

ITALIANO ESSENZIALE

Il Treno per Roma

Un romanzo a puntate per imparare l'italiano — lettura,
grammatica, tabelle e glossario

ANTEPRIMA • CAPITOLI 0-5



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Capitolo 0 — Prima di cominciare

1. Benvenuto

You are holding a story, not a textbook.

Over the next hundred chapters you will follow Professor Marco Martini and the actress Lucia Ferrari from the moment they meet on the train to Rome, through a stolen painting, a police investigation, a large Italian family, several arguments, a great deal of coffee, and — eventually — each other. You will read all of it in Italian.

That sounds impossible on page one. It is not, because of how the book is built.

Chapter 1 uses about twenty words. Chapter 2 uses those twenty plus twenty more. Every chapter after that adds exactly twenty new words and no others, and it deliberately re-uses the words you met in the chapters just before. Apart from the names of people and places — *Marco, Lucia, Roma, Bologna* — nothing appears in the Italian text that you have not already been given. By Chapter 100 you will have met roughly two thousand words — the core of the language — and you will have seen each of them many times, in a sentence, doing a job, rather than sitting in a list.

The grammar arrives the same way: one new idea per chapter, in the order that makes each next idea easy. You will begin with *I am* and work through, in time, the subjunctive and the literary past tense, and at no point will you be asked to swallow a table of thirty endings before you are allowed to read something.

There is no English translation of the Italian text. This is on purpose, and it is the single most important design decision in the book. If a translation sits beside the Italian, your eye goes to the English every time and you learn nothing. Instead, the vocabulary is controlled so tightly that you do not need a translation — you need the glossary at the end of the chapter, and about ninety seconds of patience.

There are no exercises. The re-reading is the exercise.

2. What each chapter looks like

Every chapter has the same four parts, always in this order.

Part	What it is	What to do with it
Lettura	The story. Italian only. Dialogue in the early chapters, more narrative as tenses arrive.	Read it more than once, and out loud.
Grammatica	Short notes in English on the new grammar, with the examples taken from the <i>Lettura</i> you have just read.	Read it after the story, not before.
Tabelle	Conjugation and reference tables for everything introduced in the chapter — full paradigms, singular and plural.	Do not memorise. Look things up.
Glossario	The twenty new words, Italian → English, in order of first appearance, with the gender of nouns and the infinitive of verbs.	Your safety net.

A note on the **Tabelle**: they are complete, which means they sometimes show forms the story has not used yet. A table might give you all six persons of a verb in Chapter 1 when the story only needed two. Those extra rows are reference, not homework. They are there so that when the story does reach them, in Chapter 6 or Chapter 20, you have seen them somewhere before.

Chapters grow. The first five are short — a couple of hundred words of reading, a few minutes' work. By Chapter 50 the reading has roughly trebled, and by Chapter 100 it is a proper short story of over a thousand words. You will not notice the growth while it happens, which is the point.

From around Chapter 10 the book also starts feeding you **idioms and proverbs** — *in bocca al lupo, non tutto il male viene per nuocere* — because a language without its fixed phrases is a language you can read but not hear.

3. How to actually use it

A method that works, in five steps per chapter:

- 1. Read the *Lettura* once, straight through, without looking anything up.** You will not understand all of it. Do not stop, do not look down at the glossary, do not translate in your head. You are looking for the shape of the scene: who is talking, where they are, roughly what is going on. This step feels uncomfortable for about a week and then becomes the best part.
- 2. Read it again, out loud.** Italian spelling tells you exactly how to say the word — this is a gift, and Section 5 below explains how to cash it in. Reading aloud

does two jobs at once: it drills pronunciation, and it slows your eye down to the speed at which comprehension actually happens.

- 3. Now go to the Glossario.** Look at the twenty words. Most will be words you half-guessed already, which is exactly why the glossary comes third and not first.
- 4. Read the Grammatica.** Because you have already met the new structure inside a sentence that meant something, the explanation lands as "*ah, so that's what that was*" rather than as an abstract rule.
- 5. Read the Lettura one final time.** This last pass is where the chapter is actually learned. It should now feel almost easy. That feeling is not an illusion — it is the reason to keep going.

Then, the next day, **before starting the new chapter, re-read the previous one's Lettura.** Two minutes. This one habit is worth more than any amount of flashcards, because the book has already arranged for the old words to reappear in the new chapter; your re-reading just makes sure they are warm when they do.

Pace. One chapter a day finishes the book in a little over three months. Three chapters a week finishes it in eight months. Both work. What does not work is nine chapters on Sunday and nothing until the following Sunday — the recycling system assumes you are coming back regularly, and it is the recycling that does the teaching. Consistency beats intensity.

When you feel lost. Go back two chapters and re-read. Ninety per cent of the time, being lost in Chapter 34 means something in Chapter 32 did not stick.

4. Why Italian is kinder than you fear

Every language is difficult in its own way. Italian's difficulties are concentrated in a few places, and it is unusually generous everywhere else. It is worth knowing the shape of the thing before you start walking into it.

Spelling is honest. Italian is written more or less exactly as it is pronounced, and pronounced exactly as it is written. There is no *cough / though / through*, no silent endings, no six ways to spell one vowel. Learn about a dozen rules — the whole of Section 5 — and you can read aloud, correctly, any Italian word you have never seen, including people's names and street signs. English speakers do not know how rare and valuable this is.

The verb ending tells you who. *Parlo* means "I speak". Not "speak" — *I* speak. The *-o* is the "I". Because the ending already carries the person, Italian normally throws the subject pronoun away: you say *sono professore*, not *io sono professore*, unless you want the emphasis. Six endings per tense, and a whole category of English's little words disappears. (The first few chapters of this book keep the pronoun in more often than an Italian would, so that you can see plainly who is speaking. It quietly falls away as the endings become familiar.)

Three verb families, and they are regular. Essentially every Italian infinitive ends in **-are**, **-ere** or **-ire** — *parlare, vedere, dormire*. Learn the pattern for each family and you have, at a stroke, thousands of verbs. There are irregular verbs, of course, and they are the most common ones (*essere, avere, fare, andare*), so you meet them early and use them so often that they stop being a problem. The long tail of the vocabulary is regular.

No cases. Nouns do not change their form according to their job in the sentence. If you have ever met German or Latin or Russian, this is the sound of a heavy door closing behind you.

Questions need no machinery. *Parli italiano* is "you speak Italian". *Parli italiano?* is "do you speak Italian?" Same words, same order — the voice rises at the end and that is the entire question-forming apparatus. There is no Italian equivalent of the English *do*.

Negation is one word. Put **non** in front of the verb. *Non parlo italiano*. That is all of it.

Word order is familiar. Subject-verb-object, as in English, with rather more freedom to move things around for emphasis once you know what you are doing.

A great deal of the vocabulary is already yours. Not just *pizza* and *opera* — whole families of words map onto English by formula, because English took them from Latin and French. See Section 10.

And the difficulties, so you know where to expect them:

- **Gender.** Every noun is masculine or feminine, and the articles and adjectives around it have to agree. This is Section 8, and it is mostly mechanical.
- **Prepositions.** *A, in, di, da, su, per* refuse to correspond neatly to *at, in, of, from, on, for*. There is no rule; there is only exposure, which is what a hundred chapters of story is for.
- **The subjunctive.** Real, alive, and used constantly in Italian where English gave it up centuries ago. It arrives in Chapter 40, by which point you will be ready and it will feel like a small adjustment rather than a wall.
- **Double consonants.** *Nono* is "ninth"; *nonno* is "grandfather". The difference is real and it is mostly in the length of the sound. Section 5.7.

That is the honest list. Notice what is *not* on it: nothing about tones, nothing about writing systems, nothing about unpronounceable clusters, nothing about seven noun cases.

5. Pronunciation: the whole system

Italian uses twenty-one letters. **J, K, W, X and Y** are not part of the native alphabet and turn up almost exclusively in imported words and foreign names — *jeans, kiwi, whisky, taxi, yogurt* — plus a few Italian proper names of older spelling (*Jacopo, Jesolo*).

The letter names, useful when you have to spell something out loud:

A <i>a</i>	B <i>bi</i>	C <i>ci</i>	D <i>di</i>
E <i>e</i>	F <i>effe</i>	G <i>gi</i>	H <i>acca</i>
I <i>i</i>	L <i>elle</i>	M <i>emme</i>	N <i>enne</i>
O <i>o</i>	P <i>pi</i>	Q <i>cu</i>	R <i>erre</i>
S <i>esse</i>	T <i>ti</i>	U <i>u</i>	V <i>vu</i>
Z <i>zeta</i>			

Throughout this chapter, pronunciations are given in plain English respelling, with the **stressed syllable in capitals**: *gelato* = jeh-LAH-toh.

5.1 The five vowels

This is the foundation, and it is where most foreign accents are actually made — not in the exotic consonants, but here.

Letter	Sound	English anchor	Italian examples
a	ah	father	mamma (MAHM-mah), pasta, Roma
e	eh	bed / they	sette (SET-teh), sera, caffè
i	ee	machine	vino (VEE-noh), pizza, Italia
o	oh	more / not	sole (SOH-leh), nonno, Roma
u	oo	rule	luna (LOO-nah), tutto, musica

Three rules govern all five, and they matter more than the table:

a) Every vowel keeps its full value, always. English reduces unstressed vowels to a vague *uh* — say "banana" and listen to what happens to the first and last *a*. Italian never does this. In *banana* (bah-NAH-nah) all three *a*'s are the same clean *ah*. This single habit — refusing to swallow unstressed vowels — is the difference between sounding foreign and sounding acceptable.

b) Vowels do not slide. English long vowels are secretly two sounds: say "no" slowly and you will hear it end in a *w*. Italian *o* in *no* is one pure sound, held steady and stopped. Same with *e*: English "say" glides to *ee*; Italian *e* does not.

c) Final vowels are pronounced. Fully, clearly, every time. The *-e* of *grazie* is a real, audible vowel, not a mumble. Italian words nearly all end in a vowel, and letting those endings die is the fastest way to become unintelligible — the ending is often the only thing distinguishing singular from plural, masculine from feminine, *I* from *he*.

E and *o* each have a slightly open and a slightly closed variety (compare *e* in *bene* and in *sera*). Italians themselves differ on many words by region. Ignore this for now; nobody will misunderstand you.

Sounds Italian simply does not have: the English *th* (neither in *think* nor in *this*), any *h* sound at all, and the vague *uh* of *about*. If you find yourself producing one, something has gone wrong.

5.2 Consonants that behave themselves

B, D, F, L, M, N, P, T, V are pronounced as in English. *D* and *T* are made slightly further forward, tongue against the teeth, which is what gives Italian its crisp sound, but nobody will correct you.

R is a single tap of the tongue tip against the ridge behind the upper teeth — closer to the *d* in American "ladder" than to an English *r*. Doubled, **rr**, it is a rolled trill: *Ferrari*, *terra*, *arrivederci*. If you cannot trill yet, a tap will do; do not substitute the English *r*, which is the one consonant that instantly marks an English speaker.

H is always silent. It has no sound of its own, ever. In native Italian words it exists for just two reasons: as part of the clusters **ch** and **gh** (Section 5.3), and in four verb forms — *ho*, *hai*, *ha*, *hanno* ("I have", "you have", "he has", "they have"), where it is purely a spelling device to distinguish them from *o*, *ai*, *a*, *anno*. *Ho* is pronounced "oh". You will also see it in interjections (*ah!*, *oh!*, *ehi!*) and in loanwords, where it stays just as silent: *hotel* is oh-TEL, *hobby* is OB-bee.

Q appears almost only as **qu** and is always "kw": *quattro* (KWAHT-troh), *questo* (KWEH-stoh), *qui* (kwee). Note *acqua* (AHK-kwah), where the *cq* is a held double sound.

5.3 C and G: the two-faced letters

Here is the heart of Italian spelling, and the thing that makes people say "*chi-AN-ti*" and "*broo-SHET-ta*" when they should not.

C and **G** each have two possible sounds. Which one you get is decided entirely by the letter that comes next.

	Hard sound	Soft sound
C	k , as in <i>cat</i>	ch , as in <i>church</i>
G	g , as in <i>go</i>	j , as in <i>jam</i>

And the switch:

| *Before a, o, u → HARD. Before e, i → SOFT.*

Hard		Soft	
c asa	KAH-sah	c ena	CHEH-nah
c osa	KOH-sah	c inema	CHEE-neh-mah
c ucina	koo-CHEE-nah	d ocile	DOH-chee-leh
g atto	GAHT-toh	g elato	jeh-LAH-toh
g ondola	GOHN-doh-lah	g iro	JEE-roh
g usto	GOO-stoh	m agia	mah-JEE-ah

Notice *cucina*: the first *c* sits before *u*, so it is hard; the second sits before *i*, so it is soft. Same letter, twice, in one word. The rule is doing its job.

This is efficient but it creates two gaps. Italian solves both with spelling tricks, and once you see the tricks you can never be confused by them again.

Problem 1: a soft sound before a, o or u — the silent switch *i*

Suppose you need the *ch* sound, but the next vowel is *a*. Writing *ca* would give you "ka". Italian has no separate letter for the *ch* sound, so it does this instead: **write an *i* to flip the *c* to soft, then write the vowel you actually wanted**. The *i* is a switch. It does its job and then falls silent. It is not a vowel here; it is punctuation for the ear.

This is what is happening in *ciao*.

Ciao is **not** "chee-ah-oh". It is not even close. Take it apart:

- **c** — needs to be soft
- **i** — the switch that makes it soft, then goes silent
- **ao** — the vowels you actually pronounce

Result: **chow**, rhyming with the English *now*. One syllable. The *i* is never heard.

The same trick, everywhere:

Written	Said	Not
ciao	chow	chee-ah-oh
ciabatta	chah-BAHT-tah	chee-ah-batta
cioccolata	chok-koh-LAH-tah	chee-oh-...
focaccia	foh-KAHT-chah	...cha-cha
Giorgio	JOR-joh	jee-OR-jee-oh
giorno	JOR-noh	jee-OR-noh
giusto	JOO-stoh	jee-OO-stoh
giardino	jar-DEE-noh	jee-ar-DEE-noh
Giulia	JOO-lyah	jee-OO-lee-ah
giacca	JAHK-kah	jee-AHK-kah

One refinement. The *i* is silent only when it is *unstressed* and immediately followed by another vowel. If the stress falls on the *i* itself, it is a real vowel and you say it: *farmacia* = far-mah-CHEE-ah, *bugia* = boo-JEE-ah, *magia* = mah-JEE-ah. You can hear the difference in the plural: *farmacie* = far-mah-CHEE-eh, still with its own syllable.

And note that when the following vowel is *e* or *i* itself, no switch is needed — the softening happens by itself, and the vowel is pronounced normally: *cinema* (CHEE-neh-mah), *gelato* (jeh-LAH-toh).

Problem 2: a hard sound before e or i — the blocking *h*

The reverse gap. You need "k" but the next vowel is *e*. Writing *ce* would give you "ch eh". Solution: **insert an *h***. Italian's silent letter is put to work as a blocker — it stands between the consonant and the softening vowel and prevents the softening. **ch** = k. **gh** = hard g.

Written	Said	Meaning / note
che	keh	that, what
chi	kee	who
Chianti	KYAN-tee	not "chee-anti"
brus chetta	broo-SKET-tah	not "brooshetta" — the single most common error
zuc chine	tsook-KEE-neh	
Pinoc chio	pee-NOK-kyoh	
Mich elangelo	mee-kel-AN-jeh-loh	
mac china	MAHK-kee-nah	car
spag hetti	spah-GHET-tee	hard g
fun ghi	FOON-ghee	mushrooms — not "funjee"
Lambor ghini	lam-bor-GHEE-nee	hard g
ghiaccio	GYAHT-choh	ice

So the two devices are mirror images, and both use letters that make no sound of their own:

i after *c/g* = soften it (before *a, o, u*)

h after *c/g* = harden it (before *e, i*)

Once this clicks, you can read every Italian menu in the world correctly. *Bruschetta*, *radicchio*, *maraschino*, *Chianti*, *funghi*, *zucchini* — all hard, every one of them, because of that *h*. *Ciabatta*, *focaccia*, *cappuccino*, *ciliegia*, *Perugia* — soft, because of that *i* or that *e*.

5.4 SC: the same logic, one step further

SC follows exactly the pattern of **C** — hard before *a, o, u*, soft before *e, i* — except that its soft sound is **sh**.

Combination	Sound	Examples
sca, sco, scu	sk	s cala (SKAH-lah), scu ola (SKWOH-lah), sc opa
sce, sci	sh	sc ena (SHEH-nah), sci (shee, "ski"), pesce (PEH-sheh)
scia, scio, sciu	sh + vowel (the <i>i</i> is a silent switch)	sciarpa (SHAR-pah), prosciutto (proh-SHOOT-toh), lasciare (lah-SHAH-reh)
sche, schi	sk (the <i>h</i> blocks)	sche ma (SKEH-mah), dischi (DEE-skee), maschio

Prosciutto is the perfect specimen: **s-c-i-u** — *sc* softened by the silent *i*, then the *u* you actually say. **proh-SHOOT-toh**. Not "pro-skee-oo-toh", not "pro-zhoo-toh".

5.5 GLI and GN: two sounds English almost has

GLI = the *lli* of "million". The *g* is not heard as a *g* at all; *g* and *l* together make one new sound.

Written	Said	Meaning
fam iglia	fah-MEE-lyah	family
ag lio	AH-lyoh	garlic
fig lio	FEE-lyoh	son
tag li atelle	tah-lyah-TEL-leh	
bott iglia	bot-TEE-lyah	bottle
gli	lyee	(a form of "the")

Two cautions. First, this only happens in the cluster **gli**; before other vowels, **gl** is just an ordinary *g* + *l* as in English "glass": *gloria*, *globo*, *inglese* (een-GLEH-zeh). Second, a small set of learned words keep the separate sounds even in *gli*: *negligente*, *glicine*, *anglicano*. There are few enough to meet as they come.

GN = the *ny* of "canyon", the *ni* of "onion", the *ñ* of Spanish. Again, no *g* is heard.

Written	Said	
gnocchi	NYOK-kee	not "guh-nocky" or "no-chee"
lasagne	lah-ZAH-nyeh	(plural — one sheet is a <i>lasagna</i>)
signore	see-NYOH-reh	sir
bagno	BAH-nyoh	bathroom
campagna	kahm-PAH-nyah	countryside
Bologna	boh-LOH-nyah	

Note that *gn* needs no *i* switch — it is already soft by nature, in front of any vowel. Italian writes *lasagne*, never *lasagnie*.

5.6 S and Z

S has two sounds, and the choice is largely positional.

Position	Sound	Examples
Start of a word, before a vowel	s as in <i>sun</i>	sole, sette, signore
Before a voiceless consonant (c, f, p, q, t)	s	strada, spesa, scuola
Before a voiced consonant (b, d, g, l, m, n, r, v)	z as in <i>rose</i>	sbaglio (ZBAH-lyoh), svelto (ZVEL-toh), smettere
Between two vowels	usually z	rosa (ROH-zah), musica (MOO-zee-kah), isola (EE-zoh-lah)
Doubled (ss)	always s	rosso (ROS-soh), essere, cassa

The between-vowels case is the one Italians themselves disagree about. *Casa* is KAH-zah in the north and KAH-sah in much of the centre and south; the older dictionary standard is KAH-sah. Both are correct Italian, nobody will misunderstand you, and the same goes for *cosa*, *così* and a long list of others. Pick one and be consistent.

Z also has two sounds, and here the spelling is much less help.

Sound	Examples
ts (voiceless)	pizza (PEET-tsah), piazza (PYAHT-tsah), grazie (GRAHT-tsyeh), Venezia (veh-NEHT-tsyah), Firenze (fee-REN-tseh), zucchero (TSOOK-keh-roh)
dz (voiced)	zero (DZEH-roh), zanzara (dzahn-DZAH-rah), mezzo (MED-dzoh), azzurro (ahd-DZOOR-roh), zaino (DZAHY-noh)

For most words spelling gives you little to go on, and you learn them one at a time — though **-zione**, **-anza** and **-enza** are dependably *ts*. Good news: the difference almost never changes meaning, and if you default to **ts** you will be right most of the time and understood always.

While we are here: **grazie** is *GRAHT-tsyeh*, **two** syllables, and the final *-ie* must be heard. The common English "GRAT-zee" gets the ending wrong, which is the half that matters.

5.7 Double consonants are not decoration

Pizza, espresso, bello, nonno, bicicletta. Those doubled letters are instructions: **hold the consonant longer**. For stops (p, t, c, b, d, g) this means a tiny silence before releasing — *sette* is "set—teh", with a perceptible catch. For continuants (l, m, n, r, s, f) it means simply drawing the sound out — *bello* is "bel-lo" with a long *l*.

This is not a subtlety. It changes words:

Single		Double	
casa	house	cassa	crate, till
nono	ninth	nonno	grandfather
pena	pain, pity	penna	pen
caro	dear, expensive	carro	cart
sete	thirst	sette	seven
pala	shovel	palla	ball
copia	copy	coppia	couple
fato	fate	fatto	done, fact

(In one or two of those pairs the vowel shifts slightly as well — *sette* has a more open *e* than *sete* — but the length of the consonant is what your listener is actually hearing.)

English speakers systematically under-hold doubles and over-hold nothing, so when in doubt, exaggerate. An over-long *nn* sounds mildly theatrical; a short one turns your host's grandfather into an ordinal number.

6. Stress: where the weight falls

Italian does not usually mark stress in writing, so this section is about knowing where to put it without being told.

The default: second-to-last syllable

In the great majority of Italian words, the stress falls on the penultimate — the second-to-last — syllable. Assume this unless something tells you otherwise, and you will usually be right.

Word	Stress	Said
gelato	ge- LA -to	jeh-LAH-toh
amore	a- MO -re	ah-MOH-reh
cappuccino	cap-puc- CI -no	kahp-poot-CHEE-noh
mozzarella	moz-za- REL -la	mot-tsah-REL-lah
spaghetti	spa- GHET -ti	spah-GHET-tee
signore	si- GNO -re	see-NYOH-reh
Ferrari	Fer- RA -ri	fer-RAH-ree
Toscana	To- SCA -na	toh-SKAH-nah
arrivederci	ar-ri-ve- DER -ci	ahr-ree-veh-DEHR-chee
studente	stu- DEN -te	stoo-DEN-teh

The marked exception: stress on the last syllable

When the stress falls on the **final** vowel, Italian tells you, in writing, with an accent mark. **An accent on the last letter of a word is a stress instruction, not a separate sound.**

Word	Said	Meaning
città	cheet-TAH	city
caffè	kahf-FEH	coffee
perché	per-KEH	because, why
così	koh-SEE	so, thus
più	pyoo	more
papà	pah-PAH	dad
università	oo-nee-ver-see-TAH	university
lunedì	loo-neh-DEE	Monday
virtù	veer-TOO	virtue
Niccolò	neek-koh-LOH	

This is why *caffè* is not "CAF-fay" and *città* is not "CHIT-ta". Two syllables, and the weight goes on the second one — the accent is telling you so.

Two footnotes on the mark itself. On *a, i, o, u* the accent leans left (*à ì ò ù*). On *e* it can go either way, and there the direction also tells you the vowel quality: *è* is open (*caffè, è* = "is") and *é* is closed (*perché, né*). And you will occasionally see an accent written on a syllable that is *not* final — *sùbito* / *subìto*, *prìncipi* / *princìpi* — but only where a dictionary or a careful writer needs to separate two words spelt identically. In ordinary Italian these accents are left out.

The unmarked exception: third-from-last syllable

A large and important group of words is stressed on the **third**-from-last syllable, and Italian does **not** mark these. You simply have to know them — which is another argument for reading aloud, because you meet them here first rather than embarrassing yourself later.

Word	Stress	Said	Meaning
telefono	te- LE -fo-no	teh-LEH-foh-noh	telephone
musica	MU -si-ca	MOO-zee-kah	music
macchina	MAC -chi-na	MAHK-kee-nah	car
sabato	SA -ba-to	SAH-bah-toh	Saturday
tavolo	TA -vo-lo	TAH-voh-loh	table
medico	ME -di-co	MEH-dee-koh	doctor
difficile	dif- FI -ci-le	deef-FEE-chee-leh	difficult
isola	I -so-la	EE-zoh-lah	island
Napoli	NA -po-li	NAH-poh-lee	Naples
Genova	GE -no-va	JEH-noh-vah	Genoa

Napoli and *Genova* are worth staring at. Almost every English speaker says "na-POH-lee" and "je-NOH-va", and almost every Italian says NA-po-li and GE-no-va.

One pattern rescues a whole grammatical class: in the present tense, the *loro* ("they") form of a verb does not move its stress forward to the ending. *Parlo* → *parlano* is **PAR**-la-no, not par-LA-no. *Abito* → *abitano* is **A**-bi-ta-no. *Capisco* → *capiscono* is ca-**PI**-sco-no. The stress stays where the *io* form put it, so that *-ano* / *-ono* ending is always unstressed. English speakers get this wrong almost every time, and it is the giveaway in the most-used tense in the language, so it is worth over-learning. (Other tenses have their own habits — the future, for instance, does stress the ending: *parleranno* is par-le-**RAN**-no. Each is flagged when it arrives.)

Stress can even land on the fourth-from-last syllable, when pronouns get stuck onto the end of a verb: *diteglielo* = **DI**-te-glie-lo. That is for much later.

Accents that mark meaning, not stress

A handful of one-syllable words wear an accent purely to distinguish them from a look-alike. Same sound, different job — the only exception being *è*, whose vowel is also more open than that of *e*.

With accent		Without	
è	is	e	and
sì	yes	si	oneself
dà	gives	da	from, by
là	there	la	the
né	nor	ne	of it
sé	himself	se	if

In Chapter 1 Marco asks *questo è il treno per Roma?* — "**is** this the train to Rome?" — and that accent is the whole difference between a question and a shopping list.

7. Your first sentence, out loud

Turn the page and Chapter 1 opens on a platform in Bologna, with this exchange:

- *Buongiorno!*
- *Buongiorno, signore.*
- *Scusi, questo è il treno per Roma?*

Everything you need to say it is now in your hands. *Buongiorno* is *buon + giorno*, with the silent switch *i* making that *g* soft. *Signore* has the *gn* of Section 5.5. *Scusi* opens with a voiceless *s* and has a voiced one between the vowels. *Questo* has *qu = kw*. And *è* carries its accent so you know it means "is". Stress falls on the second-to-last syllable of every word here that has more than one.

bwon-JOR-noh!

bwon-JOR-noh, see-NYOH-reh.

SKOO-zee, KWEH-stoh eh eel TREH-noh per ROH-mah?

Say it out loud. Full vowels, no *th*, no swallowed endings, a tapped *r* in *Roma*. That is Italian, and you have been able to read it for about ten minutes.

8. Gender: every noun is masculine or feminine

Italian has no neuter. Every single noun — people, animals, objects, ideas, cities, abstractions — is grammatically masculine or feminine, and the words around it change to match.

The first thing to accept: **grammatical gender is not about meaning**. *Il sole* (the sun) is masculine and *la luna* (the moon) is feminine, and in German it is the other way round, which tells you all you need to know about how deep the logic runs. *Il problema* is masculine. *La mano* (hand) is feminine. Do not look for a reason; look at the ending.

The main pattern

For most nouns, the final vowel tells you the gender, and changing that vowel makes the plural. This is the core of the system and it is beautifully economical:

Gender	Singular ends	Plural ends	Example
masculine	-o	-i	il libro → i libri (book/books)
feminine	-a	-e	la casa → le case (house/houses)
either	-e	-i	il padre → i padri; la madre → le matri

So: *il treno* → *i treni*, *la pizza* → *le pizze*, *il ragazzo* → *i ragazzi*, *la ragazza* → *le ragazze*.

Notice the trap in that third row. **-e** nouns can be either gender, and the plural is **-i** whichever they are — so *le matri* looks masculine but is not. For these you learn the gender with the word, which is why every noun in this book's glossaries comes with its article attached. When you learn *stazione*, learn *la stazione*.

A useful sub-pattern: nouns ending in **-zione**, **-sione** or **-gione** are reliably feminine — *la stazione*, *la nazione*, *la lezione*, *l'informazione*, *la stagione* → *le stazioni*, *le nazioni*. (Bare *-ione* without those letters in front is often masculine: *il milione*, *il campione*.)

Another: **-tà** and **-tù** words are feminine and never change in the plural — *la città* → *le città*, *l'università* → *le università*, *la virtù* → *le virtù*. The article does the work.

Common exceptions worth meeting now

Words of Greek origin ending in -ma are masculine. This catches everybody, because *-a* screams "feminine". It is not. These reached Italian from Greek by way of Latin, where they were neuter; when Italian lost the neuter gender they were reassigned to the masculine. The plural is **-i**, not **-e**:

Singular	Plural	
il problema	i problemi	problem
il programma	i programmi	programme
il sistema	i sistemi	system
il tema	i temi	theme, essay
il clima	i climi	climate
il dramma	i drammi	drama
il panorama	i panorami	view
il diploma	i diplomi	diploma

So it is *un problema difficile*, with a masculine adjective, and *i problemi sono difficili*. Say *la problema* and every Italian in the room will hear it.

Also Greek, also masculine, also *-a*: **il pianeta** → *i pianeti*, **il poeta** → *i poeti*. And **il cinema**, which is masculine and invariable — *i cinema* — because it is a clipped form of *il cinematografo*.

A few words that look masculine are feminine. Nearly all are clipped forms, and the gender comes from the original long word:

	From	Plural
la foto	fotografia	le foto
la moto	motocicletta	le moto
l'auto	automobile	le auto
la bici	bicicletta	le bici
la radio	radiodiffusione	le radio

Clipped words do not change in the plural: *le foto*, not *le fote*. And one true one-off, not a shortening at all: **la mano** (hand) is feminine, with the plural **le mani**.

Some plurals change gender. A small group of masculine nouns takes a feminine *-a* plural — often body parts and things that come in pairs:

Singular (m)	Plural (f)	
il braccio	le braccia	arm(s)
il dito	le dita	finger(s)
il ginocchio	le ginocchia	knee(s)
l'uovo	le uova	egg(s)
il paio	le paia	pair(s)

(A few of these also have a regular masculine plural used in other senses — *i bracci* of a river, for instance — but the feminine form is the everyday one for the body part.)

Genuinely irregular plurals — there are very few, and they are all common words: *l'uomo* → *gli uomini* (man/men), *il dio* → *gli dei* (god/gods), *il bue* → *i buoi* (ox/oxen).

Invariable nouns. Words that do not change at all between singular and plural, so the article is your only clue:

- ending in a stressed vowel: *la città* → *le città*, *il caffè* → *i caffè*, *il re* → *i re* (king/kings)
- imported words ending in a consonant: *il bar* → *i bar*, *il film* → *i film*, *lo sport* → *gli sport*, *il computer* → *i computer*

Spelling adjustments in -co, -ca, -go, -ga. Remember Section 5.3: adding *-i* or *-e* would soften the *c* or *g*, so the spelling has to be repaired with an *h* to preserve the sound. Feminines always repair:

- *l'amica* → *le amiche*, *la barca* → *le barche*, *la riga* → *le righe*

Masculines usually repair when the stress is on the penultimate syllable, and usually do not when it is further back:

- *il lago* → *i laghi*, *il parco* → *i parchi*, *il fuoco* → *i fuochi* (sound preserved)
- *il medico* → *i medici*, *il politico* → *i politici* (sound changes to soft)

With famous exceptions that go the other way: *l'amico* → *gli amici*, *il greco* → *i greci*, *il nemico* → *i nemici*.

Nouns in -ista work for both genders — the article decides: *il turista* / *la turista*, *il pianista* / *la pianista*, *il dentista* / *la dentista*. In the plural they split: *i turisti* (masculine or mixed) / *le turiste* (all female).

Do not try to hold all of this in your head. It is here so that when *i problemi* or *le mani* turns up thirty chapters from now, you have a page to come back to.

9. Three previews, so nothing surprises you

These arrive properly in Chapters 1 to 8. A glance now makes them familiar rather than new.

The articles

Because gender exists, "the" and "a" have several forms. The full system is Chapter 8; the shape of it is:

	"the" singular	"the" plural	"a / an"
masculine	il treno, lo studente, l' amico	i treni, gli studenti, gli amici	un treno, uno studente
feminine	la casa, l' attrice	le case, le attrici	una casa, un' attrice

The extra masculine forms exist for sound, not grammar: *lo* and *gli* are used before *s*+consonant, *z*, *gn*, *ps* and a few other awkward openings (*lo studente*, *lo zio*, *gli gnocchi*), while *l'* appears before a vowel in both genders (*l'amico*, *l'attrice*). Italian consistently rearranges itself to avoid clumsy sound sequences, and you will see the same instinct again when *di* + *il* contracts to *del* and *a* + *il* to *al*, from Chapter 13.

The disappearing subject pronoun

Io sono professore is correct. *Sono professore* is what people say. The *-o* on *sono* already means "I", so the pronoun is redundant and gets dropped unless you want contrast or emphasis: *io sono professore*, *lei è attrice* — "I am a professor, **she** is an actress."

This is why the verb tables in this book matter more than they look. The ending is not decoration; it is the subject.

Two ways to say "you"

Italian, like French and German, distinguishes the familiar from the polite.

- **tu** — one person you know well: family, friends, children, colleagues you are on easy terms with
- **Lei** — one person you have just met, or anyone you owe respect to. Written with a capital *L*, and — this is the odd part — it takes the *he/she* form of the verb. *Lei è attrice?* is literally "Is she an actress?" and means "Are you an actress?"

Marco and Lucia meet as strangers, so they use *Lei* from the first page. They keep using it for twenty-one chapters. When they finally switch to *tu*, in Chapter 22, it is a plot point as much as a grammar point — in Italian, that switch is a small intimacy, and there is even a verb for proposing it (*darsi del tu*).

10. Words you already have

The ones you know you know

Pizza, pasta, spaghetti, ravioli, espresso, cappuccino, gelato, mozzarella, prosciutto, ciao, bravo, opera, piano, tempo, solo, finale, studio, villa, balcone, ballerina, panorama, arena, replica, motto, fiasco, graffiti, paparazzi, mafia, maestro, diva, fresco, tombola. You already own several dozen Italian words and have simply never counted them.

Several come with a warning, because English borrowed the plural and forgot it was one:

- **un panino**, plural **i panini**. One sandwich is a *panino*. Asking for "a panini" is asking for "a sandwiches".
- **un biscotto** → **i biscotti**. Same problem.
- **un paparazzo** → **i paparazzi**; **un graffito** → **i graffiti**; **uno spaghetti** → **gli spaghetti**.

Two more traps of the same family. **Latte** means **milk** — order *un latte* in Italy and you will get a glass of milk; what you want is *un caffelatte*, or, in the morning, a *cappuccino*. And a **casinò**, with the accent, is a gambling house; **casino**, without it, means a mess or a racket, which makes the two words worth keeping apart.

The families you can guess

English took huge quantities of vocabulary from Latin, which is Italian's parent. That means whole classes of words convert by formula. Once you notice these, your reading vocabulary is several times larger than your studied vocabulary.

Italian ending	English ending	Examples
-zione	-tion	stazione, nazione, informazione, situazione, attenzione, conversazione
-tà	-ty	città, università, libertà, qualità, possibilità, realtà
-oso	-ous	famoso, curioso, generoso, delizioso, nervoso
-ale	-al	normale, generale, speciale, nazionale, centrale
-ico	-ic / -ical	pubblico, politico, fantastico, economico, tipico
-ivo	-ive	attivo, positivo, creativo, relativo
-mente	-ly	esattamente, naturalmente, certamente, veramente
-bile	-ble / -ible	possibile, terribile, incredibile, responsabile
-ista	-ist	artista, turista, pianista, giornalista

Una conversazione fantastica sulla situazione politica needs no glossary.

And the ones that will lie to you

Some words look exactly like an English word and mean something else entirely. These are worth reading twice, because the mistakes are memorable.

Italian	Actually means	Not	English word is
caldo	hot	cold	freddo
parenti	relatives	parents	genitori
libreria	bookshop	library	biblioteca
fattoria	farm	factory	fabbrica
camera	room	camera	macchina fotografica
morbido	soft	morbid	morboso
pretendere	to demand, claim	to pretend	fingere
annoiare	to bore	to annoy	dare fastidio
attualmente	currently	actually	in realtà
eventualmente	possibly, if need be	eventually	alla fine
educato	polite, well-mannered	educated	istruito
sensibile	sensitive	sensible	sensato
simpatico	likeable, nice	sympathetic	comprensivo
confetti	sugared almonds	confetti	coriandoli
peperoni	bell peppers	pepperoni	salame piccante

A *pizza ai peperoni* is a vegetable pizza. This has caused more disappointment than any other item on the list.

11. A last word before Chapter 1

Two things to hold on to.

Do not aim for perfect comprehension. Aim for forward motion. The book is engineered so that words come back — not once, but again and again, in new sentences, for chapters afterwards. A word you did not quite absorb in Chapter 12 will ambush you in Chapter 15 and again in Chapter 19, and one of those times it will simply be yours. Trusting that process is the whole skill.

Read aloud, every time. You have just learned an entire pronunciation system that maps letters onto sounds without lying to you. Reading aloud spends that knowledge at every single sentence, builds the rhythm of the language into your ear, and — because your mouth is slower than your eye — forces you to read at the speed where meaning actually forms.

Two people are about to meet on a train from Bologna to Rome. One of them is a professor. The other says she is an actress. Neither of them knows yet that in about forty chapters somebody is going to steal a painting.

Buona lettura.

Capitolo 1 — Il treno per Roma

Capitolo 1 — Il treno per Roma



Marco Martini e Lucia Ferrari si incontrano sul treno per Roma.

Lettura

Bologna. Il treno per Roma.

MARTINI — Buongiorno!

FERRARI — Buongiorno, signore.

MARTINI — Scusi, questo è il treno per Roma?

FERRARI — Sì, signore. Questo è il treno per Roma.

MARTINI — Grazie!

FERRARI — Prego.

Il treno per Roma... e il professore e la signorina.

MARTINI — Scusi, signorina... io sono Marco Martini. E Lei?

FERRARI — Io mi chiamo Lucia Ferrari.

MARTINI — Piacere, signorina Ferrari!

FERRARI — Molto piacere, signor Martini! E Lei... Lei è attore?

MARTINI — No, signorina, no! Io sono professore. E Lei? Lei è attrice?

FERRARI — Sì! Io sono attrice.

MARTINI — Attrice! Molto piacere! Professore e attrice... piacere!

FERRARI — Sì, molto piacere!

Il professore si chiama Marco Martini: è professore. La signorina si chiama Lucia Ferrari: è attrice. Il treno per Roma... e Marco e Lucia.

Grammatica

1. Essere (to be). The most important verb in Italian. Two forms appear in this chapter: *io sono* (I am) and *è* (he/she/it is, or formal "you are"). Italian usually drops the subject pronoun because the verb ending already tells you who is meant: *Sono professore* = I am a professor.

2. Gender and the definite article. Every Italian noun is masculine or feminine. Masculine nouns usually take *il* (il treno, il professore), feminine nouns take *la* (la signorina). "The" changes with the noun — you will meet more forms of the article soon.

3. Formal "you": Lei. With strangers and in polite situations, Italians say *Lei* (always capitalized here) and use the *he/she* form of the verb: *Lei è attrice?* = Are you an actress? Marco and Lucia have just met, so they use *Lei*.

4. Mi chiamo... (my name is...). Literally "I call myself". *Io mi chiamo Lucia* = my name is Lucia. *Si chiama Marco* = his name is Marco / your (formal) name is Marco.

5. Questo. *Questo è il treno per Roma?* = Is this the train to Rome? *Questo* is masculine; the feminine is *questa*.

6. Little courtesy words. *Scusi* = excuse me (formal). *Prego* = you're welcome (the automatic answer to *grazie*). *Piacere!* = pleased to meet you (literally "pleasure").

Tabelle

Essere — to be (presente indicativo)

Person	Form	English
io	sono	I am
tu	sei	you are (informal)
lui / lei / Lei	è	he/she is; you are (formal)
noi	siamo	we are
voi	siete	you are (plural)
loro	sono	they are

Chiamarsi — to be called (presente indicativo)

Person	Form	English
io	mi chiamo	my name is
tu	ti chiami	your name is (informal)
lui / lei / Lei	si chiama	his/her/your (formal) name is
noi	ci chiamiamo	our names are
voi	vi chiamate	your names are (plural)
loro	si chiamano	their names are

The reading uses only the io and lui/lei/Lei forms for now; the other rows are for reference. The plural forms start appearing from chapter 6.

The definite article (first forms)

	Masculine	Feminine
singular	il treno	la signorina

Glossario

Italiano	English
buongiorno	good morning, good day
il signore (la signora)	gentleman, sir, Mr. (lady, madam, Mrs.)
scusi	excuse me (formal)
questo / questa	this
essere (sono, è)	to be (I am, he/she/it is; formal you are)
il treno	train
per	for, to (destination)
sì	yes
grazie	thank you
prego	you're welcome
la signorina	young lady, Miss
io	I
e	and
Lei	you (formal)
chiamarsi (mi chiamo, si chiama)	to be called (my name is, his/her/your name is)
il piacere (Piacere!)	pleasure (Pleased to meet you!)
molto	very, much
l'attore (l'attrice)	actor (actress)
no	no
il professore	professor, teacher

Capitolo 2 — Perché va a Roma?



Marco, Lucia e la signora Bruni fanno conoscenza sul treno.

Lettura

Il treno va a Roma.

FERRARI — Professore, Lei va a Roma... perché?

MARTINI — Vado a Roma per lavorare. L'università di Roma ha un lavoro nuovo per me. Adesso abito a Bologna, ma il lavoro è a Roma... e anche la città è nuova per me!

FERRARI — E dove lavora, professore?

MARTINI — Lavoro in una università. L'università si chiama San Callisto. E Lei, signorina? Lei non è di Roma?

FERRARI — Sì, io sono di Roma! Ma non abito a Roma: abito a Milano. Sono attrice a Milano.

MARTINI — E perché va a Roma?

FERRARI — Vado da mia madre. Mia madre abita a Roma. Si chiama Elena.

E... una signora!

LA SIGNORA — Buongiorno! Scusi, questo è il treno per Roma?

MARTINI — Sì, signora. Prego!

LA SIGNORA — Grazie! Io mi chiamo Anna Bruni.

FERRARI — Piacere, signora Bruni! Io sono Lucia Ferrari e questo è il professor Martini.

BRUNI — Molto piacere, signor Martini! Lei è professore? E Lei, signorina?

FERRARI — Io sono attrice.

BRUNI — Un'attrice! Molto piacere!

MARTINI — E Lei, signora? Lei è di Roma?

BRUNI — No, io sono di Napoli. Ma adesso vado a Roma anche io.

Il treno va a Roma. Marco va a Roma per lavorare: ha un lavoro nuovo in una università. Lucia è di Roma, ma abita a Milano. Adesso va a Roma, da Elena, la madre. E la signora Bruni? Anche la signora Bruni va a Roma.

Grammatica

1. Verbs in -are (present tense, singular). Most Italian verbs end in *-are*. Take off *-are* and add: *-o* for io, *-a* for lui/lei/Lei: *io lavoro* (I work), *Lei lavora* (you work), *Lucia abita* (Lucia lives). You have seen *lavorare* and *abitare*.

2. Andare (to go) — irregular. *Io vado* (I go), *lui/lei/Lei va* (he/she goes, you go): *Vado a Roma. Il treno va a Roma.*

3. Avere (to have) — irregular. *Io ho* (I have), *lui/lei/Lei ha* (he/she has, you have): *L'università ha un lavoro nuovo per me.*

4. Negation: non. Put *non* directly before the verb: *Non abito a Roma* = I don't live in Rome. Compare *no* (the answer "no") with *non* (the "not" inside a sentence).

5. Little prepositions. *a* Roma / *a* Milano (in/to a city); *in* una università (in); *di* Roma (from/of — origin: *sono di Roma* = I'm from Rome); *da* mia madre (to/at somebody's place: *vado da mia madre* = I'm going to my mother's).

6. Chunks to learn as they are (full grammar later): *mia madre* = my mother; *per me* = for me; *un lavoro / una università* = a job / a university (the word for "a/an" — properly presented in chapter 4); *un'attrice* — before a feminine noun starting with a vowel, *una* becomes *un'*. Also *l'università*: *la* becomes *l'* before a vowel.

Tabelle

Regular -are verbs — model: *lavorare* (to work)

Person	<i>lavorare</i>	<i>abitare</i>
io	lavoro	abito
tu	lavori	abiti
lui / lei / Lei	lavora	abita
noi	lavoriamo	abitiamo
voi	lavorate	abitare
loro	lavorano	abitano

Andare — to go (irregular)

Person	Form
io	vado
tu	vai
lui / lei / Lei	va
noi	andiamo
voi	andate
loro	vanno

Avere — to have (irregular)

Person	Form
io	ho
tu	hai
lui / lei / Lei	ha
noi	abbiamo
voi	avete
loro	hanno

The *h* in *ho, hai, ha, hanno* is silent — it only distinguishes the spelling from other words (*o* = *or*, *ai*, *a*, *anno* = *year*).

So far the story uses mainly the *io* and *lui/lei/Lei* forms; the full tables are for reference and will all be in use by chapter 6.

Glossario

Italiano	English
andare (vado, va)	to go (I go, he/she/it goes; formal you go)
a	to, in (with cities)
perché	why, because
lavorare (lavoro, lavora)	to work
l'università	university
di	of, from
avere (ho, ha)	to have
il lavoro	job, work
nuovo / nuova	new
adesso	now
abitare (abito, abita)	to live, to reside
ma	but
anche	also, too
la città	city
dove	where
in	in
non	not
mio / mia	my
da	from; to/at somebody's place
la madre (la mamma)	mother (mum)

Capitolo 3 — Il controllore



Il controllore controlla i biglietti sul treno per Roma.

Lettura

Il treno va a Roma. Marco, Lucia e la signora Bruni parlano.

MARTINI — Signorina, com'è il tempo a Roma?

FERRARI — A Roma il tempo è bello: c'è il sole e fa caldo.

MARTINI — A Bologna adesso fa brutto e fa freddo!

BRUNI — Eh sì! Il nord è freddo, il sud è caldo. Io sono di Napoli: a Napoli c'è il sole e fa molto caldo!

FERRARI — Roma è una città bella e calda. Mia madre parla molto di tempo e di sole: "A Roma c'è il sole! Il sole di Roma è bello!"

MARTINI — Il sole di Roma... per me è molto bello. Bologna è bella, ma è fredda!

BRUNI — E perché va a Roma, professore? Per il sole?

MARTINI — No, signora: vado per lavorare! Ho un lavoro nuovo in una università di Roma.

BRUNI — Che bello! E dove abita?

MARTINI — Adesso abito a Bologna... e la città nuova è... nuova anche per me!

Ecco il controllore. Il controllore lavora in treno.

IL CONTROLLORE — Buongiorno! Biglietto, prego!

MARTINI — Sì, sì... il mio biglietto... Ma dove è il mio biglietto? Non vedo il biglietto!

FERRARI — È qui, professore!

MARTINI — Ah! Ecco il biglietto! Grazie, signorina.

IL CONTROLLORE — Grazie, signore... Signorina, grazie... E Lei, signora? Ha il biglietto?

BRUNI — Sì, ecco!

IL CONTROLLORE — Grazie. Buon viaggio!

FERRARI — Grazie!

MARTINI — Che lavoro, il controllore: lavora in treno, in viaggio!

FERRARI — Eh sì! E che viaggio: Bologna-Roma... da un tempo brutto e freddo... a una città di sole!

Il tempo a Roma è bello: c'è il sole. Il tempo a Bologna è brutto: fa freddo. Ma in treno... in treno fa caldo, e il viaggio è bello.

Grammatica

1. Fare (to do/make) and the weather. Italians describe weather with *fare*: *Che tempo fa?* (What's the weather like?) — *Fa caldo* (it's hot), *fa freddo* (it's cold), *fa bello* / *fa brutto* (the weather is nice / bad). *Fa* is the lui/lei/Lei form of *fare*.

2. C'è (there is). *C'è il sole* = the sun is out (literally "there is the sun"). You will meet the plural (*ci sono*) in the next chapter.

3. Adjective agreement. Adjectives match the gender of the noun: *il tempo è bello* but *la città è bella*; *il nord è freddo* but *Bologna è fredda*. Adjectives ending in *-e* (like *il professore*) don't change for gender — more on those later.

4. Buono → buon. Before most masculine nouns, *buono* shortens: *Buon viaggio!* (Have a good trip!).

5. They-form of -are verbs. Add *-ano*: *Marco, Lucia e la signora Bruni parlano* (they talk). Just recognize it for now.

6. Che...! *Che bello!* = How nice! *Che lavoro!* = What a job! *Che viaggio!* = What a journey! — *che* + adjective or noun makes an exclamation. As a question word, *che tempo fa?* = what's the weather like?

7. Com'è...? = *come* + *è*: "What is ... like?" — *Com'è il tempo a Roma?*

Tabelle

Fare — to do, to make (irregular)

Person	Form
io	faccio
tu	fai
lui / lei / Lei	fa
noi	facciamo
voi	fate
loro	fanno

Weather with fare and c'è

Italiano	English
Che tempo fa?	What's the weather like?
Fa caldo. / Fa freddo.	It's hot. / It's cold.
Fa bello. / Fa brutto.	The weather is nice. / bad.
C'è il sole.	It's sunny.

Adjective agreement (singular)

Masculine	Feminine	English
il tempo bello	la città bella	nice
il nord freddo	Bologna fredda	cold
un caffè caldo	una città calda	hot
un tempo brutto	una sera brutta	bad

Adjectives in -e (grande, importante...) have one form for both genders — they arrive in chapter 6.

Glossario

Italiano	English
parlare	to speak, to talk
come (com'è?)	how (what is ... like?)
il tempo	weather; time
bello / bella	beautiful, nice
c'è	there is
il sole	sun
fare (fa)	to do, to make (<i>fa caldo</i> = it's hot)
caldo / calda	hot, warm
brutto / brutta	ugly, bad
freddo / fredda	cold
il nord	north
il sud	south
che	what (a)...!, that
ecco	here is..., there is...!
il controllore	(train) conductor
il biglietto	ticket
vedere (vedo)	to see
qui	here
buono (buon)	good
il viaggio	journey, trip

Capitolo 4 — Un caffè, per favore



Marco e Lucia prendono un caffè al bar del treno.

Lettura

Il treno va a Roma. Oggi il tempo fa bello: c'è il sole, non fa brutto. Marco e Lucia parlano, parlano, parlano...

MARTINI — Signorina... un caffè? C'è un bar in treno!

FERRARI — Un caffè, sì! Grazie, professore!

BRUNI — Io no, grazie. Non prendo caffè oggi.

Marco e Lucia vanno al bar. Anche il controllore è al bar: prende un caffè.

IL CONTROLLORE — Un caffè fa bene in viaggio! E il caffè di questo bar è buono!

IL CAMERIERE — Buongiorno! Prego?

MARTINI — Un caffè per la signorina e un caffè per me, per favore.

IL CAMERIERE — Sì, signore. Ecco: il caffè per la signorina... e il caffè per Lei.

FERRARI — Con zucchero ma senza latte, per favore.

MARTINI — E per me senza zucchero, grazie.

IL CAMERIERE — Ecco lo zucchero, signorina! E... acqua? C'è anche un dolce molto buono!

MARTINI — Ha un panino? Voglio mangiare... e voglio bere un'acqua!

IL CAMERIERE — Sì! Ecco i panini: sono molto buoni. E l'acqua fredda.

MARTINI — E Lei, signorina? Vuole mangiare? Un panino o un dolce?

FERRARI — No, grazie. Non voglio mangiare: voglio bere il caffè... un caffè caldo!

MARTINI — Quanto è, per favore? Pago io!

IL CAMERIERE — ... Signore, scusi! Questo non è... Questo è un biglietto di treno!

MARTINI — Oh! Scusi! Ecco...!

FERRARI — Ah, il professore!

Marco paga. Lucia beve il caffè con zucchero, senza latte. Marco beve il caffè senza zucchero e mangia un panino.

FERRARI — Che bello! Da qui vedo il sole e... il sud!

MARTINI — Sì! A Bologna oggi fa freddo, ma qui fa caldo. Com'è il caffè?

FERRARI — Molto buono! Il caffè caldo, il sole, un viaggio bello...

MARTINI — Eh sì. Nord o sud, il caffè in Italia è buono! E anche mia madre... anche mia madre beve il caffè con zucchero e senza latte, signorina!

FERRARI — Ah, sì? Bene!

Grammatica

1. The indefinite article (a / an). Masculine: *un* (un caffè, un panino, un bar); *uno* before s+consonant or z (uno zucchero — rare in practice). Feminine: *una* (una città), *un'* before a vowel (un'acqua, un'attrice).

2. Volere (to want) — irregular. *Io voglio, lui/lei/Lei vuole.* With a noun (*Voglio un caffè*) or with an infinitive (*Voglio mangiare* = I want to eat; *Vuole bere?* = do you want to drink?).

3. Plural of nouns. Masculine -o → -i: il panino → i panini. Feminine -a → -e: la signora → le signore. Words with a final accent don't change: il caffè → i caffè. Note the plural articles: *i* (m.), *le* (f.).

4. Plural adjectives and verbs. *I panini sono molto buoni* — the adjective takes the plural too (*buoni*), and *sono* here means "they are" (same form as *io sono*!). *Marco e Lucia vanno* = they go (from *andare*).

5. Al = a + il. Italians merge prepositions with articles: *al bar* = *a* + *il bar* (at/to the bar). Just learn *al bar* as a chunk; the full system comes in chapter 13.

6. Prendere. Literally "to take", but it's THE verb for ordering things: *Prendo un caffè* = I'll have a coffee.

Tabelle

Volere — to want (irregular)

Person	Form
io	voglio
tu	vuoi
lui / lei / Lei	vuole
noi	vogliamo
voi	volete
loro	vogliono

Bere — to drink (irregular)

Person	Form
io	bevo
tu	bevi
lui / lei / Lei	beve
noi	beviamo
voi	bevete
loro	bevono

The indefinite article (a / an)

	Before...	Example
un	most masculine nouns	un caffè, un treno, un bar
uno	masculine s+consonant, z	uno studente, uno zucchero
una	most feminine nouns	una città, una signora
un'	feminine + vowel	un'acqua, un'attrice

Plural of nouns and articles

Singular	Plural	Rule
il panino	i panini	m. -o → -i
la signora	le signore	f. -a → -e
il caffè	i caffè	accented final vowel: no change

Glossario

Italiano	English
oggi	today
il caffè	coffee
il bar	bar, café
prendere (prendo, prende)	to take; to have (food/drink)
bene	well (<i>fa bene</i> = it does you good)
il cameriere	waiter, barman
per favore	please
con	with
lo zucchero	sugar
senza	without
il latte	milk
l'acqua	water
il dolce	dessert, sweet, cake
il panino	sandwich, bread roll
volere (voglio, vuole)	to want
mangiare	to eat
bere (bevo, beve)	to drink
o	or
quanto (Quanto è?)	how much (How much is it?)
pagare (pago, paga)	to pay

Capitolo 5 — Roma Termini



Arrivo a Roma Termini: Marco, Lucia ed Elena in stazione.

Lettura

Roma! Il treno arriva a Roma, in una stazione molto bella: Roma Termini. Oggi a Roma c'è il sole e fa caldo.

FERRARI — Ecco Roma! Il treno arriva!

MARTINI — E io arrivo in una città nuova... La valigia, signorina! Prendo io la valigia!

FERRARI — Grazie, professore!

BRUNI — Arrivederci, signorina! Arrivederci, professore! E... buon lavoro a Roma! Io vado al bar: voglio un panino e un'acqua per il viaggio a Napoli!

MARTINI — Arrivederci, signora Bruni! Buon viaggio!

IL CONTROLLORE — Roma Termini! Arrivederci!

Marco e Lucia sono in stazione. In stazione c'è un bar: il cameriere fa un caffè molto buono... ma adesso no, adesso non è il tempo di un caffè!

FERRARI — Professore... il mio numero di telefono! Può scrivere il numero, per favore?

MARTINI — Sì! Ecco il telefono...

FERRARI — Ecco: tre, tre, cinque... quattro, otto, uno... due, due... sei, sette.

MARTINI — Tre, tre, cinque, quattro, otto, uno, due, due, sei, sette. Bene! E io abito in Via Marmorata nove, a Roma... da oggi! Posso chiamare domani?

FERRARI — Sì! Domani!

Ecco Elena, la madre di Lucia. Elena è in stazione.

FERRARI — Mamma! ... Mamma, questo è il professor Marco Martini.

ELENA — Molto piacere, professore!

MARTINI — Piacere, signora!

FERRARI — Professore... vuole mangiare da mia madre domani? Alle dieci un caffè, e... c'è un dolce di Roma molto buono!

ELENA — Sì, sì! E Lei, professore, beve il caffè con zucchero o senza? Con latte o senza latte?

FERRARI — Senza zucchero e senza latte, mamma: il professore beve il caffè senza zucchero!

MARTINI — ... Sì! E Lei, signorina, prende il caffè con zucchero, ma senza latte.

FERRARI — Ah! Bene!

ELENA — Molto bene!

MARTINI — Quanto è bella Roma! A domani... e pago io!

FERRARI — No, professore. Oggi il caffè in treno... domani pago io! Arrivederci!

MARTINI — A domani, signorina!

Marco vede Lucia ed Elena: vanno da Elena, a Trastevere. E Marco va in Via Marmorata, con la valigia... e con un numero di telefono! Chiama domani? Sì: domani!

Grammatica

1. Verbs in -ere (present tense). Like -are verbs, but the lui/lei/Lei ending is -e: *prendere* → *prendo, prende*; *vedere* → *vedo, vede*; *scrivere* → *scrivo, scrive*. Compare: *lavora* (-are) but *prende* (-ere).

2. Potere (can, to be able) — irregular. *Io posso, lui/lei/Lei può* + infinitive: *Posso chiamare domani?* = May I call tomorrow? *Può scrivere?* = Can you write?

3. Numbers 1-10. uno, due, tre, quattro, cinque, sei, sette, otto, nove, dieci. Italians read phone numbers digit by digit or in pairs.

4. Arrivare. A regular -are verb: *il treno arriva, io arrivo*.

5. Chunks. *Alle dieci* = at ten o'clock (telling the time properly comes in chapter 8). *A domani!* = see you tomorrow! *Ed* = *e* before a vowel (*Lucia ed Elena*).

6. Ripasso — remembering coffee. Notice how *con / senza, volere, prendere*, and *bere* from chapter 4 come back: knowing how someone takes their coffee is very Italian — and Marco and Lucia each remembered!

Tabelle

Regular -ere verbs — model: prendere (to take)

Person	prendere	scrivere	vedere
io	prendo	scrivo	vedo
tu	prendi	scrivi	vedi
lui / lei / Lei	prende	scrive	vede
noi	prendiamo	scriviamo	vediamo
voi	prendete	scrivete	vedete
loro	prendono	scrivono	vedono

Compare with -are: the tu form is -i in both classes, but lui/lei/Lei is -a for -are verbs (lavora) and -e for -ere verbs (prende). The -ire class completes the picture in chapter 6.

Potere — can, to be able to (irregular)

Person	Form
io	posso
tu	puoi
lui / lei / Lei	può
noi	possiamo
voi	potete
loro	possono

Numbers 1-10

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

Glossario

Italiano	English
arrivare (arrivo, arriva)	to arrive
la stazione	station
la valigia	suitcase
arrivederci	goodbye
il numero	number
il telefono	telephone
potere (posso, può)	can, to be able to
scrivere (scrivo, scrive)	to write
tre	three
cinque	five
quattro	four
otto	eight
uno	one
due	two
sei	six
sette	seven
chiamare (chiamo, chiama)	to call, to phone
domani	tomorrow
nove	nine
dieci	ten