

Learn Italian



Spoken Italian follows the written language exactly with each letter corresponding to one specific sound. The following guide explains how each letter sounds, using comparisons from (standard British) English as a rough guide.

Stress is usually placed on the penultimate syllable eg andiamo (ahn-dee-AH-moh, 'come on') but can also be on the preceding one eg pubblico (PUB-lee-coh, 'public'), unless there is an acute accent on a word eg caffè (kah-FEH, 'coffee').

Vowels

- **a** is like a long 'a' in 'man'. 'Mamma' (maah-mmaah), especially when used by children who want something, can go on seemingly forever.
- **e** open like the 'e' in 'sell', or closed like the 'a' in 'mate'
- **i** is like 'ee' in 'feet'
- open like the 'o' in 'pot', or closed like the 'o' in 'over'
- **u** is like the 'o' in do

When a word has two vowels together, each sound is pronounced separately eg buona sera (bwah-nah-seh-ra, 'good evening')

Consonants

The letters J, K, W, X, and Y do not exist in the Italian alphabet. Consonant sounds are like in English except for:

- **c** has two sounds: a) like 'ch' in 'chair' before the letters 'i' and 'e' eg ciao (chaoh, 'hi/bye') b) elsewhere like 'c' in 'cat' eg casa (kah-zah, 'house')
- **g** has two sounds a) like 'g' in 'gent' before the letters 'i' and 'e' eg gioco (jeeow-koh, 'I play') b) otherwise like 'g' in 'go' eg gatto (gah-toh, 'cat')
- **h** is silent eg ho (oh, 'I have')
- **r** is rolled, though not as much as in Spanish eg ragazzo (rrah-ga-tssoh, 'boy')
- **S** has two sounds: a) like the 's' in 'nose' when between vowels eg rosa (roh-zah, 'rose') b) the 's' in 'start' eg signora (see-nyoh-rah, 'madam')
- **Z** has two sounds: a) like 'zz' in 'buzz' at the beginning of words eg zio (tsee-oh, 'uncle') b) like 'ts' in 'bits' eg grazie (gra-tsee-eh, 'thank you')

Combinations

- **Ch** like 'c' in 'cab' eg che (keh, 'what')
- **Gh** like 'g' in 'get' eg spaghetti (spah-get-ee)
- **Gn** like 'ni' in 'onion' eg agnello (ah-nyeh-loh, 'lamb')
- **Gl** like 'll' in 'million' eg voglio (voh-lyoh, 'I want')
- **Sc** has two sounds: a) like 'sc' in 'scar' eg scuola (skwoh-lah, 'school') b) like 'sh' in 'shut' before 'e' and 'i' eg sciare (sheeh-ah-reh, 'to ski')
- **Ps**, both letters are sounded unlike in English where the P is silent

Where a consonant is doubled, the sound is twice as long, eg bello (beh-loh, 'beautiful').

You, me and everyone else

Singular: io I, tu you, lui/egli/lei/ella he/she; Plural: noi we, voi you, loro/essi they

Note: The formal word for "you" is Lei (grammatically treated as a third-person pronoun; plural: Loro

- **to be (essere)** Sono I am, sei you are, è he/she/it is, siamo we are, siete you (pl) are, sono they are
- **to have (avere)** Ho I have, hai you have, ha he/she/it has, abbiamo we have, avete you have, hanno they have
- **to go (andare)** Vado I go, vai you go, va he/she/it goes, andiamo we go, andate you go, vanno they go
- **to want (volere)** Voglio I want, Vuoi you want, Vuole he/she/it wants, Vogliamo we want, Volete you want, Vogliono they want

Word glue

si yes

no no

per favore please

grazie thank you

e and

o or

con with

senza without

ma/però but

per for, in order to, by

perché?/perché why?/because

che/cosa? what?

quale? which?

quando? when?

dove where?

come how

più more

meno less

troppo too much

qualcosa something

Numbers

1-20: uno, due, tre, quattro, cinque, sei, sette, otto, nove, dieci, undici, dodici, tredici, quattordici, quindici, sedici, diciassette, diciotto, diciannove, venti

30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 1,000: trenta, quaranta, cinquanta, sessanta, settanta, ottanta, novanta, cento, mille

Numbers from 31-99 are formed from multiple of 10 minus last letter if followed by a vowel + unit, eg. 68 sessant + otto

Things to remember

- Masculine singular nouns are preceded by the articles lo, l' and il and typically end in o eg. 'il libro'.
- For plural words: the o often becomes an i (eg. 'libri') and the articles change: lo and l' becomes gli and il to i
- Feminine singular nouns are preceded by la and l' usually end in a eg. 'la banca'. To form the plural, the articles la or l' become le, and a changes to e eg. 'le scuole'.