
quando **KWAHN-doh**
when
guardare **gwahr-DAH-reh**
to watch

ai eye
mai **mye**
never
hai **eye**
you have

au ow, as in how
auto **OW-toh**
car
aula **OW-lah**
classroom

ei ay, as in say
sei **say**
six, you are
lei **lay**
she

oi oy, as in boy
poi **poy**
then
noi **noy**
we

A stressed i or u keeps a beat of its own: **mio** **MEE-oh**, **via** **VEE-ah**, **paura** **pah-OO-rah**.

Across words too: a word ending in a vowel runs straight into the next one, with no gap and no catch in the throat. Page 5 shows more.

Same sound, different word: the accent tells you which

è	·	e	là	·	la	sì	·	si	dà	·	da
eh		**eh**	**lah**		**lah**	**see**		**see**	**dah**		**dah**
is		and	there		the	yes		oneself	gives		from

né	·	ne	tè	·	te
neh		**neh**	**teh**		**teh**
nor		of it, some	tea		you

Spoken Italian L'italiano parlato

One flowing line: Italian runs words together, so a sentence can sound like one long word. That's a big part of why it sounds fast. The link mark joins two words said as one.

A final consonant jumps to the next word

non‿è	in‿Italia	un‿altro	per‿ora
noh-NEH	**ee-nee-TAH-lyah**	**oo-NAHL-troh**	**peh-ROH-rah**
it isn't	in Italy	another	for now

The apostrophe: a vowel drops before another vowel

l'amico	un'amica	dov'è	c'è	quest'anno	l'acqua
lah-MEE-koh	**oo-nah-MEE-kah**	**doh-VEH**	**cheh**	**kwehs-TAHN-noh**	**LAHK-kwah**
the friend	a friend (a woman)	where is	there is	this year	the water

Written, not just said: Italian writes these short forms with an apostrophe, so you never see **lo amico**, only **l'amico**. **un'** takes an apostrophe only for a woman or a feminine word: **un amico**, but **un'amica**.

Short forms before a consonant

FULL FORM	FULL FORM	FULL FORM	FULL FORM	FULL FORM
buono	signore	bello	volere	fare
BEFORE A CONSONANT	BEFORE A CONSONANT	BEFORE A CONSONANT	BEFORE A CONSONANT	BEFORE A CONSONANT
buongiorno	**signor Rossi**	**bel tempo**	**voler bene**	**far finta**
bwohn-JOHR-noh	**see-NYOHR ROHS-see**	**behl TEHM-poh**	**voh-LEHR BEH-neh**	**fahr FEEN-tah**
good morning	Mr Rossi	nice weather	to love, care about	to pretend

No apostrophe here: a final e or o drops before a consonant (in **bel** and **quel**, the whole **lo**). The stress stays where it was, so **signor** is see-NYOHR. Some, like **buon** and **signor**, are almost always short; others, like **far** for **fare**, mostly in set phrases.

Doubling across words

Raddoppiamento: a casa sounds like a ccasa

In Tuscany, Rome and the south, a consonant at the start of a word is said double after a few short words, like a, e, è, che, tre, più, and after words with a final accent: **a casa** sounds like **a ccasa**, **che cosa?** sounds like **che ccosa?** and **è vero** sounds like **è vvero**. Most northern speakers don't do it. It's never written, and you'll be understood either way.

Little words you'll hear in every scene

allora	cioè	dai	boh	beh	magari
ahl-LOH-rah	**choh-EH**	**dye**	**boh**	**beh**	**mah-GAH-ree**
so, well then	I mean	come on	dunno	well...	maybe, if only

Practice Pratica

How: say each pair slowly, then fast, until the two words sound clearly different. For the doubles, really hold the long one.

Single or double?

nono **NOH-noh** ninth	nonno **NOHN-noh** grandad
sete **SEH-teh** thirst	sette **SEHT-teh** seven
eco **EH-koh** echo	ecco **EHK-koh** here it is
note **NOH-teh** notes	notte **NOHT-teh** night

Hard or soft?

chi **kee** who	ci **chee** us, there
pesche **PEHS-keh** peaches	pesce **PEH-sheh** fish
ghiro **GEE-roh** dormouse	giro **JEE-roh** turn, tour

Where's the stress?

subito **SOO-bee-toh** straight away	su**bi**to **soo-BEE-toh** suffered
compito **KOHM-pee-toh** homework	com**pi**to **kohm-PEE-toh** polite

Tongue twisters

Trentatré trentini entrarono a Trento, tutti e trentatré trotterellando.	tr, and the accent on -tré
Sopra la panca la capra campa, sotto la panca la capra crepa.	p and c, and a pure a
Apelle, figlio di Apollo, fece una palla di pelle di pollo.	single or double l
Tre tigri contro tre tigri.	the tap in tr and gr

Ten sentences: cover the right side

1	**Do**ve **a**biti?	**DOH-veh AH-bee-tee?** Where do you live?
2	Vor**rei** un caf**fè**, per fa**vo**re.	**vohr-RAY oon kahf-FEH, pehr fah-VOH-reh.** I'd like a coffee, please.
3	La **mam**ma la**vo**ra in un ospe**da**le.	**lah MAHM-mah lah-VOH-rah een oon ohs-peh-DAH-leh.** Mum works in a hospital.
4	Il **tre**no **par**te **al**le **ot**to.	**eel TREH-noh PAHR-teh AHL-leh OHT-toh.** The train leaves at eight.
5	Ci ve**dia**mo do**ma**ni.	**chee veh-DYAH-moh doh-MAH-nee.** See you tomorrow.
6	Non ho ca**pi**to, può ri**pe**tere?	**nohn oh kah-PEE-toh, pwoh ree-PEH-teh-reh?** I didn't understand, can you say it again?
7	Ho **fa**me, an**dia**mo a man**gia**re!	**oh FAH-meh, ahn-DYAH-moh ah mahn-JAH-reh!** I'm hungry, let's go and eat!
8	Il **gat**to **dor**me sul **let**to.	**eel GAHT-toh DOHR-meh sool LEHT-toh.** The cat's asleep on the bed.
9	**Og**gi fa **mol**to **cal**do.	**OHD-jee fah MOHL-toh KAHL-doh.** It's really hot today.
10	Per**ché** non **vie**ni?	**pehr-KEH nohn VYEH-nee?** Why aren't you coming?

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