

TEACH

YOURSELF

ITALIAN

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1.1


THE ALPHABET AND THE BASIC SOUNDS

The modern Italian alphabet has less letters than the English one: **J, K, W, X** and **Y** do not occur in native terms. Nevertheless, these letters do appear in dictionaries, for archaic spellings, and for a few foreign and international terms officially adopted in Italian, as well.

The following table includes these letters too, though showing them in **deep green**, to stress their less common use.




Each entry shows the pronunciation of the letter in Italian, trying to make the closest match with English sounds.




An important thing to remember is that all the Italian vowels are clipped, i.e. their duration, or sound length, is very short, compared to the average English vowels.


For a better comprehension, each vowel has one or more icons like this one , with links to audio files in .WAV format.

The last column on the right shows the "name" of each letter, i.e. what they are called in Italian.

BASIC SOUND TABLE

LETTER	PRONOUNCIATION	NAME
A	Always as an English a in <i>cat, fact</i> , or as an o in <i>how, cloud, mouse</i> . (audio sample A )	<i>a</i>
B	Always as an English b .	<i>bi</i>
C	As an English k , except when the following vowel is e or i : in this case it sounds as the English cluster ch in <i>chest, chip, chisel</i> . The letter c also forms some special clusters, discussed in the following page.	<i>ci</i>
D	Always as an English d .	<i>di</i>
E	Depending on the word, it may have two slightly different sounds: either as an English a in <i>hay, layer, may</i> (this is popularly called a narrow "e" or closed "e"), or as an English e in <i>send, tent, hen</i> (this one is popularly called a wide "e" or open "e"). To mark this difference, two different accents are placed above the vowel: an acute accent, slanted rightwards (é), gives the "closed" sound, while the grave accent, slanted leftwards (è), gives the "open" sound. Unlike in French, in Italian accented vowels such as é and è are used very sparingly: most words are spelled with an ordinary e . Obviously, for the spoken language, the correct sound must be remembered. But the student should not worry about this too much: in most cases, a word pronounced with an incorrect sound (for example a wide "e" in place of a narrow "e") would be understood all the same. (audio sample É , acute ) . . . (audio sample È , grave )	<i>e</i> (narrow sound)

F	Always as an English f in <i>fame, knife, flute</i> , but never like <i>of</i> .	<i>effe</i>
G	As an English g in <i>gravel, goblet</i> , except in three cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when followed by vowels e and i, it sounds as English j in <i>jelly, jigsaw</i>; • when followed by n, forming cluster gn (discussed in the following page); • when followed by l, forming cluster gl (discussed in the following page). 	<i>gi</i>
H	It is completely soundless: never as in <i>house, hope, hammer</i> , but as in <i>heir, honest</i> . Its use will be explained further on. It also takes part to special clusters, discussed in the following page. But h	<i>acca</i>
I	It always sounds as an English y in <i>yellow, troyan</i> . A similar sound is that of English ee in <i>fleet, seem</i> , but the length of the Italian sound is shorter. (audio sample I )	<i>i</i>
J	A few names have a letter j , always pronounced as an English y in <i>yell, lawyer</i> ; for further details about this letter, scroll down the page to the NOTES or follow this LINK .	<i>i lunga</i>
K	In foreign or international words, it always sounds as an English k .	<i>kappa</i>
L	Always as English l .	<i>elle</i>
M	Always as an English m .	<i>emme</i>
N	Always as an English n .	<i>enne</i>
O	Always as an English o , in some cases with a "narrow" or "closed" sound as in <i>blow, soul, row</i> , or sometimes with a "wide" or "open" sound as in <i>cloth, spot, dog</i> . These sounds are spelled with the acute accent (ó) for the closed sound, and with the grave accent (ò) for the open sound. However, the use of ó and ò is very limited, and the correct sound must be known. Also in this case, a word pronounced with the wrong accent is usually understood all the same. (audio sample Ó ) . . . (audio sample Ò )	<i>o</i> (wide sound)
P	Always as an English p .	<i>pi</i>
Q	Always as an English q , it is always followed by vowel u .	<i>qu</i>
R	This sound is always "rolled", like a Scottish r in <i>Edinburgh</i> , or a Spanish r in <i>señor</i> . It is obtained by making the tip of the tongue vibrate almost against the hard palate, next to the back of the upper teeth. It never sounds as an English r , nor as a French r .	<i>erre</i>

S	As an English s , sometimes strong as in <i>strip, fuss, spare</i> , and sometimes weak as in <i>easy, abuse, lies</i> . The letter s also belongs to some special clusters, discussed in the following page.	<i>esse</i> (strong sound)
T	Always as English t	<i>ti</i>
U	The sound is similar to an English w in <i>win, rowing</i> , but u is a vowel, while w is a consonant. (audio sample U )	<i>u</i>
V	Always as an English v .	<i>vu</i> or <i>vi</i>
W	In foreign or international words, it may either sound as a German w in <i>würstel, watt</i> (i.e. like an Italian v), or as an English w in <i>window</i> (i.e. as the Italian vowel u). When Italians are in doubt, they usually pronounce the letter w in the German way, as suggested by the name given to this letter, which means <i>double v</i> .	<i>doppia</i> <i>vu</i>
X	In foreign or international words, it always sounds as an English x .	<i>ics</i>
Y	In foreign or international words, it always sounds as an English y , i.e. exactly as the Italian vowel i . A further note about this letter is at the bottom of the page: either scroll down, or follow this LINK .	<i>i greca</i> or <i>ipilon</i>
Z	According to the word, it sounds either as an English ds in <i>godzilla</i> , or as ts in <i>cats</i> .	<i>zeta</i> (with the ds sound)

NOTES





- **letter J** - in some Italian words, such as **gioiello** (= *jewel*), **maiale** (= *pig*), and a few others, the vowel **i** is followed by a further vowel that belongs to the same syllable. This **i** will therefore have a rather "swift" sound, i.e. a short duration, more or less as the letter **y** would be pronounced in English in *yellow, coyote, yolk*: no more than 100 years ago, this **i** would have been often spelled **j** (i.e. **giojello, majale**), to show this particular sound due to the following vowel. The Italian name for **j** means *long i*. Nowadays, this spelling has become totally obsolete, and **j** only occurs in a few first names and surnames. However, it is always pronounced as an Italian **i**.

















- **letter Y** - it is a reminiscence of the Greek alphabet, as suggested by the name *Greek i* given to this consonant. But while this letter in Greek sounds like German *ü*, in Italian it sounds exactly like vowel **i**, and since it was redundant, it was gradually dropped.

1.2

SPECIAL CLUSTERS

The pronunciation of some consonants changes when they come together and form one syllable (monosyllabic clusters).

CLUSTER	PRONOUNCIATION
<p>CE, CI CIA, CIE, CIO, CIU</p>	<p>While ca, co and cu are pronounced as in English, ce and ci have a soft sound (palatal pronunciation), like in English che and chi.</p> <p>When the cluster ci is followed by a further vowel, the i loses its sound, and becomes merely graphic (only to show that c has to be pronounced as English "ch"). Therefore, cia sounds like cha (<i>not chya</i>), cie is pronounced che, cio as cho, and ciu as chu.</p> <p><u>CE</u>  <u>CI</u>  <u>CIA</u>  <u>CIE</u>  <u>CIO</u>  <u>CIU</u> </p>
<p>CHE, CHI</p>	<p>The letter h between c and e, or between c and i, gives the cluster a hard sound (guttural pronunciation): che sounds like an English ke, while chi sounds like an English ki.</p> <p><u>CHE</u>  <u>CHI</u> </p>
<p>GE, GI GIA, GIE, GIO, GIU</p>	<p>The clusters ga, go and gu are pronounced like in English, but ge and gi have a "soft" sound (palatal pronunciation), like English je and jy (or jih).</p> <p>Also in this case, when cluster gi is followed by a further vowel, i becomes mute, and the English "j" sound is followed by the second vowel, thus gia sounds like ja (<i>not jya</i>), gie is pronounced je, gio as jo, and giu as ju.</p> <p><u>GE</u>  <u>GI</u>  <u>GIA</u>  <u>GIE</u>  <u>GIO</u>  <u>GIU</u> </p>
<p>GHE, GHI</p>	<p>An h inserted between g and vowel e or i gives the cluster a hard sound (guttural pronunciation): ghe sounds like an English gue in guest, while ghi sounds like an English gui in guild.</p> <p><u>GHE</u>  <u>GHI</u> </p>
<p>GLI GLIA, GLIE, GLIO, GLIU</p>	<p>When gl is followed by vowel i, it has the same sound as ll in Spanish words like <i>caballo</i>, <i>lluvia</i>, etc. This exact sound does not exist in English, although a rather similar one is obtained pronouncing the sentence "I will call</p>

	<p><i>you</i>", in which a double <i>l</i> is followed by y + another vowel. The Italian sound is obtained by pressing the point of the tongue against the back of the teeth and flattening it against the hard palate.</p> <p>When gli is followed by vowels a, e, o and u, the sound of i is lost; glia sounds like Spanish lla (close enough to English llya, but y should not be heard much), glie as Spanish lle, glio as Spanish llo, and gliu as Spanish llu.</p> <p>Instead, when gl (without an i) is followed by vowels a, e, o and u, it is simply pronounced as in English, in words like glass, glove, glue.</p> <p><u>GLI</u> </p> <p><u>GLIA</u>  <u>GLIE</u>  <u>GLIO</u>  <u>GLIU</u> </p>
<p>GN</p>	<p>It is pronounced exactly as a Spanish ñ, in <i>señor</i>, <i>mañana</i>. The gn cluster is always followed by a vowel.</p> <p><u>GNA</u></p> <p></p> <p><u>GNE</u>  <u>GNI</u>  <u>GNO</u>  <u>GNU</u> </p>
<p>SCE, SCI</p> <p>SCIA, SCIE, SCIO, SCIU</p>	<p>The cluster sc only has a special sound when followed by vowels e and i, in which case it sounds like an English sh in <i>sharp</i>, <i>shelf</i>, <i>shop</i>.</p> <p>In any other case (sca, sco, scu) the pronunciation is like the English one in <i>scar</i> <i>scorpion</i>, <i>scuba</i>.</p> <p>When the cluster sci is followed by a vowel (scia, scie, scio, sciu), the sound of i is lost; thus scia sounds like English sha, scie is pronounced she, scio as sho, and sciu as shu.</p> <p><u>SCE</u>  <u>SCI</u> </p> <p><u>SCIA</u>  <u>SCIE</u>  <u>SCIO</u>  <u>SCIU</u> </p>

The aforesaid concepts are summarized in the following table, which shows the Italian clusters (bold letters) and their English sound (in italics); the few marked [*] refer to Spanish pronunciation.

MONOSYLLABIC CLUSTERS SUMMARY TABLE

ca · <i>ca</i>	co · <i>co</i>	cu · <i>cu</i>	ce · <i>che</i>	ci · <i>chi</i>
-	-	-	che · <i>ke</i>	chi · <i>ki</i>
cia · <i>cha</i>	cio · <i>cho</i>	ciu · <i>chu</i>	-	-
ga · <i>ga</i>	go · <i>go</i>	gu · <i>gu</i>	ge · <i>je</i>	gi · <i>ji</i>
-	-	-	ghe · <i>gue</i>	ghi · <i>gui</i>
gia · <i>ja</i>	gio · <i>jo</i>	giu · <i>ju</i>	-	-
gla · <i>gla</i>	glo · <i>glo</i>	glu · <i>glu</i>	gle · <i>gle</i>	gli · <i>lli</i> [*]
glia · <i>lla</i> [*]	glio · <i>llo</i> [*]	gliu · <i>llu</i> [*]	glie · <i>lle</i> [*]	-

gna · ña [*]	gno · ño [*]	gnu · ñu [*]	gne · ñe [*]	gni · ñi [*]
sca · sca	sco · sco	scu · scu	sce · she	sci · shi

[*] = Spanish sounds

There are some words ending with **...cia**, **...cie**, **...gia**, **...gie**, whose sound does not follow above-mentioned rules. This is not due to an irregular pronunciation, but simply to the fact that the letters that form the cluster belong to separate syllables.

Focus these examples:

- **grigia**, meaning *grey* (feminine form), consists of the following syllables: **gri - gia**, and is pronounced as English "*gryh-jah*" (soundless "h"!). The **gia** cluster makes one syllable, thus its sound follows the general rule previously discussed;

([AUDIO SAMPLE](#))

- **bugia**, meaning *a lie*, consists of the following syllables: **bu - gi - a**, and sounds like English "*bw-jyh-ah*" (soundless "h"!), because the cluster **gia** is split into two syllables: **gi** and **a**, pronounced separately.

([AUDIO SAMPLE](#))

For the time being, the student can simply ignore this apparently complicated situation, and keep following the general rules: any unusual pronunciation will be clearly indicated.

1.3

ENGLISH SPELLING OF ITALIAN SOUNDS

The pronunciation of the Italian consonants should not be difficult for English-speakers, but most vowels have a different sound. There are two important points to keep well in mind at all times:

- In Italian, the pronunciation of the vowels does not change according to the word (only **e** and **o** have "wide" and "narrow" sounds, yet not very different), whereas for instance an English "e" is pronounced in different ways (*leave*, *hen*, *break*).

As a general rule, the sound of Italian vowels is not affected by other letters. There is only one exception, already discussed in the previous [paragraph 1.2](#): when **i** belongs to particular clusters, its sound is not heard.

- The Italian vowels are always pronounced clipped, i.e. with a very short duration (sound length), whereas in English they are often held, so to obtain a "long" sound, particularly when they occur at the end of a word. For example, the English *undergo* is pronounced as if the word was spelled *undergoe*, although the word ends with **o** alone.

In Italian, this sound would be shorter, as if the word was spelled *undergoh*, (without pronouncing the **h**), and the great majority of Italian words ends in a similar way, i.e. with a vowel.

Vowels are the greatest obstacle in attempting to mimic the Italian sound by using syllables pronounced in the English way; there is no other way to obtain clipped vowels than to add an "h" after each of them (ah, eh, oh, etc.) This phonetic spelling looks a little awkward, for instance **libreria** (for *bookshop*) looks like "lyhbrehryhah"; but this will no longer be necessary once the student has fully learned the basic pronunciation rules. Practice hard your vowels, so to get rid of these funny spellings very soon!

In these first chapters, a phonetic spelling (i.e. the English spelling of the word's sound), between quotation marks and in italics style, has been added to each Italian word, as a further help for the beginner; at more advanced stages, it will be abandoned, assuming that the student has gradually become confident with the pronunciation rules.

The introduction paragraph (see [GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF THESE PAGES](#)) shows a few examples, and explains why I preferred to use this method rather than the international phonetic system.

Further notes about the phonetic spelling are the following ones:

- The sound of the Italian vowel **a** is obtained by spelling it "*..ah..*", always sounding as in **bath**, but obviously clipped, i.e. much shorter than in English.

- The Italian **e** is spelled *"..eh.."*: it may sound as letter **e** in **bet**, or as letter **a** in **may** not pronouncing the **y**.
- The Italian **i** is obtained by *"..yh.."* or *"..y.."*, always sounding as the letter **y** in **gym**;
- The Italian **o** is spelled *"..oh.."*, sometimes sounding as letter **o** in **box**, and sometimes as in **coal**, though with a shorter sound than in English.
- The Italian **u** is spelled *"..w.."*, always sounding as letter **w** in **want**.
- The Italian **c** is spelled *"..k.."* when its sound is "strong" (guttural), as in **card**, **come**.
The "soft" (palatal) sound, like the English cluster **ch** in **church** or **cheese**, is spelled *"..ch.."* (remember not to omit the sound of **h** in this case!).
- In a similar way, the Italian **g** is spelled *"..g.."*, when its sound is "strong" (guttural), as in **goal**, **guide**; its "soft" (palatal) sound, like an English **j**, is spelled *"..j.."*, sounding like **jam** or **jungle**.
- The Italian cluster **sc**, when the sound matches the English cluster **sh** in **shade** or **fish**, is spelled *"..sh.."* (again, do not omit the sound of **h** in this case!).
- The Italian **gn** sound is spelled using a Spanish *"..ñ.."*, as **señor**.
- For the Italian cluster **gl** another Spanish group has been used, *"..ll.."* (always with a reminder note). In the GRAMMAR AND EXERCISES section of this website, this phonetic spelling has been preferred, because it is the closest to the Italian pronunciation.
Instead, in the USEFUL EXPRESSIONS sections I preferred to use its quasi-equivalent English *...lly...* spelling, because the readers whose only purpose is that to use the sentences on a holiday, would find this spelling easier to understand, without having to learn the language in depth.
- The sound of the Italian **r** is always "rolled": there is no graphic way for showing this, so simply keep in mind the pronunciation of this letter.

ACCENT (or STRESS)

Accent will be the subject of the next paragraph, but I would like to introduce in advance that in the English sound version, the stressed syllables are shown in bold: these syllables carry the stress in pronouncing the relevant word. For example:











animale (*animal*) is pronounced "*ahny**h**mahleh*" (stress on the syllable **ma**)

tavolo (*table*) is pronounced "*tah**v**ohloh*" (stress on the first syllable **ta**)

perché (*why, because*) is pronounced "*pehr**ch**eh*" (stress on the last syllable **che**)

So now, according to the pronunciation table and to the above-mentioned notes, you should be able to pronounce correctly any Italian sound.

Take a test with the following words:

ITALIAN	AUDIO SAMPLE	ENGLISH SOUND	MEANING
bianco		<i>"byahnkoh"</i>	<i>white</i>
strada		<i>"strahdah"</i>	<i>road</i>
mare		<i>"mahreh"</i>	<i>sea</i>
grazie		<i>"grahtsyeh"</i>	<i>thanks</i>
luogo		<i>"lwohgoh"</i>	<i>place, location</i>
amico		<i>"ahmykoh"</i>	<i>friend</i>
facile		<i>"fahchyleh" (English "ch")</i>	<i>easy</i>
centro		<i>"chentroh" (English "ch")</i>	<i>center</i>
alzare		<i>"ahltsahreh"</i>	<i>to lift</i>
Parigi		<i>"Pahryjyh"</i>	<i>Paris</i>

1.4

DOUBLE CONSONANTS

Many Italian words have double consonants. They can be found in any part of the word, but never as first letters or as last letters.

In most cases they are followed by a vowel, as in **dubbio** = *doubt*, **gatto** = *cat*, etc.; but in some cases they may be followed by **r**, as in **labbra** = *lips*, **attrito** = *friction*, etc.

Instead, another consonant never occurs before a double consonant.

Also English has several words with double consonants, as *supple*, *bottle*, *abbot*.


In Italian, though, double consonants sound stronger than in English; this is obtainable by breaking the sound, for example as if the word *cattle* was spelled *ca-ttle*: the **tt** sound should therefore be heard more.

Any consonant can be doubled, except letter **h** (never doubled, because it is always soundless), or for non-standard ones (**j**, **k**, **w**, **x**, **y**).

Here you can listen to the actual sound of double consonants:

 dubbio (<i>doubt</i>)	 affare (<i>bargain, business</i>)
 gatto (<i>cat</i>)	 passato (<i>past</i>)
 labbra (<i>lips</i>)	 collare (<i>collar</i>)
 attrito (<i>friction</i>)	 anno (<i>year</i>)


Some clusters too may be doubled:

...**cci** like English "...tchyh", as in **stracci** (*rags*) 

...**cce** like English "...tcheh", as in **accesso** (*access*) 

Compounds of ...**cci** + vowel obviously follow the same pronunciation, dropping the **i** sound:

...**ccia** (sounds like "...tchah"), as in **faccia** (*face*) 

...**ccio** (sounds like "...tchoh"), as in **riccio** (*curl; porcupine*) 

...**cciu** sounds like "...tchuh" as in **acciuga** (*anchovy*) 

Similar clusters with **g** (...**ggia**, ...**ggio**, etc.), follow the same phonetical rules as above, sounding as "...djah", "...djoh", etc.

Rarely, the cluster ...**ccie** or ...**ggie** (with an **i**) may also occur, but they sound exactly as the clusters ...**cce** and ...**gge** mentioned above; in these cases **i** (merely phonetic) is also redundant, so modern spellings tend to drop it.

Double vowels are quite rare in Italian, though possible in a few cases.

They always sound as the normal individual vowels, but in these cases a longer sound should be heard:

cooperare (*to cooperate*) 

zii (*uncles*) 

veemenza (*vehemence*)

Double letters, either consonants or vowels, always belong to separate syllables (how to divide words into their syllables is specifically dealt with by paragraph 17.3):

attrito at - tri - to

passare pas - sa - to

abboccare ab - boc - ca - re

lucchetto luc - chet - to

cooperazione co - o - pe - ra - zio - ne

and so on

1.5

ACCENT (OR STRESS)

Although there is no strict rule, in most Italian words the accent or stress falls on the penultimate syllable. Although the stress is carried by the whole syllable, it is much easier to remember which vowel carries it: for instance, in the word **possibile** (*possible*) the stress is carried by the second syllable (**-si-**) (unlike in English), but it is easier to remember that the first vowel, i.e. **i**, is stressed.

In the following examples accented vowels are used for the Italian spelling, to show which is the vowel that carries the stress. However, keep in mind that it is very unusual for Italian words to be spelled with accented letters, with very few exceptions discussed further in this page.

To help the reader, the stressed syllables have also been marked in the "English spelling" version by using **bold** letters, as explained at the end of the previous [paragraph 1.4](#).

A few examples:

lampadina	"lahmpahdyhnah"	light bulb
carbòne	"karbohneh"	coal
supermercàto	"swpehrmehrkahtoh"	supermarket
senatòre	"sehnahtohreh"	senator
aereoplàno	"ahehrehohplahnoh"	airplane
arcobaléno	"ahrkohbahlehnoh"	rainbow
riconoscènte	"ryhkohnohshenteh" (English "sh" !)	thankful

But in some other words the stress is carried by an earlier syllable:

mòbile	"mohbyhleh"	piece of furniture (as a noun); movable (as an adjective)
ràpido	"rahpyhdoh"	fast, quick
telèfono	"tehlehfohnoh"	telephone
libero	"lyhbehroh"	free (from duty or restraint)
pòvero	"pohvehroh"	poor




THE USE OF ACCENTED VOWELS IN COMMON SPELLING

Accented vowels have been used in the previous examples for the sake of an easier understanding. In ordinary spelling they are allowed, but very seldom used. Only in two cases accented vowels are commonly used:

- **WORDS WHOSE LAST SYLLABLE CARRIES THE ACCENT**

There are many words of this kind in Italian (nouns, verb inflections, adverbs, etc.), and some are frequently used. An accent is compulsory in this case, otherwise the stress would not be heard.





Furthermore, in some cases the same word spelled without an accent even has a different meaning (see further down). A few words with a similar spelling, but whose last syllable is not stressed, are shown on the right.

 perché	"pehrkeh"	why, because		
 sarà	"sahrah"	it will be	Sara	"sahrah" Sarah (a name)
 perciò	"pehrchoh"	therefore		
papà	"pahpah"	dad	papa	"pahpah" pope
però	"pehroh"	but, however	pero	"pehroh" pear-tree
più	"pyw"	more, plus		

- Some of these words have an accent on the last syllable because they dropped the last part of the original word they derive from (usually Latin), or because they are of French origin (most French words have an accent on the last syllable).
Also several compounds of **che** (pronounced "ke", meaning *which, that*) are spelled with an accent:
- **perché** (*why, because*)
poiché (*because*)
benché (*despite*)
giacché (*since*)
sicché (*so, therefore*)
etc.

- **WORDS THAT HAVE A DIFFERENT MEANING DEPENDING ON THE POSITION OF THE ACCENT**

A few words have a different meaning when different syllables carry the accent:

	àncora	"ahnkohrah"	anchor (noun)
	ancòra	"ahnkohrah"	again, more (adverb)
	règia	"rehjah"	royal (adjective)
	regia	"rehjyah"	direction of a movie or a play (noun)
	capitàno	"kahpytahnoh"	captain (noun)
	càpitano	"kahpytahnoh"	they happen, they occur (verb)

- In this case, accents are not mandatory; many Italian people do not use them, because the meaning of the word, and therefore its correct accent, is clearly understood by the context of the phrase: considering the first couple of sample words, in sentences such as "*strange things happen*" or "*he is the captain*", neither of the two words (*happen, captain*) could be mistaken with the other.

Focus your attention on the second couple of words shown above: in the first noun (**règia**), the **gia** cluster forms one syllable, because the syllables of the word are **re - gia**; therefore, the pronunciation of the cluster "-jah" follows the standard rules, as has already been said in [paragraph 1.2](#).

In the second word (**regia**), instead, the same cluster belongs to two separate syllables: **re - gi - a**, so the sound too splits into "*re-jyh-ah*". Only the second syllable **gi** carries the accent, not the final **a**.

TYPES OF ACCENTED VOWELS USED IN ITALIAN SPELLING

This part of the paragraph is not really fundamental for a beginner, although some readers might have noticed that most of the accented vowels used so far bear a grave accent, i.e. slanted leftwards (**perciò, sarà**), while a few others are slanted in the opposite direction (**perché**).

Modern Italian uses the following set of accented vowels:

"grave" accents, slanted leftwards
("wide" sound pronunciation)

à è ì ò ù

"acute" accent, slanted rightwards
("narrow" sound pronunciation)

é

(eventually, read again [paragraph 1.1](#) for the different ways of pronouncing the vowel "e").

From the table above, you can see how only **e** has both forms, while all the others take only the grave (leftwards) accent.

Very seldom, an **ó** (with acute accent) is also found in printed texts, but its use is not mandatory, and most people prefer to spell it as a normal **o**.

It has already been said in this page that when the accent is carried by the last syllable, an accented vowel has to be used. Since most vowels only take the grave accent, this is the only one that can be used:

andrà "ahndrah" he / she will go

là "lah" there

lunedì "lwnehdyh" monday

finì "fyhnyh" it finished

falò "fahloh" great fire, pire

però "pehroh" but

laggiù "lahjjw" down there, over there

più "pyw" more - plus

But **e** can take two different accents; according to the word, either one or the other should be used.

These are examples of words whose final **e** bears a grave accent ("wide" sound):

è "eh" he / she / it is

caffè "kah'ffeh" coffee or coffee-bar

frappè "frah'ppeh" milk shake

In other words, instead, the final **e** bears the acute accent ("narrow" sound):

perché "pehrkeh" why, because

né "neh" not, nor, neither

sé "seh" self, one's self

In very few cases, an accented **e** can be used within the word, to indicate which is the correct sound of the vowel:

pèsca ("wide" e) = peach **pé**sca ("narrow" e) = fishing

This is not mandatory; actually, many people would spell both words **pesca** (with a normal **e**), because the context of the sentence is enough to understand which of the two makes more sense.

HOW TO TYPE ACCENTED VOWELS

Most people who do not use an Italian keyboard may wonder how to type accented vowels in a text, because a standard international keyboard does not have these letters among the keys. Since they belong to the ASCII set of characters, it is possible to enter them by typing their code numbers in the keyboard's number pad, while pressing the **Alt** key: try them out yourself, in the box below.

à = Alt+133 | è = Alt+138 | ì = Alt+141 | ò = Alt+149 | ù = Alt+151 | é = Alt+130

To type an **o** with an acute accent use Alt+162, but remember that **ó** is only found in dictionaries, as a reading aid.

Instead not all fonts have capital (uppercase) accented letters.

Times New Roman and *Arial*, among the most commonly used, have the following codes: try them out.

À = Alt+0192 | È = Alt+0200 | Ì = Alt+0204 | Ò = Alt+0210 | Ù = Alt+0217 | É = Alt+0201
Again, to type **Ó** use Alt+0211, for the same limited use as above.

If your computer or the standard font you are using does not have such vowels, you can still use normal ones followed by an apostrophe:

a' | **e'** | **i'** | **o'** | **u'**

A' | **E'** | **I'** | **O'** | **U'**

Some Italian people too use apostrophes in place of accented vowels, but since this is not very correct, and the two different **e**'s cannot be told, the use of accented vowels should be preferred, where available.

2.1

GENDER AND NUMBER STANDARD INFLECTIONS

NOTE

in this paragraph, the "English sound" spelling of words shows again which syllable is stressed.

Italian language has two main genders: masculine and feminine; a third neutre gender (for plants, non-living objects, general concepts, etc.) occurs only in pronouns, so for the time being simply disregard it.

In English, a vast majority of nouns are neutre (masculine and feminine are only used for human beings or for animals), while articles and adjectives have no gender at all.

In Italian instead, nouns, adjectives and articles too are either masculine or feminine (but never neutre).

An important difference with English is that articles and adjectives have masculine and feminine forms, according to the gender of the noun they are related to.

For nouns, number (i.e. whether the word is singular or plural) works exactly as in English: the singular form is used when referring to one subject and the plural form when referring to two or more. But in Italian, adjectives and articles are number-sensitive too, whereas in English they are not: "*the old house*" in plural form becomes "*the old houses*", only the noun changes, while in Italian also the article and the adjective would be turned in plural form.

Here are a few examples. Articles and adjectives will be dealt with throughoutly in a further paragraph, so now try to focus your attention only on their inflections (marked in red colour), which show both their gender and number.

casa (feminine, singular)	" <i>kahsah</i> "	<i>house, home</i>
albero (masculine, singular)	" <i>ahlbehroh</i> "	<i>tree</i>
una casa (feminine, singular)	" <i>wnah kahsah</i> "	<i>a house, a home</i>
un albero (masculine, singular)	" <i>wn ahlbehroh</i> "	<i>a tree</i>
una vecchia casa (feminine, singular)	" <i>uhnah veh'kkyah kahsah</i> "	<i>an old house</i>
un grosso albero (masculine, singular)	" <i>uhn grohssoh ahlbehroh</i> "	<i>a big tree</i>
vecchie case (feminine, plural)	" <i>veh'kkyeh kahseh</i> "	<i>old houses</i>
grossi alberi (masculine, plural)	" <i>grohssyh ahlbehryh</i> "	<i>big trees</i>

GENDER AND NUMBER INFLECTIONS FOR NOUNS

Masculine and feminine inflections follow this general pattern:

MASCULINE INFLECTIONS

- singular:**o**
- plural:**i**

FEMININE INFLECTIONS

- singular:**a**
- plural:**e**

Therefore, according to this table:

tavolo (masc.)	" <i>tahvohloh</i> "	<i>table</i>
tavoli	" <i>tahvohlyh</i> "	<i>tables</i>
porta (fem.)	" <i>pohrtah</i> "	<i>door</i>
porte	" <i>pohrteh</i> "	<i>doors</i>
vaso (masc.)	" <i>vahsoh</i> "	<i>vase</i>
vasi	" <i>vahsyh</i> "	<i>vases</i>
capra (fem.)	" <i>kahprah</i> "	<i>goat</i>
capre	" <i>kahpreh</i> "	<i>goats</i>
martello (masc.)	" <i>mahrtehlloh</i> "	<i>hammer</i>
martelli	" <i>mahrtehlyh</i> "	<i>hammers</i>

No nouns nor adjectives end with **u**, so this vowel should not create a problem.

There are also several nouns and adjectives whose singular form ends with **e**: they can be either masculine or feminine. Their plural always ends with **i**, regardless of gender:

BOTH MASCULINE AND FEMININE

- singular:**e**
- plural:**i**

Here are a few examples:

cane (masc.)	" <i>kahneh</i> "	<i>dog</i>
cani	" <i>kahnyh</i> "	<i>dogs</i>
ape (fem.)	" <i>ahpeh</i> "	<i>bee</i>
api	" <i>ahpyh</i> "	<i>bees</i>
rete (fem.)	" <i>rehteh</i> "	<i>net</i>
reti	" <i>rehtyh</i> "	<i>nets</i>
mare (masc.)	" <i>mahreh</i> "	<i>sea</i>
mari	" <i>mahryh</i> "	<i>seas</i>

The two patterns shown up to this point should be considered the standard ones, and should be practised throughoutly.

Some further examples:

palla (fem.)	" <i>pahllah</i> "	<i>ball</i>
palle	" <i>pahlleh</i> "	<i>balls</i>
uccello (masc.)	" <i>w'tchehlloh</i> " (English "tch")	<i>bird</i>
uccelli	" <i>w'tchehlyh</i> "	<i>birds</i>
mese (masc.)	" <i>mehseh</i> "	<i>month</i>
mesi	" <i>mehsyh</i> "	<i>months</i>

A typical problem for beginners is that if a noun or an adjective ends with **e**, it may be either a feminine plural (according to the first pattern), or a masculine or feminine singular (according to the second pattern). In the same way, a noun or an adjective ending with **i** is surely plural, but it might be either masculine or feminine. This situation is only apparently confusing, as other parts of the sentence (articles, adjectives, verb tenses, etc.) will make gender difficult to be mistaken.

GENDER AND NUMBER INFLECTIONS FOR ADJECTIVES

Adjectives follow the same two patterns as nouns, so:

bello (masculine) "behlloh" nice, handsome
 plural: **belli** "behllyh"

bella (feminine) "behllah" nice, beautiful
 plural: **belle** "behlleh"

alto (masculine) "ahltoh" tall, high
 plural: **alti** "ahltyh"

alta (feminine) "ahltah" tall, high
 plural: **alte** "ahlteh"

grande (masculine & feminine) "grahndeh" big, huge, large
 plural: **grandi** (masculine & feminine) "grahndyh"

divertente (masculine & feminine) "dyhvehrtehnteh" funny, amusing
 plural: **divertenti** (masculine & feminine) "dyhvehrtehntyh"

Since the gender and number of both noun and adjective must always match, combinations can be:

brutta casa (fem.) "bruh'ttah kahsah" ugly house
brutte case "bruh'tteh kahseh" ugly houses

nuovo albero (masc.) "nwohvoh ahlbehroh" new tree
nuovi alberi "nwohvyh ahlbehryh" new trees

piccola ape (fem.) "py'kkolah ahpeh" small bee
piccole api "py'kkoleh ahpih" small bee

brutto colore (masc.) "brw'ttoh kohlohreh" ugly colour
brutti colori "brw'ttyh kohlohryh" ugly colours

grande nave (fem.) "grahndeh nahveh" big ship
grandi navi "grahndyh nahvyh" big ships

fedele servitore (masc.) "fehdehleh sehrvyhtohreh" faithful servant
fedeli servitori "fehdehlyh sehrvyhtohryh" faithful servants

2.2

GENDER AND NUMBER

STANDARD INFLECTIONS

PARTICULAR CASES

NOTE

in this paragraph, the "English sound" spelling of words shows again which syllable carries the stress
This page deals with nouns and adjectives which behave according to the two standard patterns dealt with in the previous paragraph, but need a further discussion.

You do not need to learn all these forms now, though it would be better if you simply read this paragraph, and came back to it from time to time, until you become familiar with all cases.

The nouns and adjectives dealt with in this page end with the special clusters discussed in [paragraph 1.2](#): their plurals too have to "compromise" with phonetics, so this brings a few changes to their inflections.

WORDS ENDING WITH ...co, ...ca, ...go, ...ga

These nouns and adjectives add an **h** to their plural form.

Should this not happen, the sound of consonant **c** and **g** would change.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...co	...koh	...chi	...kyh
...ca	...kah	...che	...keh
...go	...goh	...ghi	...ghyh
...ga	...gah	...ghe	...gheh

As said above, the plural form without an **h** would change the guttural or "hard" sound of **c** and **g** to a palatal or "soft" sound (...co would become ...ci, sounding like English ...chyh, ...ga would become ...ge sounding like English ...jeh, etc. etc.).

So letter **h** is needed, to keep the "hard" sound.

buco	"bwkoh"	hole
buchi	"bwkyh"	holes
fico	"fyhkoh"	fig
fichi	"fyhkyh"	figs
chirurgo	"kyhrwrgoh"	surgeon
chirurgi	"kyhrwrghyh"	surgeons
lago	"lahgoh"	lake
laghi	"lahghy"	lakes
formica	"fohrmyhkah"	ant
formiche	"fohrmyhkeh"	ants
sega	"sehgah"	saw
seghe	"sehgheh"	saws
mucca	"mw'kkah"	cow
mucche	"mw'kkeh"	cows

However, when the vowel that comes before **...-co** or **...-go** is **i** (i.e. **...-ico**, **...-igo**), in most cases the masculine plural drops the **h**, thus becoming **...-ci** or **...-gi** (English sound *...chyh* or *...jyh*):

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
amico	"ahmyhkoh" = friend	amici	"ahmyhchyh" = friends
nemico	"nehmyhkoh" = enemy	nemici	"nehmyhchyh" = enemies
logico	"lohjyhkoh" = logical	logici	"lohjyhchyh" = logical referred to a plural noun
tecnico	"tehknyhkoh" = technician - technical	tecnici	"tehknyhchyh" = technicians - technical
unico	"wnyhkoh" = only, sole	unici	"wnyhchyh" = only, sole referred to a plural noun
comico	"kohmyhkoh" = comical - comedian	comici	"kohmyhchyh" = comical - comedians
magico	"mahjyhkoh" = magic(al)	magici	"mahjyhchyh" = magic(al) referred to a plural noun
tragico	"trahjyhkoh" = tragic	tragici	"trahjyhchyh" = tragic referred to a plural noun
simpatico	"sympahytkoh" = pleasant (person)	simpatici	"sympahytkyh" = pleasant referred to a plural noun

Unfortunately, there are also a few words that end with **...-ico** or **...-igo** and have a regular masculine plural:

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
antico	"ahntyhkoh" = antique, old	antichi	"ahntyhkyh" = antique, old
fico	"fyhkoh" = fig	fichi	"fyhkyh" = figs
plico	"plyhkoh" = large envelope, small packet	plichi	"plyhkyh" = large envelope, small packets
rigo	"ryhgoh" = line (especially of text)	righi	"ryhghyh" = lines

The two inflections are not taken at random: a rule, based on the word's stressed syllable, determines whether the noun or adjective has a regular or an irregular masculine plural.

Provided that **...-co** or **...-go** is the last syllable, all words whose stress falls on the antepenultimate (i.e. two syllables ahead of **-co** or **-go**) have an irregular masculine plural (**...-ici**, **...-igi**), without any exception.

Instead when the stressed syllable is the penultimate (one syllable ahead of **-co** or **-go**), the masculine plural is regular, and the only two exceptions are **amico** (*friend*) and **nemico** (*enemy*).

Let's see again a few words from the previous examples (the stressed syllable is shown in **green**):

singular	syllables	plural	position of the stress
tecnico	tec - ni - co	tecnici	(stress on the antepenultimate syllable)
antico	an - ti - co	antichi	(stress on the penultimate syllable)
magico	ma - gi - co	magici	(stress on the antepenultimate syllable)
rigo	ri - go	righi	(stress on the penultimate syllable)

But...

singular	syllables	plural	position of the stress
amico	a - mi - co	amici	(despite the stress on the penultimate syllable)
nemico	ne - mi - co	nemici	(despite the stress on the penultimate syllable)

Obviously, it would be impossible to think of all these complicated rules while reading or speaking. For this reason, when rehearsing these words, it is very important to actually pronounce them, because the sound of the correct plural forms will linger in the reader's mind. Time and exercise will gradually help the learner to tell the masculine plurals automatically, by their sound, as fluent speakers do.

Instead the feminine form of the same words discussed so far always follows the general rule:

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
amica	"ahmyhkah" = friend	amiche	"ahmyhkeh" = friends
logica	"lohjyhkah" = logical	logiche	"lohjyhkeh" = logical referred to a plural noun
magica	"mahjyhkah" = magic(al)	magiche	"mahjyhkeh" = magic(al) referred to a plural noun
antica	"ahntyhkah" = antique, old	magiche	"ahntyhkeh" = antique, old referred to a plural noun

The general rule is also followed when the consonant **c** is double, regardless of the vowel that comes before it (i.e. **...-acco**, **...-icco**, **...-occo**, **...-ucco**, all behave in the same way):

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
pacco	"pahkkoh" = parcel	pacchi	"pahkkyh" = parcels
ricco	"ryhkkoh" = rich - rich person	ricchi	"ryhkkyh" = rich - rich people
tocco	"tohkkoh" = a touch	ricchi	"tokkyh" = touches
succo	"swhkkoh" = juice	succhi	"swhkkyh" = juices

Obviously, nothing special happens when words end with **...ce** or **...ge**:

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
luce (feminine)	"lwcheh" = light	luci	"lwchyh" = lights
legge (feminine)	"leh'jjeh" = law	leggi	"leh'jjyh" = laws
gregge (feminine)	"greh'jjeh" = herd	greggi	"greh'jjyh" = herds

WORDS ENDING WITH ...cio, ...cia, ...gio, ...gia

These nouns and adjectives usually drop vowel **i** in the plural form.

In the singular form, vowel **i** is not actually pronounced, as it is only needed to give consonants **c** and **g** a "soft" sound (these clusters sound like English ...*choh*, ...*chah*, ...*joh*, ...*jah*).

In the plural inflections, the **i** is no longer needed to keep this "soft" sound, therefore it is dropped.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...cio	...cho	...ci	...chyh (with English "ch" sound)
...cia	...cha	...ce	...cheh (with English "ch" sound)
...gio	...joh	...gi	...jyh
...gia	...jah	...ge	...jeh

Leaving vowel **i**, the sound would not change (for example, both **...ge** and **...gie** sound like English ...*jeh*).

calcio	"kahlchoh"	kick
calci	"kahlchyh"	kicks
lancia	"lahnchah"	spear
lance	"lahncheh"	spears
orologio	"ohrohlohjoh"	clock, watch
orologi	"ohrohlohjyh"	clocks, watches
loggia	"loh'djah"	lodges, balconies
logge	"loh'djeh"	lodge, balcony

Also for this case a few exceptions exist, but they are not so important at this stage.

WORDS ENDING WITH ...ciò, ...cìa, ...giò, ...gìa

Although these clusters look very similar to the previous ones, you will notice that vowel **i** has an accent: this means that this vowel carries the stress (for example, in the word **magìa** = *magic* the word is pronounced "*mahjyhah*").

In the case previously discussed, **...cio**, **...cìa**, etc. form one syllable, and the vowel **i** is merely phonetic (i.e. not actually heard as an individual **i**). In this case instead, the clusters **...cì** and **...cì** belong to two separate syllables; for this reason **i** carries the stress, and is perfectly heard.

Here is an example showing two nouns which apparently end in a similar way: **camicia** (*shirt*) and **farmacia** (*chemist shop*)

the syllables in **camicia** (previous group) are **ca** + **mi** + **cia** (the stress is on **-mi-**)

the syllables in **farmacia** (this group) are **far** + **ma** + **ci** + **a** (the stress is on **-ci-**)

Take note that accented vowels are not commonly used when spelling ordinary words. Sometimes they are, for words not frequently used, such as **leggiò** (*book-stand, book-rest*), **zoppìa** (*lameness*), etc. But **farmacia**, as well as other everyday's words, would be normally spelt with a regular **i**.

Nevertheless, accented vowels are allowed. They are always found in dictionaries, as a useful help for readers who are likely not familiar with the Italian language. So these pages too will often show them, in the case of uncertain pronunciation.

In the plural form, masculine nouns keep a double **i**, while feminine ones turn last vowel into **e**, as for any other standard plural.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...ciò	<i>...chyhoh</i>	...cìi	<i>...chyhyh</i> (with English "ch" sound)
...cìa	<i>...chyhah</i>	...cìe	<i>...chyheh</i> (with English "ch" sound)
...giò	<i>...jyhoh</i>	...gìi	<i>...jyh yh</i>
...gìa	<i>...jyhah</i>	...gìe	<i>...jyheh</i>

In this way, the plural inflection does not affect the vowel **i**, which also keeps carrying the stress, as in the singular form.

In a more general sense, this rule is used for **any** word whose last part sounds like **...iò** or **...ià**.

For example: **rinvìo** (*postponement*); **armonìa** (*harmony*); etc.

rinvìo	<i>"rynvyhoh"</i>	<i>postponement</i>
rinvìi	<i>"rynvyhyh"</i>	<i>postponements</i>
addìo	<i>"ah'ddyhoh"</i>	<i>farewell</i>
addìi	<i>"ah'ddyhyh"</i>	<i>farewells</i>
ronzìo	<i>"rondzyhoh"</i>	<i>buzzing</i>
ronzìi	<i>"rondzyhyh"</i>	<i>buzzings</i>
bugìa	<i>"bwjyhah"</i>	<i>lie</i>
bugìe	<i>"bwjyheh"</i>	<i>lies</i>
follià	<i>"fohllyhah"</i>	<i>craze</i>
folliè	<i>"fohllyheh"</i>	<i>crazes</i>
armonìa	<i>"ahrmohnyhah"</i>	<i>harmony</i>
armonìe	<i>"ahrmohnyheh"</i>	<i>harmonies</i>

Both vowels at the end of the word should be distinctly heard when properly pronouncing these nouns.

WORDS ENDING WITH ...scio AND ...scia

These nouns behave like the ones ending with **...cio** and **...cia** discussed above: plurals simply drop the phonetic **i**, which is no longer needed.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...scio	<i>...skoh</i>	...sci	<i>...shyh</i> (English "sh" sound)
...scia	<i>...skah</i>	...sce	<i>...sheh</i> (English "sh" sound)

So simply drop an **i** in the plural form.

fascio	" <i>fahshoh</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>bundle (of twigs or branches)</i>
fasci	" <i>fahshyh</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>bundles</i>
ascia	" <i>ahshah</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>axe</i>
asce	" <i>ahsheh</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>axes</i>

NOUNS ENDING WITH ...scìo AND ...scìa

These nouns differ from the previous ones because their vowel **i** carries the accent. Once again, this depends on the word's syllables; for example **fruscìo** (*hissing*) is made of: **fru + sci + o** (**-sci-** is stressed).

There are not many of these words, but they behave as the ones ending with **cìo**, **cìa**, etc., previously discussed.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...scìo	<i>...shyhoh</i> (English "sh" sound)	...scii	<i>...shyhyh</i> (English "sh" sound)
...scìa	<i>...shyhah</i> (English "sh" sound)	...scie	<i>...shyheh</i> (English "sh" sound)

So they too simply keep the **i** in the plural form (masculine will have **i** twice).

fruscìo	" <i>frwshyhoh</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>hissing</i>
fruscii	" <i>frwshyhyh</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>hissings</i>
scìa	" <i>shyhah</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>trail</i>
scie	" <i>shyheh</i> " (English "sh" sound)	<i>trails</i>

WORDS ENDING WITH ...glio AND ...glia

Again, in clusters **...glio** and **...glia** vowel **i** is not actually pronounced, but simply used to obtain a Spanish "ll" sound (see [paragraph 1.2](#) for more details).

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...glio	<i>...lloh</i> (Spanish "ll" sound)	...gli	<i>...llyh</i> (Spanish "ll" sound)
...glia	<i>...llah</i> (Spanish "ll" sound)	...glie	<i>...lleh</i> (Spanish "ll" sound)

So masculine plurals drop one **i** (which otherwise would be double), while feminine plurals keep it.

figlio	"fyllloh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	son
figli	"fylllyh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	sons
scoglio	"skohllloh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	sea rock
scogli	"skohlllyh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	sea rocks
figlia	"fylllah" (Spanish "ll" sound)	daughter
figlie	"fyllleh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	daughters
foglia	"fohllah" (Spanish "ll" sound)	leaf
foglie	"fohllleh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	leaves

WORDS ENDING WITH ...gliò AND ...glia

Another case of nouns with accented **i**, belonging to the penultimate syllable and carrying the stress.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...gliò	...llyhoh (Spanish "ll" sound)	...glii	...llyhyh (Spanish "ll" sound)
...glia	...llyhah (Spanish "ll" sound)	...glie	...llyeh (Spanish "ll" sound)

Very few words have this ending, but the rule is the same as for similar cases discussed above: vowel **i** is kept in both masculine and feminine plurals.

bisbigliò	"bysbyhlyhoh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	wispering
bisbiglii	"bysbyhlyhyh" (Spanish "ll" sound)	wisperings

WORDS ENDING WITH ...gno AND ...gna

These do not require a special discussion: as any other noun, masculine plural is **...gni** and feminine plural is **...gne**.

Always remember that cluster **gn** sounds like Spanish ñ.

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
ragno (masculine)	"rahñoh" = spider	ragni	"rahñyh" = spiders
compagna (feminine)	"kohmpahñah" = partner	compagne	"kohmpahñeh" = partners

NOUNS ENDING WITH ...gnìò AND ...gnia

Again, these few nouns have an accented vowel **i**, because it belongs to their penultimate syllable (which carries the stress). The pattern is quite similar to the ones discussed before:

singular	English sound	plural	English sound
...gnìò	...ñyhoh (Spanish "ñ" sound)	...gniì	...ñyhyh (Spanish "ñ" sound)
...gnia	...ñyhah (Spanish "ñ" sound)	...gnie	...ñyheh (Spanish "ñ" sound)

Therefore, both genders keep the **i** (masculine will have two).

Actually, no common nouns or adjectives exist in the masculine form, and only one common noun exists in feminine gender:

compagnia	"kohmpahñyhah" (Spanish "ñ" sound)	company
compagnie	"kohmpahñyheh" (Spanish "ñ" sound)	companies

Take your time to become familiar with these inflections: once you master them, you should be able to cope with the great majority of Italian nouns and adjectives.

Don't let the following paragraph scare you! Non-standard inflections might be a bit difficult to memorize,

but they represent a minority: most nouns belong to the two general patterns. For this reason, you can memorize [paragraph 2.3](#) little by little, while carrying on with further topics, but I suggest you should browse it, to have an idea of what non-standard inflections can look like.

2.3

GENDER AND NUMBER NON-STANDARD INFLECTIONS

Although most nouns and adjectives have a standard inflection, there are some words which follow different patterns. As said at the end of paragraph 2.1, they might not be easy to learn at once, but there is no need of doing so: simply read this page, try to understand how and why these inflections differ from the standard ones, and memorize them little by little, as you study further paragraphs.

NOUNS WITH A LATIN NEUTRE PLURAL

A few nouns indicating either objects or concepts which are commonly given a high consideration (i.e. some parts of the human body) have a standard masculine singular (...o) but a peculiar plural ending with ...a (which is the original Latin neutre plural inflection of the word); in modern Italian, though, this particular plural form has changed gender, and is feminine:

osso (masculine, singular)	"ohssoh"	bone
ossa (feminine, plural)	"ohssah"	bones
dito (masculine, singular)	"dyhtoh"	finger
dita (feminine, plural)	"dyhtah"	fingers
braccio (masculine, singular)	"brah'tchoh"	arm
braccia (feminine, plural)	"brah'tchah"	arms
gesto (masculine, singular)	"jehstoh"	deed, feat
gesta (feminine, plural)	"jehstah"	deeds, feats

Sometimes these names have two plural forms, one feminine of Latin origin (as explained above), and one masculine (regular) with a similar though "less noble" meaning. This concept will be discussed again at the end of this paragraph.

For the time being, try to memorize this important noun with a fully irregular gender:

mano (feminine despite the ...o, singular)	"mahnoh"	hand
mani (feminine despite the ...i, plural)	"mahnyh"	hands

NOUNS ENDING WITH ...tore

The ...tore ending usually indicates a human action or activity (in a very generic sense). Curiously, a few English words of Latin origin still have similar inflections (i.e. *actor* - *actress*, *master* - *mistress*, etc.):

guidatore (masculine)	"gwydahtohreh"	driver, conductor (masculine or feminine)
guidatrice (feminine)	"gwydahtryhcheh"	
attore (masculine)	"ah'ttohreh"	actor (masculine)
attrice (feminine)	"ah'ttryhcheh"	actress (feminine)
pittore (masculine)	"py'ttohreh"	painter (masculine)
pittrice (feminine)	"py'ttryhcheh"	painter (feminine)
nuotatore (masculine)	"nwohtahtohreh"	swimmer (masculine or feminine)
nuotatrice (feminine)	"nwohtahtryhcheh"	
mentitore (masculine)	"mentyhtohreh"	liar (masculine or feminine)
mentitrice (feminine)	"mentyhtryhcheh"	

NOUNS WHOSE FEMININE INFLECTION IS ...essa

They belong to several categories, which cannot be specifically classified, but a few guidelines could be: noble ranks, some professional activities, some nouns whose masculine ends in **...one**.

Also in this case, some English feminine nouns have kept the Latin root.

barone (masculine)	"bahrohneh"	baron (masculine)
baronessa (feminine)	"bahrohnehssah" (notice the accent)	baroness (feminine)
duca (masculine)	"dwkah"	duke (masculine)
plural duchessa (feminine)	"dwkehssah" (accent shift again)	duchess (feminine)
studente (masculine)	"stwdehnteh"	student (masculine or feminine)
studentessa (feminine)	"stwdehntehssah"	
dottore (masculine)	"doh'ttohreh"	doctor (masculine or feminine)
dottoressa (feminine)	"doh'ttohrehssah"	
presidente (masculine)	"prehsyhdehnteh"	president (masculine or feminine)
presidentessa (feminine)	"prehsyhdehntehssah"	
leone (masculine)	"lehohneh"	lion (masculine)
leonessa (feminine)	"lehohnehssah"	she-lion (feminine)

Besides the accent shift on the penultimate syllable (because this feminine inflection brings one additional syllable to the word), note how in the **duca - duchessa** example, an **h** has been added to keep the strong sound of the cluster **ca** ("ka") turning into **che** ("ke"); simply **ce** would have sounded like English "che".

NOUNS OF GREEK ORIGIN

Some nouns of Greek origin end in **a** in both masculine and feminine forms; originally, most of them did not have a feminine form, therefore the same inflection is now used also for feminine.

They indicate human activities.

But in the plural form, they behave according to the standard inflections (see previous [paragraph 2.2](#)).

atleta (masculine and feminine, singular)	"ahtlehtah"	athlete (masculine and feminine)
atleti (masculine plural)		
atlete (feminine plural)		
eremita (masculine and feminine, singular)	"ehrehmytah"	hermit (masculine and feminine)
eremiti (masculine plural)		
eremite (feminine plural)		
idiota (masculine and feminine, singular)	"yhdyohtah"	idiot (masculine and feminine)
idioti (masculine plural)		
idiote (feminine plural)		

Some other nouns with similar features are:

collega (= colleague);

omicida (= murderer);

sosia (= lookalike);

suicida (= suicide [person]);

The same inflection is also found in a number of nouns whose only gender is masculine:

monarca (= monarch);

problema (= problem);

programma (= program);

pentagramma (= pentagram);

schema (pronounced "skehma" = scheme);

stemma (= crest);

and few more.

Most of these inflections are typically of Greek origin.
Their plurals are regular (**schemi**, **programmi**, **stemmi**, etc.)

NOUNS WHOSE MASCULINE AND FEMININE HAVE DIFFERENT MEANINGS

A few nouns have different meanings when changing from masculine to feminine. They can be organized in different groups, according to the relation between the meaning of the two forms:

NOUNS WHOSE MASCULINE AND FEMININE ARE INDIVIDUAL WORDS

These few nouns have the same root in masculine and feminine forms, but they might be considered totally individual, because masculine singular turns into masculine plural, and feminine singular into feminine plural; their meaning is generically related, sometimes as a metaphor.

filo (masc. sing.) = *string*

fili (masc. plur.) = *strings*

fila (fem. sing.) = *row, queue*

file (fem. plural) = *rows, queues*

peso (masc. sing.) = *weight*

pesi (masc. plur.) = *weights*

pesa (fem. sing.) = *scales for heavy goods*

pese (fem. plural) = *scales for heavy goods (plural)*

visto (masc. sing.) = *visa (for passports, etc.)* **visti** (masc. plur.) = *visas*

vista (fem. sing.) = *sight; view*

viste (fem. plur.) = *sights; views*

NOUNS INDICATING TREES AND THEIR FRUIT

The pattern "masculine for the tree - feminine for the fruit" is used for many fruits which grow on trees (but not for fruit coming from plants or bushes, such as melons, raspberries, grapes, etc. etc.):

melo = *apple-tree*

mela = *apple*

pesco = *peach-tree*

pesca = *peach*

olivo (or **ulivo**) = *olive-tree*

oliva = *olive*

ciliegio = *cherry-tree*

ciliegia = *cherry*

pruno = *prune-tree*

prugna = *prune* (notice a slight change in the noun's root)

A few fruit names, though, are masculine and this pattern could be confusing. Also when the fruit's name ends with **e**, masculine and feminine could be told only by the article (which will be the subject of the following paragraph) or by an adjective. In these cases, the above-said pattern may not be followed, and the form **albero di ...** (literally *tree of ...*) is used, followed by the fruit's plural form:

un limone (masculine, singular) = *a lemon*

un limone, or **un albero di limoni** = *a lemon-tree*

una noce (feminine, singular) = *a nut*

un noce, or **un albero di noci** = *a nut-tree*

The latter form can be used as a standard, also in the previous case, so *apple-tree* could be either **melo** or **albero di mele**.

But such details are not really important at this stage, so don't worry about them now. Simply, be aware of the importance of masculine and feminine gender in Italian nouns.

A few nouns have two different plural genders, with some difference in their meaning:

osso (masculine, singular) = *bone*

ossa (feminine, plural, Latin neutre form, see above) = *bones* (of living beings)

ossi (masculine plural) = *bones* (in a more "material" sense, i.e. a bone of a T-steak)

gesto (masculine, singular) = *deed, feat or gesture*

gesta (feminine, plural, Latin neutre form) = *deeds, feats*

gesti (masculine plural) = *gestures*

NOUNS WHOSE SINGULAR AND PLURAL INFLECTIONS ARE THE SAME

They belong to several categories:

FOREIGN NOUNS

Italian is becoming slowly accustomed to new foreign terms, especially in technical fields; some of these terms have no actual equivalent in the original language, so they are periodically added to the standard dictionary.

Some others, though, are perfectly translatable; in these cases, the use of foreign terms is considered rather snobbish, also because in Italy the knowledge of foreign languages is still far from a good standard. Furthermore, people who like showing themselves by using foreign words are very likely to pronounce them incorrectly, or to misspell them; on the other end, when foreign words are pronounced *correctly*, they might even be not understood at all, a funny paradox. Therefore, if a foreign word has an Italian equivalent, it is advisable to use the latter.

Nevertheless, many international terms of common use would never create a problem.

This is how gender works in these cases.

- When the meaning of the term is similar to an Italian one, or when it has a specific gender in the original language, the noun is usually given the same gender in Italian. A few examples:
CD (compact disk) basically relates to the concept of *music record* (in Italian: **disco**, masculine), so this noun, either short form or full-length form, is considered masculine, and obviously **floppy disk**, **hard disk**, etc. are masculine too, since they contain the same concept of recording device;

metro (short form for the French *métropolitaine* = *urban subway railway*) is also used in Italian; the "official" form is **metropolitana**, feminine (actual translation of the French term, very similar to Italian), but the short form is also used, obviously with feminine gender.

e-mail is similar to *mail* (in Italian: **posta**, feminine), so it is usually considered feminine, although some "purists" prefer to use the actual translation **posta elettronica** (*electronic mail*);

- When the gender of the noun is more indefinite (no similarity with Italian nouns), it is usually given a standard masculine gender (which in Italian mimics the neutre gender):
sport, **computer** or **PC**, **würstel**, **whisky**, **ouverture**, **modem**, **menù** (also spelled **menu**, as in French), etc. etc.

But in their plural forms, these nouns are always treated as if they were singular:

due metro (*two subways*), **tre menù** (*three menus*), **quattro e-mail** (*four e-mails*), and so on.

Some people prefer to use the foreign plurals (**due ouvertures**, **quattro e-mails**, etc.): This too is considered correct, provided that the right plurals are used (for example, words of German origin cannot be turned into their plural forms by simply adding an *s*).

NOUNS WITH AN ACCENT ON THE LAST SYLLABLE

Words whose last syllable is stressed carry a graphic accent on the last letter (always a vowel). Most of them come from longer words of archaic origin, which have dropped the last syllable, and are therefore known as "truncated nouns"; they are easily told because of the last accented vowel:

metà (either *half* or *halves*);

virtù (either *virtue* or *virtues*);

viltà (*cowardness*, either singular or plural);

bontà (*goodness*, either used to indicate the quality, or the object itself, i.e. **le bontà** = *the good things, the good food*); etc.

Other words with an accent on the last vowel, though not real truncated nouns (because they were not originated from longer nouns), behave in the same way:

caffè (either *coffee* or *coffees*);

falò (either *great fire* or *great fires*); etc.

SHORTENED NOUNS

On the opposite end, there are several nouns which are often "shortened" in common speech, as if they were truncated nouns, but have no accent.

bicicletta (*bicycle*) is shortened in **bici** (either singular or plural);

fotografia (*photograph*) is shortened in **foto** (either singular or plural);

metropolitana (*subway*, also mentioned above) is shortened in **metro**; etc..

In official texts, their full spelling is preferred, although their short form is sometimes used for compounds, like **fotoamatore** (*amateur photographer*), etc.

Obviously only the short version has one inflection, while the full-length noun has ordinary singular and plural forms (**fotografia** sing., **fotografie** plur.).

MONOSYLLABIC NOUNS

Also monosyllabic nouns, which are very few in Italian, behave as truncated words, because their only syllable carries the accent (although a graphic accent is not indicated, except for **tè**):

re (either *king* or *kings*); **tè** (either *tea* or *teas*); all musical notes: **do** (C), **re** (D), **mi** (E), etc.

NOUNS OF GREEK ORIGIN ENDING WITH ...si

These nouns end with **...esi**, **...isi**, **...osi**, they are feminine, and in most cases they belong to specific fields (either philosophical, or mathematical, or medical, etc.); some of them, though, do often occur in everyday's speech too.

These are a few common ones:

tesi (feminine) both *thesis* and *theses*;

ipotesi (feminine) both *hypothesis* or *hypotheses* and;

paralisi (feminine) both *paralysis* and *paralyses*;

osmosi (feminine) *osmosis* (normally used in singular form, though the Italian plural is the same);

catarsi (feminine) *catharsis* (same as above for plural).

As you see, also English uses the Greek root, and forms a plural by only changing the penultimate vowel *i* into *e*.

Other nouns with one single inflection are very few, and should be considered exceptions, therefore they cannot be classified. An example is:

vaglia = masculine, both *money order* and *money orders*.

2.4

ARTICLES

Articles can prove a little tricky to English speakers, because English only has two: *the* (definite article) and *a* (indefinite), and the only variation is the use of *an* (instead of *a*) when nouns start with a vowel: *a box*, *an eye*.

In Italian, though, articles need to match the noun they relate to, both by gender and by number: for example, translating *the lady* and *the man* different articles have to be used (**la donna** and **l'uomo**), as well as for *the cat* and *the cats* (**il gatto** and **i gatti**).

Furthermore, Italian language uses articles more often than English: general nouns and numerals sometimes require them, whereas in English they are usually omitted ("*he prefers wine to beer*" in Italian would be translated "*he prefers the wine to the beer*"); in the same way, "*I was born in the 1963*" sounds queer in English.

Finally, Italian articles also have to match phonetically the word coming next, to produce a more fluent sound, and they do this by modifying their basic inflection.....

But don't panic! Mastering these articles is a much easier task than it might seem from this description, and once you become familiar with the sound of Italian language (more than with the actual rules), your ears will help you more than your memory.

So, let's become familiar with each of them, one at a time:

DEFINITE ARTICLES

- **LO** (masculine, singular)
it is used before nouns starting with a **z** (at the beginning of a word, it always sounds as English "dz", not "tz"), and with nouns starting with clusters **s + consonant** (**sb...**, **sc...**, **sd...** etc.):
lo zucchero (*the sugar*)
lo zoccolo (*the clog*)
lo scambio (*the exchange*)
lo spazio (*the space*)

- IL (masculine, singular)
it is used when the noun starts with any consonant not belonging to the previous case:
il cane (*the dog*)
il mare (*the sea*)
il castello (*the castle*)
il treno (*the train*)
il sole (*the sun*)
- LA (feminine, singular)
it is used with nouns starting with any consonant:
la casa (*the house*)
la forza (*the strength*)
la scatola (*the box*)
la zuppa (*the soup*)
- L' (both masculine and feminine, singular)
this is the elision of **lo** or **la**: their vowel has been dropped, and an apostrophe has taken its place; you can see from the examples how no space separates the article from the following letter. It is used with nouns starting with a vowel. The loss of the article's vowel is to provide a swifter sound, as the sound of two vowels would "slow down" the pronunciation:
l'occhio (masculine, pronounced "**loh**'kkyoh", *the eye*)
l'acqua (feminine, pronounced "**lah**'kkwah", *the water*)
l'impatto (masculine, "**lympahttoh**", *the impact*)
l'aria (feminine, "**lahryah**", *the air*)
- GLI (masculine, plural)
it is used with nouns starting with:
- vowels,
- consonant **z**,
- clusters made of **s** + another consonant (**sb...**, **sc...**, **sd...** etc.),
- cluster **gn**:
gli artisti (*the artists*)
gli elefanti (*the elephants*)
gli infedeli (*the infidels*)
gli occhi (*the eyes*),
gli uomini (*the men*)
gli zoccoli (*the clogs*)
gli studenti (*the students*)
gli scandali (*the scandals*),
gli gnomi (*the gnomes*)
- I (masculine, plural)
it is used with nouns starting with consonants which do not belong to the previous case:
i cavalli (*the horses*)
i signori (*the gentlemen*)
i rami (*the branches*)
- LE (feminine, plural)
it is used with any noun (either starting with a consonant or a vowel):
le ville (*the villas*)
le ali (*the wings*)
le piante (*the plants*)
le espressioni (*the expressions*)
le scarpe (*the shoes*)
Note that **le** does not follow the elision rule as for the singular form. See also the bottom of the page for a further minor note.

INDEFINITE ARTICLES

As in English, only singular forms exist:

- UNO (masculine, singular)
it is used in the same cases which require the definite article **lo** is used (see above):
uno zio (*an uncle*)
uno sconto (*a discount*)
uno steccato (*a fence*)

- UN (masculine, singular)
it is used in the same cases which require the definite articles **il** and masculine **l'** (see above):
un bottone (*a button*)
un osso (*a bone*)
un soldato (*a soldier*)
un amico (*a friend*)
un gioco (*a game*)
un uccello (*a bird*)

- UNA (feminine, singular)
it is used with nouns starting with any consonant:
una scala (*a ladder*)
una torcia (*a torch*)
una zucca (*a pumpkin*)

- UN' (feminine, singular)
it is the elision of **una**, used when nouns start with any vowel. The apostrophe "binds" the article to the following letter, both in spelling (no space) and in pronunciation, as for the **l'** article above:
un'anima (pronounced "wnahnymah", *a soul*)
un'elica (pronounced "wnehlykah", *a propeller*)
un'orma (pronounced "wnohrmah", *a footprint*)

The full spelling **una** is also accepted when the following noun starts with **i**: i.e. **un'importante scoperta** (*an important discovery*) may sometimes be spelled **una importante scoperta**, but this happens rather seldom, so simply stick to the general rule.

When plural nouns are indefinite, they simply do not use an article, or they use the partitive form: i.e. *cats* (no article) or *some cats* (partitive), *coins* or *some coins* (partitive), etc. Partitive will be dealt with further on, so for the time being simply disregard its use.

Summarising this (apparently) difficult scheme, the following table will make articles much more easy to memorize:

(matching noun starts with...)	DEFINITE ARTICLES				INDEFINITE ARTICLES	
	masculine singular	feminine singular	masculine plural	feminine plural	masculin singular	feminine singular
Z or S+consonant	lo	la	gli	le	uno	una
any other consonant	il	la	i	le	un	una
vowels	l'	l'	gli	le	un	un'

The article's gender and number is very important because, as already explained in [paragraph 2.1](#) and [paragraph 2.2](#), the noun's inflection alone might not always clearly tell whether the gender is masculine or feminine, singular or plural:

libro (masculine)

book

ape (feminine sing.)

bee

il libro	<i>the book</i>	l'ape	<i>the bee</i>
un libro	<i>a book</i>	un'ape	<i>a bee</i>
porte (feminine pl.)	<i>doors</i>	ospiti (masculine)	<i>guests</i>
le porte	<i>the doors</i>	gli ospiti	<i>the guests</i>
mano (fem. sing., irregular)	<i>hand</i>	atleta (masc., non-standard)	<i>athlete</i>
la mano	<i>the hand</i>	l'atleta	<i>the athlete</i>
una mano	<i>a hand</i>	un atleta	<i>an athlete</i>
gesta (fem. pl., irregular)	<i>human acts, deeds</i>	gesti (masculine)	<i>gestures</i>
le gesta	<i>the acts, the deeds</i>	i gesti	<i>the gestures</i>

The importance of matching the article with the noun is even greater when the latter have the same inflection for singular and plural form, as foreign or truncated nouns (see [paragraph 2.2](#)), because in these cases whether the noun is singular or plural can be told only by the article:

computer (masculine)	<i>computer</i>	computer (or computers)	<i>computers</i>
il computer	<i>the computer</i>	i computer (or i computers)	<i>the computers</i>
un computer	<i>a computer</i>		
età (feminine)	<i>age</i>	età	<i>ages</i>
l'età	<i>the age</i>	le età	<i>the ages</i>
un'età	<i>an age</i>		

INDEFINITE ARTICLES USED AS PRONOUNS

In certain sentences, indefinite articles act as pronouns. In this case, the English equivalent does not match the Italian syntax, so an example will make this concept easy to understand:

an old dog - an old one (*one* acts as a pronoun, meaning *dog*)

beautiful flowers - beautiful ones (again, *ones* acts as a pronoun)

In Italian, *one* used as a pronoun is translated with the same indefinite article **uno** or **una** before the noun: as already explained, article **uno** also has the meaning of *one* (as a numeral), so in these cases it acts both as an article and a pronoun at the same time:

un vecchio cane = *an old dog*

uno vecchio = *an old one*

The only difference is that the full-length expression **uno** or **una** are used (not **un**, or **un'**, as indefinite articles): this gives stress to the fact that the article also acts as a pronoun.

As a result, only two forms are possible: **uno** (always used for masculine) and **una** (always used for feminine).

Here are a few more examples:

un'ampia veduta = *a wide view*

una ampia = *a wide one*

uno speciale apparecchio = *a special device*

uno speciale = *a special one*

una grossa scatola = *a large box*

una grossa = *a large one*

un'improbabile circostanza = *an unlikely circumstance*

una improbabile = *an unlikely one*

Foreseeing a common impression, I agree that these topics might appear complicated ...but only for non-

Italian speakers, of course.

The three ways of mastering these patterns are *practice*, *more practice* and *practice again*.

NOTES

- for phonetic reasons, nouns starting with the diptongues (cluster of two vowels) **ia**, **ie**, **io** and **iu**, require the full article, without elision, despite the general rule; for example: **lo iodio** (*iodine*, in Italian it requires an article). But these words are pretty rare, so don't worry about them now.
- feminine plural words starting with **e** (**esposizioni** = *expositions*, **evidenze** = *evidences*, etc.) now use the full article **le**, which means that the pronunciation of both vowels **e** should be heard: **le entrate** (*the income*) would be pronounced "*leh ehntrahteh*".
In older times, this article used to be treated as for singular nouns starting with a vowel: **l'entrate**, **l'esposizioni**, etc...
But now this does not occur any longer.

2.5

THE POSITION OF ADJECTIVES

English adjectives usually come before the noun (with very few exceptions, such as "*prince charming*", or similar expressions).

Italian adjectives, instead, may come either before or after the matching noun:

una piccola casa **una casa piccola**

Both expressions above mean *a small house*, but in the second one the idea of *small* is slightly more emphasized.

Two further situations will make this concept more evident:

*He lives in a **small house** not far from mine* *It is a **small house** compared to the average*

The main concept of the first sentence is that "somebody lives nearby", not that "his house is small": in Italian, the adjective would come before the noun (**una piccola casa**).

In the second expression, the fact that "the house is small" is much more important for the overall sense of the sentence: in this case the Italian adjective would come after the noun (**una casa piccola**).

Also the tone of the voice can be used to express different concepts: in the second sentence, *small house* would be pronounced with a slight stress.

But don't worry: in Italian, the general idea would be understood in both cases.

The pattern "noun - adjective" is as common as the opposite one "adjective - noun", though in certain expressions the "adjective - noun" pattern might be incorrect, or sound very strange to an Italian. For example, when colours are used as adjectives, they always follow the noun:

a black cat would always be **un gatto nero**

the green leaves always **le foglie verdi**

the blue sky always **il cielo azzurro**

The opposite form (**le verdi foglie**, **l'azzurro cielo**, etc.) would sound unusual, or poetical, but it would never be used in common speech.

Anyway, it's not really important to master this concept now; simply, be aware that adjectives may either follow the noun, or may be used before it with a less emphasized meaning.

ADJECTIVES **grande**, **bello**, **buono**

Three very common adjectives, **grande** (*big, great, large*), **bello** (*nice, pretty, handsome, fine*), and **buono** (*good, fine*), when used before a noun, sometimes drop one or two letters for phonetic reasons.

grande

For masculine gender, when this adjective is followed by a consonant, it may be shortened in **gran**, to create a more fluent rhythm, but both forms are perfectly correct, and which of the two is used is just a personal choice:

un grande castello ~ **un gran castello** (*a big castle*)

il grande rumore ~ **il gran rumore** (*the big noise*)

un grande paese ~ **un gran paese** (*a great country*)

etc. etc.

When the following masculine noun starts with a vowel, instead, **grande** remains more often unchanged. The shortened form **grand'** (with an apostrophe) also exists, but only in a limited number of cases. If you are in doubt, it is better to use **grande** in full:

un grande armadio (*a big wardrobe*)

il grande esodo (*the great exodus*)

un grande uomo ~ **un grand'uomo** (*a great man*, both are correct)

etc. etc.

With feminine nouns, the same changes as for masculine ones may sometimes occur, but in many cases the unchanged **grande** is the only possible form:

una grande nazione ~ **una gran nazione** (*a big nation*, both correct)

la grande avventura (*the great adventure*)

una grande paura ~ **una gran paura** (*a great fear*)

una grande esperienza (*a great experience*)

and so on.

Plurals of both genders behave as singular forms:

grandi castelli or (less common) **gran castelli**

grandi uomini or (less common) **grand'uomini**

grandi nazioni or (less common) **gran nazioni**

grandi paure or (less common) **gran paure**

(obviously, when only one singular form is possible, also its plural will have only one form).

bello

This adjective is slightly more complicated, although its changes only concern masculine gender.

Before a consonant, this adjective changes in the same way as the previous one (i.e. it drops two letters), but in this case it is not a free choice, because **bello** in full would sound unacceptable:

un bel gatto (*a nice cat*) notice: "**un bello gatto**" is *wrong*

un bel cappotto (*a nice coat*)

un bel lavoro (meaning both *a nice job* and *a good job*)

un bel cane (*a nice dog*)

etc. etc.

When the shortening occurs before a vowel, only one letter is dropped instead of two, and an apostrophe links the adjective to the noun (as it happens when using articles **l'**, dealt with in [paragraph 2.4](#)):

il bell'orologio (*the nice watch*) notice: **l'orologio** - **il bell'orologio**

il bell'uccello (*the nice bird*) notice: **l'uccello** - **il bell'uccello**

il bell'esemplare (*the nice specimen*) notice: **l'esemplare** - **il bell'esemplare**

and so on.

Feminine gender (**bella**) does not change:

una bella casa (*a nice house*)

la bella stagione (*the fine season*)

When the following feminine noun starts with a vowel, the form **bell'** may be used, although modern language tends to abandon the latter form when the vowel is not an "a":

una bella automobile ~ **una bell'automobile** (*a nice car*, both are correct)

la bella isola or (less common) **la bell'isola** (*the nice island*)

una bella estate or (less common) **una bell'estate** (*a nice summer*)

Used with masculine plural nouns, the adjective turns into **begli** when followed by a vowel, **bei** when followed by a consonant (this is the same phonetic change which occurs for plural articles **i** ~ **gli**, see previous [paragraph 2.4](#)):

i begli occhi (*the pretty eyes*) notice: **gli occhi - i begli occhi**
i begli abiti (*the nice clothes*) notice: **gli abiti - i begli abiti**
i begli effetti (*the nice effects*) notice: **gli effetti - i begli effetti**
 ...and
i bei cani (*the nice dogs*)
bei gioielli (*nice jewels*)
bei capelli (*fine hair*)
 etc. etc.

No change occurs in feminine plural:
le belle vacanze (*the nice holidays*)
le belle arti (*the fine arts*)
le belle melodie (*the nice melodies*).

buono
 This adjective is much easier: masculine singular always requires the short form **buon** (without an apostrophe):
un buon prezzo (*a good price*)
un buon impiego (*a good job*)
un buon televisore (*a good TV set*)
 etc. etc..

Feminine singular has no special change:
una buona marca (*a good brand*)
una buona giornata (*a good ~ fine day*)
una buona cena (*a good dinner*)
 and so on.

Plurals never change:
i buoni amici (*the good friends*)
buone maniere (*good manners*)
buoni strumenti (*good instruments*)
buone notizie (*good news*, notice how in Italian this noun is plural)
 etc. etc.

Summarizing these irregular adjectives for an easier memorization:
 (in brackets are less usual forms, or forms which do not exist for all nouns)

following noun starts with...	masculine singular	feminine singular	masculine plural	feminine plural
vowel	grande (grand')	grande (grand')	grandi (grand')	grandi (grand')
consonant	grande (gran)	grande (gran)	grandi (gran)	grandi (gran)
vowel	bell'	bella (bell')	begli	belle
consonant	bel	bella	bei	belle
vowel	buon	buona	buoni	buone
consonant	buon	buona	buoni	buone

Obviously, when these adjectives are used after the noun, no changes occur and standard inflections are used:

gran castello, but **castello grande**
bell'uomo, but **uomo bello**
buon prezzo, but **prezzo buono**.

Whatever form you use, remember to make a correct match between the adjective's gender and number, and those of the noun it relates to: a masculine plural noun always requires a masculine plural adjective, a

singular feminine noun always needs a feminine singular adjective, and so on.

COMBINING ARTICLES WITH NOUN-ADJECTIVE AND ADJECTIVE-NOUN

When an article occurs before either an adjective-noun (a-n) or a noun-adjective (n-a) combination, it will obviously match the same gender and number of the word coming next, and it will also have to match with it phonetically:

il grande oceano (a-n, masculine)	<i>the great ocean</i>	(the article matches grande)
l'oceano grande (n-a)	<i>the great ocean</i>	(the article matches oceano)
l'unica scelta (a-n, feminine)	<i>the only choice</i>	(the article matches unica)
la scelta unica (n-a)	<i>the only choice</i>	(the article matches scelta)
i piccoli uccelli (a-n, masculine)	<i>the small birds</i>	(the article matches piccoli)
gli uccelli piccoli (n-a)	<i>the small birds</i>	(the article matches uccelli)
una buona occasione (a-n, masculine)	<i>a good opportunity</i>	(the article matches buona)
un'occasione buona (n-a)	<i>a good opportunity</i>	(the article matches occasione)
uno stupido incidente (a-n, masculine)	<i>a stupid accident</i>	(the article matches stupido)
un incidente stupido (n-a)	<i>a stupid accident</i>	(the article matches incidente)

When using indefinite articles before an adjective, beware of a typical mistake which should be avoided: the use of an apostrophe where it is *not* needed.

Focus the following examples:

un incredibile evento = *an incredible event*

un ultimo tentativo = *a last try*

un amaro ricordo = *a bitter memory*

un'incredibile notizia = *an incredible news*

un'ultima risposta = *a last answer*

un'amara bevanda = *a bitter drink*

In the first three sentences the noun is masculine, so **un** does not require an apostrophe (**un evento**, **un incredibile evento**, or **un tentativo**, **un ultimo tentativo**).

In the second three sentences the noun is feminine, so **una** is shortened in **un'** which does require an apostrophe (**una notizia**, but **un'incredibile notizia**), since for phonetic reasons **una** drops the last **a** before words starting with a vowel.

It's quite common for beginners to make an incorrect use of the apostrophe (i.e. "**un'incredibile evento**", or so), especially when the adjective has the same inflection "-e" both for masculine and for feminine, as in the afore-said example.

So always take care in using (or not using) the apostrophe according on the gender of the following noun, disregarding the adjective.

These patterns are not easy to master at once, so it is better to practice them throughoutly from time to time.

3.1

CARDINAL & DECIMAL NUMBERS

Cardinal numerals (1, 2, 3... etc.) are used for mathematics or for stating quantities.

The name of Italian ones works in the following way:

- 1 to 10 have a specific name,
- 11 to 16 follow a semi-standard pattern (more or less like English ...-teen),
- 17 to 19 have a different semi-standard pattern;
- all the others can be obtained with a fully standard pattern.

The following tables show also English sounds.

0 to 10		
zero	<i>dzehroh</i>	<i>zero</i> (but also <i>nill</i> , <i>o</i> , etc...)
uno	<i>wnoh</i>	<i>one</i>
due	<i>dweh</i>	<i>two</i>
tre	<i>treh</i>	<i>three</i>
quattro	<i>quah'ttroh</i>	<i>four</i>
cinque	<i>chinqueh</i>	<i>five</i>
sei	<i>sehy</i>	<i>six</i>
sette	<i>seh'tteh</i>	<i>seven</i>
otto	<i>oh'ttoh</i>	<i>eight</i>
nove	<i>nohveh</i>	<i>nine</i>
dieci	<i>dyehchih</i>	<i>ten</i>

Numbers do not change inflection for different genders, except **uno**, which actually behaves as the same indefinite article (see [paragraph 2.4](#)), and therefore when followed by a matching noun changes as follows:

uno	<i>one</i> (as a digit)
uno scopo, un cane, un occhio	<i>one purpose</i> (= a purpose), <i>one dog</i> (= a dog), <i>one eye</i> (= an eye)
una scatola, una chiave, un'oca	<i>one box</i> (= a box), <i>one key</i> (= a key), <i>one goose</i> (= a goose)

But any other number is irrespective of gender (the noun will obviously be plural):

un albero, tre alberi (masculine)	<i>one tree, three trees</i>
una casa, tre case (feminine)	<i>one house, three houses</i>
un cane, otto cani (masculine)	<i>one dog, eight dogs</i>
una chiave, otto chiavi (feminine)	<i>eight keys</i>

In written Italian, it is usually more correct to spell small numbers by their names when they state a quantity:

"there were **five** ships" would be better than "there were 5 ships".

When using articles, the numeral acts like a plural adjective in the "adjective-noun" pattern:

gli alberi - i tre alberi	(gli matches alberi , while i matches tre)	<i>the trees - the three trees</i>
le case - le tre case	(le matches both case and tre)	<i>the houses - the three houses</i>
i cani - gli otto cani	(i matches cani , while gli matches otto)	<i>the dogs - the eight dogs</i>

**le chiavi - le otto
chiavi**

(**le** matches both **chiavi** and **otto**) *the keys - the eight keys*

When the numbered noun is single (i.e. "only one"), the adjective **unico** = *only* can be used:

il gatto (*the cat*) - **un gatto** (*one cat*) - **l'unico gatto** (*the only cat*)

la strada (*the road*) - **una strada** (*one road*) - **l'unica strada** (*the only road*)

l'indice (masc., *the index*) - **un indice** (*one index*) - **l'unico indice** (*the only index*)

(if you don't feel confident with articles, browse again [paragraph 2.4](#))

Instead, when numbers are treated as nouns, they are always masculine and singular, because Italian assumes that **numero** (= *number*) comes before them, although in most cases it may be omitted.

And, as any other noun, also the word **numero** requires an article:

il numero uno or simply **l'uno** *number one*

il numero due or simply **il due** *number two*

il numero otto or simply **l'otto** *number eight*

il numero dieci or simply **il dieci** *number ten*

As usual, notice how the article phonetically depends on the following word.

11 to 19

undici	<i>wndychih</i>	<i>eleven</i>
dodici	<i>dohdychih</i>	<i>twelve</i>
treddici	<i>trehdychih</i>	<i>thirteen</i>
quattordici	<i>quah'ttohrdychih</i>	<i>fourteen</i>
quindici	<i>quihndychih</i>	<i>fifteen</i>
sedici	<i>sehdyhchih</i>	<i>sixteen</i>
diciassette	<i>dychassehtteh</i>	<i>seventeen</i>
diciotto	<i>dychohittoh</i>	<i>eighteen</i>
diciannove	<i>dychahnnohveh</i>	<i>nineteen</i>

As you see, the first group has a root resembling numbers 1 to 6, followed by the suffix **...dici**, a contraction of **dieci** (*ten*), with accent falling on the last syllable before the suffix.

The last three numbers, instead, have an opposite pattern: a prefix for *ten* (**dicia...**) is followed by the digit, though for fonetic reasons something changes in the overall spelling. The stressed syllable is the same as for the corresponding digits.

The same rules stated above for 0 to 9 are also valid for these numbers (and for the following ones, as well), therefore:

undici	<i>(eleven)</i>
gli undici cani (masculine)	<i>the eleven dogs</i>
le undici case (feminine)	<i>the eleven houses</i>
il numero undici or simply l'undici	<i>(number eleven)</i>
diciannove	<i>(nineteen)</i>
i diciannove cani (masculine)	<i>the nineteen dogs</i>
le diciannove case (feminine)	<i>the nineteen houses</i>
il numero diciannove or simply il diciannove	<i>(number nineteen)</i>

FULL MULTIPLES OF 10

venti	<i>vehnty</i>	<i>twenty</i>
trenta	<i>trehntah</i>	<i>thirty</i>
quaranta	<i>quahrahntah</i>	<i>forty</i>
cinquanta	<i>chinquahntah</i>	<i>fifty</i>
sessanta	<i>sehssahntah</i>	<i>sixty</i>
settanta	<i>seh'ttahntah</i>	<i>seventy</i>
ottanta	<i>oh'ttahntah</i>	<i>eighty</i>
novanta	<i>nohvahntah</i>	<i>ninety</i>
cento	<i>chehntoh</i>	<i>one hundred</i>

So the multiples of ten are not very different from the English ones, as they use a suffix **...anta** (but **...enta** for *thirty*) in the same way English uses *...ty*.

Names of digits slightly change, binding with the suffix.

The word **cento**, instead, actually means *hundred* (Italian does not require to specify *one*, as in English).

All rules are the same as above:

cinquanta	(<i>fifty</i>)	cento	(<i>one hundred</i>)
i cinquanta cani (masculine)	(<i>the fifty dogs</i>)	i cento cani	(<i>the one hundred dogs</i>)
le cinquanta case (feminine)	(<i>the fifty houses</i>)	le cento case	(<i>the one hundred houses</i>)
il numero cinquanta or il cinquanta	(<i>number fifty</i>)	il numero cento or il cento	(<i>number one hundred</i>)

COMPOUND NUMBERS FROM 21 TO 99

To obtain *twenty-one*, *thirty-two*, *forty-eight*, etc., the pattern is similar to English: bind the multiple of 10 to the digit (with no dash).

ventuno	<i>vehntwnoh</i>	<i>twenty-one</i>
ventidue	<i>vehntydweh</i>	<i>twenty-two</i>
ventitré	<i>vehntytreh</i>	<i>twenty-three</i>
ventiquattro	<i>vehntyquah'ttroh</i>	<i>twenty-four</i>
venticinque	<i>vehntychinqueh</i>	<i>twenty-five</i>
ventisei	<i>vehntyseh'ih</i>	<i>twenty-six</i>
ventisette	<i>vehntyseh'tteh</i>	<i>twenty-seven</i>
ventotto	<i>vehntoh'ttoh</i>	<i>twenty-eight</i>
ventinove	<i>vehntynohveh</i>	<i>twenty-nine</i>

and the same
for other numbers:

trentuno	<i>trehntwnoh</i>	<i>thirty-one</i>
trentadue	<i>trehntahdweh</i>	<i>thirty-two</i>
trentatré	<i>trehntah'treh</i>	<i>thirty-three</i>
quarantuno	<i>quahrahntwnoh</i>	<i>forty-one</i>
quarantadue	<i>quahrahntahdweh</i>	<i>forty-two</i>
cinquantuno	<i>chinquahntwnoh</i>	<i>fifty-one</i>
cinquantadue	<i>chinquahntahdweh</i>	<i>fifty-two</i>

Note that the stress always falls on the digit.

Two observations:

- when digits start with a vowel (**uno**, **otto**) the last vowel of the multiple of ten is dropped (**ventuno**, not "**ventiuno**"; **quarantotto**, not "**quarantaotto**"); etc.
- since digit **tre** is monosyllabic (one syllable), in order to keep the stress on vowel **e** also in compound numbers, the last vowel is spelled **é** (with an accent): **tre**, but **ventitré**; **trentatré**; **quarantatré**; etc.).

FULL MULTIPLES OF 100

Very simple!

Just bind each digit to **cento**:

duecento	<i>dwehcentoh</i>	<i>two hundred</i>
trecento	<i>trehcentoh</i>	<i>three hundred</i>
quattrocento	<i>quah'ttrohcentoh</i>	<i>four hundred</i>
cinquecento	<i>chinqucentoh</i>	<i>five hundred</i>
seicento	<i>sehcentoh</i>	<i>six hundred</i>
settecento	<i>seh'ttecentoh</i>	<i>seven hundred</i>
ottocento	<i>oh'ttocentoh</i>	<i>eight hundred</i>
novecento	<i>nohvehcentoh</i>	<i>nine hundred</i>
mille	<i>mylleh</i>	<i>one thousand</i>

COMPOUND NUMBERS FROM 100 TO 999

Also **cento** behaves in the same way as the previous numbers, although in English you would have to use conjunction *and* (i.e. *one hundred and one*; *three hundred and two*; etc.):

centouno	<i>chentohwnoh</i>	<i>one hundred and one</i>
centodue	<i>chentohdweh</i>	<i>one hundred and two</i>
centotré	<i>chentohtreh</i>	<i>one hundred and three</i>
centoquattro	<i>chentohquah'ttroh</i>	<i>one hundred and four</i>
centocinque	<i>chentohchinqueh</i>	<i>one hundred and five</i>
centosei	<i>chentohsehih</i>	<i>one hundred and six</i>
centosette	<i>chentohseh'tteh</i>	<i>one hundred and seven</i>
centootto	<i>chentohoh'ttoh</i>	<i>one hundred and eight</i>
centonove	<i>chentohnohveh</i>	<i>one hundred and nine</i>
centodieci	<i>chentohdyehchih</i>	<i>one hundred and ten</i>

Note that this time no elisions are made, therefore **cento** always remains the same, also before **uno** and **otto**.

For greater numbers with a **cento** compound, the pattern is the same:

centoundici (*one hundred and eleven*)
centoventitré (*one hundred and twenty-three*)
centocinquantotto (*one hundred and fifty-eight*)
centonovanta (*one hundred and ninety*)

etc.

Also multiples work out in the same way:

duecentocinque (*two hundred and five*)
trecentodiciassette (*three hundred and seventeen*)
quattrocentosessantasette (*four hundred and sixty-seven*)
cinquecentotrentuno (*five hundred and thirty-one*)
ottocentocinquantaquattro (*eight hundred and fifty-four*)
novenentoottantotto (*nine hundred and eighty-eight*)

etc.

FULL MULTIPLES OF 1,000

Mille is slightly different from the **cento** concept: it actually means *one thousand* (not simply *thousand*): its multiples are therefore made of number + **...mila** (suffix for **mille**), also for numbers greater than 9:

duemila	<i>dwehmyhlah</i>	<i>two thousand</i>
tremila	<i>trehmyhlah</i>	<i>three thousand</i>
quattromila	<i>quah'ttrohmyhlah</i>	<i>four thousand</i>
cinquemila	<i>chinquemyhlah</i>	<i>five thousand</i>
seimila	<i>sehmyhlah</i>	<i>six thousand</i>
settemila	<i>seh'ttehmyhlah</i>	<i>seven thousand</i>
ottomila	<i>oh'ttohmyhlah</i>	<i>eight thousand</i>
novemila	<i>nohvehmyhlah</i>	<i>nine thousand</i>
diecimila	<i>dyehchymyhlah</i>	<i>ten thousand</i>
undicimila	<i>wndychihmyhlah</i>	<i>eleven thousand thousand</i>
dodicimila	<i>dohdychihmyhlah</i>	<i>twelve thousand</i>
ventimila	<i>vehntymyhlah</i>	<i>twenty thousand</i>
ventunomila	<i>ventwnohmyhlah</i>	<i>twenty-one thousand</i>
ventiduemila	<i>ventydwehmyhlah</i>	<i>twenty-two thousand</i>
trentamila	<i>trehntahmyhlah</i>	<i>thirty thousand</i>
quarantamila	<i>quahrahntahmyhlah</i>	<i>forty thousand</i>
centomila	<i>chentohmyhlah</i>	<i>one hundred thousand</i>
centodiecimila	<i>chentohdyehchymyhlah</i>	<i>one hundred and ten thousand</i>
centocinquantamila	<i>chentohchinquahntahmyhlah</i>	<i>one hundred and fifty thousand</i>
duecentomila	<i>dwechentohmyhlah</i>	<i>two hundred thousand</i>
novecentonovantanovemila	<i>nohvehchentohnohvantahnohvehmyhlah</i>	<i>nine hundred ninety-nine thousand</i>

Notice how the stress is always carried by the **...mila** suffix.

COMPOUND NUMBERS FROM 1,001 TO 999,999

There is a slight change at this point, as **mille** and **...mila** sometimes need conjunction **e** (= *and*), where in English it is usually omitted. Follow these examples:

- **mille e uno** (*mylleh eh wnoh*) = *one thousand one*
- **mille e sette** = *one thousand seven*
- **mille e trentacinque** = *one thousand thirty-five*
- **mille e cento** = *one thousand one hundred*
- **mille e trecento** = *one thousand three hundred*
- **mille e novecento** = *one thousand nine hundred*

BUT...

- **millecentouno** = *one thousand one hundred and one*
- **millecentonove** = *one thousand one hundred and nine*
- **millecentoventotto** = *one thousand one hundred and twenty-eight*
- **millequattrocentonovantasei** = *one thousand four hundred and ninety-six*
- **milleottocentotrentatré** = *one thousand eight hundred and thirty-three*

Therefore, as a general rule, conjunction **e** breaks the word only when **mille** is followed by numbers smaller than 100, or by full multiples of 100 (**duecento**, **trecento**, etc.). The unbroken form is used in all other cases.

But in written texts, books, newspapers, etc., such big numbers are uncommon to be spelled with words: "*almost two thousand people attended the event*" would be more likely than "*one thousand nine hundred and eighty-seven people...*", or if the right number was required it would often be spelled with numerals: "*1987 people*". So if you don't become familiar now with these patterns, you can still do well, although you will need to master these numbers for dates (discussed in paragraph 3.4).

NOTE

In English, numbers like 1,100; 1,200; 1,300; etc. may either sound *one thousand one hundred*, *one thousand two hundred*, etc., or *eleven hundred*, *twelve hundred*, etc.: this **never** happens in Italian, which only uses the first form (**mille e cento**, **mille e duecento**, etc.), as the word **cento** does not support digits greater than nine (**novecento**).

DECIMAL NUMBERS AND SEPARATORS

While English uses a comma (,) as a separator for thousands, Italian uses a full stop (.).

1,100 (English spelling) becomes **1.000**

344,901 (English spelling) becomes **344.901**

and so on.

Obviously, thousand separators do not affect pronunciation: they are simply used as mere graphic elements.

The comma instead, in Italian **virgola**, is used as a separator for decimals, whereas in English a dot is normally used:

1.15 (English spelling) becomes **1,15**

63.05 (English spelling) becomes **63,05**

and so on.

In this case, the word **virgola** is used exactly as English *point*, so that in the examples above the pronunciation would be:

1,15 = **uno virgola quindici** (*one point fifteen*)

63,05 = **sessantatré virgola zero cinque** (*sixty-three point o five*)

and so on.

Fractions, instead, will be discussed in paragraph 3.3.

3.2

ORDINAL NUMBERS

As suggested by their name, ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd... etc.) are used for indicating orders or ranks. In Italian, they have specific forms from 1 to 10, while all the following ones use one same suffix, so they are quite easy to learn.

Unlike cardinal numbers, though, ordinals behave like an adjective, therefore they can have both a masculine and a feminine gender, in both singular and plural forms (all of them are regular).

Also in this page English sounds are shown.

ORDINAL NUMBERS FROM 1st TO 9th

primo	<i>prymoh</i>	<i>first</i>
secondo	<i>sehkohndoh</i>	<i>second</i>
terzo	<i>tehrtzo</i>	<i>third</i>
quarto	<i>quahrtoh</i>	<i>fourth</i>
quinto	<i>quihntoh</i>	<i>fifth</i>
sesto	<i>sehstoh</i>	<i>sixth</i>
settimo	<i>seh'ttymoh</i>	<i>seventh</i>
ottavo	<i>oh'ttahvoh</i>	<i>eighth</i>
nono	<i>nohnoh</i>	<i>ninth</i>
decimo	<i>dehchimoh</i>	<i>tenth</i>

As found in most Western languages, the expressions *first* and *second* are irregular (i.e. they have no

phonetic relation with their cardinal numbers *one* and *two*), in all the others the name of the digit is still recognizable, though slightly changed:

tre - terzo, **quattro - quarto**, **cinque - quinto**, and so on, while many suffixes change.

Used as adjectives, they all follow the most common pattern:

primo (masculine singular)

primi (masculine plural)

prima (feminine singular)

prime (feminine plural)

secondo (masculine singular)

secondi (masculine plural)

seconda (feminine singular)

seconde (feminine plural)

And so on with all the others.

Note that there is an adjective derived from **uno** (*one*), **unico**, which means *only*, in contrast with **primo** (*first*). This adjective is regular, although its "...co" ending causes phonetic adjustment:

unico *wnyhkoh* (masculine singular)

unica *wnyhkah* (feminine singular)

unici *wnyhchyh* (masculine plural)

uniche *wnyhkeh* (feminine plural)

As in English, ordinals require an article, whose gender and phonetics will match the ordinal itself:

il primo = *the first* (masculine singular);

la prima = *the first* (feminine singular);

i primi = *the first* (masculine plural);

le prime = *the first* (feminine plural);

l'ottavo = *the eighth* (masculine singular);

l'ottava = *the eighth* (feminine singular);

gli ottavi = *the eighth* (masculine plural);

le ottave = *the eighth* (feminine plural);

As in English, the article is required both when the ordinal is used as an adjective (i.e. when it is followed by a noun) and when it works as a pronoun (i.e. when it replaces the noun):

la prima casa = *the first house*

tu sei il terzo = *you are the third*

il quinto concorrente = *the fifth participant*

l'ottava a destra = *the eighth on the right*

In Italian, **primo** (especially its plural masculine and feminine) in some cases may also have a meaning of *the early...* or *the earliest...*, referred to time, history, etc.:

le prime conquiste = *the early (earliest) achievements*

i primi abitanti = *the early (earliest) inhabitants*

le prime tracce dell'uomo = *the early (earliest) traces of man*

i primi esempi di arte bizantina = *the early (earliest) samples of Byzantine art*

Instead, when quoting the entries of an ordered list, a ranking, etc., the article is dropped (as in English):

primo: XXXXX *first: XXXXX*

secondo: YYYYY *second: YYYYY*

terzo: ZZZZZ *third: ZZZZZ*

....

....

From *11th* onwards, you only need to add suffix **...esimo**, and to drop the cardinal number's last vowel (except when the last digit is **...tre = ...three**):

undicesimo	<i>wndychehsyhmō</i>	<i>eleventh</i>
dodicesimo	<i>dohdychehsyhmōh</i>	<i>twelfth</i>
tredecimo	<i>trehdychehsyhmōh</i>	<i>thirteenth</i>
quattordicesimo	<i>quah'ttohrdychehsyhmōh</i>	<i>fourteenth</i>
ventesimo	<i>vehntehsyhmōh</i>	<i>twentieth</i>
ventunesimo	<i>vehntuhnehisyhmōh</i>	<i>twenty-first</i>
ventiduesimo	<i>vehntydwehsyhmōh</i>	<i>twenty-second</i>
ventitreesimo	<i>vehntytrehehsyhmōh</i>	<i>twenty-second</i>
trentesimo	<i>trehntehsyhmōh</i>	<i>thirtieth</i>
trentunesimo	<i>trehntwhnehisyhmōh</i>	<i>twenty-first</i>
trentaduesimo	<i>trehntahdwehsyhmōh</i>	<i>twenty-second</i>
trentatreesimo	<i>trehntahrehehsyhmōh</i>	<i>twenty-second</i>
quarantesimo	<i>quahrantehisyhmōh</i>	<i>fortieth</i>
centesimo	<i>chentehsyhmōh</i>	<i>one hundredth</i>
duecentesimo	<i>dwechentehsyhmōh</i>	<i>two hundredth</i>
millesimo	<i>myllehsyhmōh</i>	<i>one thousandth</i>

The modern way to indicate ordinal numbers is to add their last vowel to the number, in "superscript" style:

1^o (primo) or **1^a (prima)**

9^o (nono) or **9^a (nona)**

17^o (diciassettesimo) or **17^a (diciassettesima)**

etc. etc...

Just like adjectives, they can also have the plural form:

8ⁱ (ottavi) or **8^e (ottave)**

22ⁱ (ventiduesimi) or **22^e (ventiduesime)**

etc. etc...

Eventually, a circumflex accent (^) may replace any of the superscript vowels:

1[^] = 1^o, 1^a, 1ⁱ, 1^e

25[^] = 25^o, 25^a, 25ⁱ, 25^e

130[^] = 130^o, 130^a, 130ⁱ, 130^e

etc. etc.

The more classic way to indicate an ordinal number in Italian is to use roman numbers:

I = 1^o (primo) or **1^a (prima)**

IX = 9^o (nono) or **9^a (nona)**

XVII = 17^o (diciassettesimo) or **17^a (diciassettesima)**

etc. etc...

When a roman number occurs in an Italian text, it should always be looked at as an ordinal number, unless it belongs to a date.

If you don't feel too confident with these numbers, [appendix 1](#) will show you how they work.

Adding a superscript vowel to roman numbers (i.e. **III^o**, **V^a**, etc.) is considered **incorrect**: since they already act as ordinal numbers, the vowel would be redundant.

Roman numbers are now still used to indicate volumes, chapters, monarchs, centuries, and very few more categories. However, for some of the aforesaid ones (centuries, rulers) the use of Western numbers would not be considered very elegant.

In common speech, ordinal numbers are used according to the "adjective-noun" pattern, i.e. they are always followed by the classified noun, never vice-versa:

il primo giorno (*the first day*)
le seconde case (*the second houses*)
la ventesima volta (*the twentieth time*)
etc.

Instead, when a roman number is used, the ordinal number usually follows the noun:

- when they are used to indicate a monarch, a pope, or other rulers, they are mentioned as in English, but omitting article *the*:

Leone IV (read as **Leone quarto**) = *Leo IV*, (in English, *Leo the fourth*)

Carlo VIII (Carlo ottavo) = *Charles VIII* (in English, *Charles the eighth*).

- When indicating a book's chapter or volume, a play's act, etc.:

volume III (volume terzo), capitolo XIII (capitolo tredicesimo) = *third volume, thirteenth chapter*

atto II (atto secondo) = *second act*.

In these cases both forms are accepted, so also **terzo volume, secondo atto**, etc., would be correct if spelled with letters (but not with roman numbers).

- When indicating a century (also in this case both forms are correct):

secolo XVII (secolo diciassettesimo) or XVII secolo(diciassettesimo secolo) = *seventeenth century*.

NOTE

As already said, ordinals greater than *10th* do not use the same suffix as the smaller ones, having simplified the inflection to **...esimo** or **...esima**.

In old-style Italian, instead, all ordinals used to follow the pattern **decimo primo** (instead of **undicesimo**), **decimo secondo** (instead of **dodicesimo**), etc., also for larger numbers (**ventesimo quinto** instead of **venticinquesimo**, **settantesimo nono** instead of **settantanovesimo**, etc.), thus keeping the original suffixes of the first nine digits; today this form is very rarely used, and sounds quite archaic.

3.3

FRACTIONS AND ROUGH QUANTITIES

FRACTIONS

In Italian, fractions work exactly as in English: the first number is expressed as a cardinal number, the second one as an ordinal.

$\frac{2}{3}$ = **due terzi** = *two thirds*

$\frac{1}{7}$ = **un settimo** = *one seventh*

$\frac{5}{8}$ = **cinque ottavi** = *five eighths*

$\frac{12}{45}$ = **dodici quarantacinquesimi** = *twelve forty-fifths*

Number 1 always has the 'short' form **un**, according to the general phonetic rules of **uno**, either as a number or as an indefinite article:

$\frac{1}{3}$ = **un terzo** = *one third*

$\frac{1}{10}$ = **un decimo** = *one tenth*

$\frac{1}{90}$ = **un novantesimo** = *one ninetieth*

Fractions whose denominator is 2 read this number as **mezzo** (*half*) or **mezzi** (*halves*).

$1/2$ = **un mezzo**, or simply **mezzo** = *one half*, or *half*

$4/2$ = **quattro mezzi** = *four halves*

$5/8$ = **cinque ottavi** = *five eighths*

$12/45$ = **dodici quarantacinquesimi** = *twelve forty-fifths*

When a fraction is used to state a quantity, the noun to which it refers is introduced by preposition **di** (*of*):
due quinti di alcool = *two fifths of alcohol*

cinque ottavi di pollice = *five eighths of an inch*

notice how Italian does not use an indefinite article before *inch*, nor before any other measure

tre quarti di litro = *three fourths of a liter*

cinquanta centesimi di dollaro = *fifty hundredths of a dollar* (actually: *fifty cents*)

This last example shows how the word **centesimi** (*hundredths*) is also used for *cents*, to indicate small change of any decimal system currency.

When the object of the fraction is introduced by a definite article (*two thirds of **the** members*, etc.), a compound preposition made of **di** + article will have to be used, instead of **di** alone. The following samples show the use of both the simple preposition **di** and of its compound form; although you may disregard the latter now, simply note the difference with the first two. Compound prepositions will be dealt with in paragraph 5.2.

Ordinal numbers always have the masculine form, also when the numbered object is feminine:

un quarto di torta = *one fourth of cake*

un quarto di questa torta = *one fourth of this cake*

un quarto della torta = *one fourth of the cake*

tre quinti di zucchero = *three fifths of sugar*

tre quinti di questo zucchero = *three fifths of this sugar*

tre quinti dello zucchero = *three fifths of the sugar*

ROUGH QUANTITIES

Besides the common use of **una dozzina di...** (*a dozen...*), meaning *twelve of something*, in Italian the following expressions referring to rough quantities are commonly used:

una decina = *about ten*

una ventina = *about twenty*

una trentina = *about thirty*

una quarantina = *about forty*

una cinquantina = *about fifty*

una sessantina = *about sixty*

una settantina = *about seventy*

una ottantina = *about eighty*

una novantina = *about ninety*

As for the word **dozzina**, these quantities are treated as nouns (i.e. not as pure numbers), therefore they require an article, and are followed by the simple preposition **di** (*of*), which refers to the counted objects. So, for instance:

una decina di bottoni = *about ten buttons*

una quarantina di minuti = *about forty minutes*

un'ottantina di soldati = *about eighty soldiers*

The noun **decina** may be combined with exact numbers, to obtain alternative forms:

due decine = **una ventina** = *about twenty*

tre decine = **una trentina** = *about thirty*

quattro decine = **una quarantina** = *about forty*

and so on, up to

nove decine = una novantina = *about ninety*

All the others (**ventina, trentina**, etc.) are never numbered, i.e. they are always used in the form **una ventina, una trentina**, etc.

Also **una cinquina** (*about five*) and **una quindicina** (*about fifteen*) are quite common, although they tend to be rather colloquial.

Other nouns for rough quantities are:

un centinaio (masculine) = *about one hundred*

plural **centinaia** (feminine) = *hundreds*

un migliaio (masculine) = *about one thousand*

plural **migliaia** (feminine) = *thousands*

These two are not really "rough", as their literal meaning is *hundred* and *thousand*, but since for counting (see again [paragraph 3.1](#)) their equivalent suffixes **...cento** and **...mila** are normally used, **centinaio** and **migliaio** often carry a meaning of *approximately 100* and *approximately 1.000*.

cento scatole = *one hundred boxes*

un centinaio di scatole = *some one hundred boxes*

trecentocinque mattoni = *three hundred and five bricks*

tre centinaia di mattoni = *some three hundred bricks*

novacentocinquanta frammenti = *nine hundred and fifty fragments*

un migliaio di frammenti = *some one thousand fragments*

tremilasettantotto spettatori = *three thousand and seventy-eight spectators*

tre migliaia di spettatori = *some three thousand spectators*

An exact number may be turned into a rough amount also by using **circa** and **all'incirca**, which mean *about, approximately, some*.

cento scatole = *one hundred boxes*

circa cento scatole = *about one hundred boxes*

trecentocinque mattoni = *three hundred and five bricks*

circa trecento mattoni = *approximately three hundred bricks*

novacentocinquanta frammenti = *nine hundred and fifty fragments*

circa un migliaio di frammenti = *some one thousand fragments*

tremilasettantotto spettatori = *three thousand and seventy-eight spectators*

circa tre migliaia di spettatori = *about three thousand spectators*

The use of **circa** or **all'incirca** does not automatically exclude the use of **decine, centinaia, migliaia**, ecc.

circa quaranta minuti = *about forty minutes*

una quarantina di minuti = (same as above)

circa una quarantina di minuti = (same as above)

all'incirca trecento mattoni = *approximately three hundred bricks*

tre centinaia di mattoni = (same as above)

all'incirca tre centinaia di mattoni = (same as above)

all'incirca mille frammenti = *some one thousand fragments*

un migliaio di frammenti = (same as above)

circa un migliaio di frammenti = (same as above)

Also indefinite adjectives such as **qualche** (*some*), **poche** (*a few*), **diverse** (*several*), etc. may combine with **decine, centinaia** and **migliaia**:

poche decine di minuti = literally: *a few tens of minutes* (i.e. 40 min.-50 min., or so)

qualche centinaio di membri = *a few hundred members*

diverse migliaia di metri = *several thousand metres*

Note that **qualche** is singular, and can only combine with singular nouns, thus **qualche centinaio, qualche migliaio** (masculine).

Instead **poche** is already plural, therefore it has to be **poche centinaia, poche migliaia** (both feminine).

It is also possible to combine two rough quantities:

due decine di migliaia di abitanti = *some twenty thousand inhabitants* (literally: *two tens of thousands*)

poche centinaia di migliaia di cellule = *a few hundred thousand cells*

In the same way also **paio** (*pair*), besides its "standard" meaning of *two of something, two-piece set*, is also commonly used for "slightly more than one" (*a couple of, a few, a little, two or three, etc.*).

entro un paio di giorni = *within a couple of days - within a few days*

un paio di consigli = *a couple of tips - a few tips*

fra un paio d'anni = *in a couple of years time - in a few years time*

Paio (masculine), whose plural is **paia** (feminine), is never numbered, unless wishing to express the actual meaning of "pair", "a set of two":

due paia di scarpe = *two pairs of shoes*

sei paia di guanti = *six pairs of gloves*

circa dieci paia di pantaloni = *some ten pairs of trousers*

una quindicina di paia di occhiali = *about fifteen pairs of glasses*

4.1

PERSONAL PRONOUNS USED AS SUBJECTS

In chapter 4 we will start discussing verbs, but in order to build actual sentences with them it is better to introduce personal pronouns first.

Since in Italian these pronouns have two forms, one when they are used as subjects and one when they are used for any other part of the sentence (as direct object, in genitive case, in dative case, etc.), only the former case will be dealt with by this paragraph.

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>			
1st person	io	<i>I</i>	noi	<i>we</i>		
2nd person	tu	<i>you</i> (singular)	voi	<i>you</i> (plural)		
3rd person	egli	<i>he</i>	essi	<i>they</i> (masculine + neutre)		
	ella	<i>she</i>			esse	<i>they</i> (feminine)
	esso	<i>it</i> (masculine)				
	essa	<i>it</i> (feminine)				

Personal pronouns are the only part of the sentence in which Italian makes a distinction between masculine/feminine and neutre. Neutre gender is used for objects, plants and animals except man; but this distinction does not cause any important change, because all other parts of the sentence (nouns, verb inflections, adjectives, etc.) do not have a neutre gender, which is simply handled by using either masculine or feminine.

So you only need to be aware of neutre gender when using singular personal pronouns as a subject of the sentence.

Before turning the page, be sure to memorize them well.

4.2

INDICATIVE TENSES OF ITALIAN VERBS

The Italian word for *tense* is **tempo**, which also means *time*, suggesting that tenses are inflections which show whether actions are carried out in the present, in the past, or in the future.

As in most western languages, also Italian verbs are indicated with their infinitive tense, called **tempo infinito** or simply **infinito** (omitting the word for *tense*).

According to the infinitive tense, verbs can be divided into three main groups, called **coniugazioni** (= *conjugations*):

1. verbs ending with **...are**, like **andare** (*to go*), **mangiare** (*to eat*), **camminare** (*to walk*)
2. verbs ending with **...ere**, like **avere** (*to have*), **vedere** (*to see*), **essere** (*to be*), **decidere** (*to decide*)
3. verbs ending with **...ire**, like **dormire** (*to sleep*), **venire** (*to come*), **coprire** (*to cover*)

In conjugations 1 and 3, the infinitive tense of all verbs carries its accent on the penultimate syllable, thus stressing the verb's inflection (in the following examples, the stressed syllable is shown in *italics style* and in lighter blue colour):

andare (1st), **mangiare** (1st), **dormire** (3rd), **venire** (3rd), etc.

But in the 2nd conjugation (**...ere**), stress may sometimes fall on the antepenultimate syllable (i.e. one syllable before the infinitive's inflection), so this conjugation may be split into two further groups:

- verbs whose penultimate syllable carries the stress (as in conjugations 1 and 3): **avere**, **vedere**, etc.
- verbs whose stress is carried by an earlier syllable, as **essere**, **decidere**, etc.

INDICATIVO (INDICATIVE)

Indicative is the group of tenses used more often, especially at an early stage.

Since some of the tenses do not exactly match English ones, their literal meaning will be stated in this page, but in further pages they will be referred to with their Italian name.

simple tenses

- **PRESENTE** (= literally *present tense*), translating English present tense: "*I go*", "*you go*", etc.;
- **IMPERFETTO** (= literally *imperfect tense*), translating English simple past tense "*I went*", "*you went*", etc., expressing an action which was still in progress by the time the sentence refers to, or was habitual (the use of this tense will be later explained more in detail).
- **FUTURO** (= literally *future tense*), translating English future tense, "*I shall go*";
- **PASSATO REMOTO** (= literally *remote past tense*), translating English simple past tense "*I went*", expressing an action which happened quite a long time ago, and has already ended by the time the sentence refers to. This tense almost acts in opposition to imperfect tense, by which the past action has not ended by the time of the sentence (further details will be discussed later on).

compound tenses (made by an auxiliary verb + the main verb's past participle)

- **PASSATO PROSSIMO** (= literally *recent past tense*), translating the English present perfect "*I have gone*", and often also English simple past tense "*I went*"; it expresses actions which have taken place a short time ago.
- **TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO** (= *recent pluperfect tense*), matching English past perfect "*I had gone*"; it expresses actions which have taken place a long time ago.
- **TRAPASSATO REMOTO** (= *remote pluperfect tense*), translating the same English past perfect "*I had gone*", but with a much more limited use: the action described is no longer in progress, and it is followed by another action expressed by simple past tense (i.e. "*when he had gone, you came*");
- **FUTURO ANTERIORE** (= literally *forward future*), also known as *future perfect*, expressing an action which will have taken place in a future time: in English, this tense is not specific, but the matching form may be obtained all the same: "*you will have gone*", "*they will have arrived*", etc.

In Italian, this same tense may also translate uncertainty, as if the action was not sure, or only had chance to be true: "*it might have been him*", "*he might have arrived*".

In the following paragraphs, all these concept will be fully discussed again.

Summarizing again these tenses in a chronological order:

FUTURE ACTIONS are translated by:

futuro = English future tense: the action will happen in the future

futuro anteriore = English future perfect: in the future, the given action will have happened; but it can also express possibility: the action might have happened (now).

PRESENT ACTIONS are translated by:

presente = English present tense: the action happens now

PAST ACTIONS are translated by:

passato prossimo = English present perfect: the action has happened a short time ago and is now over

imperfetto = English simple past: the action happened in the past, and was either habitual or was in progress

passato remoto = English simple past: the action happened a long time ago, and is now over

trapassato prossimo = English past perfect: the action had happened in a further past

trapassato remoto = English past perfect: the action had happened, and then something else happened afterwards

Inflections of regular verbs follow a standard pattern, but there are many irregular verbs too, most of which are important ones, as the verb **essere** (*to be*) and **avere** (*to have*), which will be the first ones discussed in the following paragraphs, because they are also used as auxiliary verbs for all others.

Nevertheless, when two irregular verbs have similar stems, they often have similar inflections too.

COMPOUND TENSES

These tenses (*I have seen, you have heard, he had wrote, they had come*, etc.) are very similar to the English ones, as they need an auxiliary verb in simple tense, followed by the main verb's past participle. Two auxiliary verbs are used in Italian: **avere** (*to have*), used for all transitive verbs and a few intransitive ones, and **essere** (*to be*), used for most intransitive verbs.

The same auxiliary **essere** is also used for passive forms.

English uses auxiliary verbs in a rather different way: the verb *to have* is always used for compound tenses, both for transitive and intransitive verbs ("*I have gone, it had rained, we had returned*", etc.); verb *to be* is always used for passive forms ("*I am helped, you were defeated*", etc.).

Interrogative and negative sentences, instead, use the auxiliary verbs *to do* and *to have* ("*do you go...?, have you gone...?, I do not go*").

To become confident with the construction of Italian compound tenses you should focus well the simple pattern mentioned above and summarized by the following lines:

- transitive verbs form compound tenses by using **avere** + past participle of the main verb
- most intransitive verbs use **essere** + past participle of the main verb
- a few intransitive verbs use **avere** + past participle of the main verb, as transitive ones

4.3

THE VERB *ESSERE*

PART I

SIMPLE INDICATIVE TENSES

The Italian verb **essere** (*to be*) is strongly irregular but also very important, because it is one of the two auxiliary verbs used in forming compound tenses with all other verbs.

Furthermore, **essere** is also used for nominal sentences, i.e. the ones in which *to be* is followed by an adjective or by a noun, thus forming a copula (or nominal predicate). For instance *I am old; this is plastic; they were nice; we were lazy* etc., in which *to be* expresses a condition, a quality, not a direct object which receives a real action.

Therefore, before discussing regular verbs, it is important for the student to become confident with the verb **essere**.

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) sono	<i>I am</i>	(noi) siamo	<i>we are</i>
2nd person	(tu) sei	<i>you are (singular)</i>	(voi) siete	<i>you are (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) è	<i>he/she/it is</i>	(essi / esse) sono	<i>they are</i>

A first important thing to remember is that in spoken Italian the verbs are not necessarily introduced by a personal pronoun, as they are in English, because the different persons (singular and plural) have a specific inflection for each of them, with very few exceptions. So, when the subject of a sentence is a personal pronoun, in spoken language it is frequently omitted, while in written language it is often more correct to mention it.

This page, as well as the following ones, will show personal pronouns in brackets: it is useful for the student to practice them, yet remembering that their use is not compulsory in everyday's speech.

Without a pronoun, the sentence might look as if it had no subject, because in English it is always mentioned; but in Italian the specific inflection of the verb is enough to understand who carries out the

action, i.e. who is the subject of the sentence.

In the case of the present tense, only inflection **sono** refers to two persons, 1st singular and 3rd plural, and could be mistaken. But also in this case, there is no need to use a pronoun when the other parts of the sentence make it clear to whom **sono** refers:

(io) sono alto = *I am tall* (**alto** is singular, therefore **sono** can only be 1st singular person)

(essi) sono giovani = *they are young* (**giovani** is plural, therefore **sono** is 3rd plural person)

Another example:

(io) sono brava = *I am clever* (feminine)

(esse) sono brave = *they are clever* (feminine)

When the remaining part of the sentence does not make clear who the subject is, a pronoun is used to avoid any doubt:

sono a letto = either *I am in bed* or *they are in bed*

io sono a letto = *I am in bed*

essi sono a letto = *I am in bed*

But sometimes the subject has already been mentioned, in which case the pronoun may be dropped again:

dove sei? sono a letto = *where are you? I am in bed*

dove sono i bambini? sono a letto = *where are the kids? they are in bed*

Pronouns, though, may be used on purpose to give the sentence a certain emphasis, or to show a contrast.

Focus this case:

sei un uomo = *you are a man*

tu sei un uomo = *you are a man*

The second sentence may carry a meaning of *you are a man, not me, nor her*, giving a certain stress to "you".

Also when the sentence expresses a contrast, personal pronouns may be used for the same reason explained above:

io sono un uomo e tu sei una donna = *I am a man and you are a woman*

noi siamo veloci, voi siete lenti = *we are fast, you are slow*

But if no emphasis is required, the spoken language often omits the pronoun, and sometimes the written language too does:

sono magro (alternatively, **io sono magro**) = *I am thin*

sei un uomo (alternatively, **tu sei un uomo**) = *you are a man*

siete ragazzi (alternatively, **voi siete ragazzi**) = *you are boys*

è un vecchio libro (alternatively, **esso è un vecchio libro**) = *it's an old book*

è una brava insegnante (alternatively, **ella è una brava insegnante**) = *she is a good teacher*

sono vecchie (alternatively, **esse sono vecchie**) = *they are old* (feminine)

So, there is no need to worry about the choice of pronouns, unless you wish to use them for practice or to emphasize the pronoun itself.

When the latter is used, it has to match the verb by gender and number.

Plural forms will obviously be told by the same verb inflection:

(tu) sei alto = *you are tall* (masculine)

(voi) siete alti = *you are tall* (plural)

(io) sono giovane = *I am young*

(noi) siamo giovani = *we are young*

IMPERFETTO

	singular		plural	
1st person	(io) ero	<i>I was</i>	(noi) eravamo	<i>we were</i>
2nd person	(tu) eri	<i>you were</i> (singular)	(voi) eravate	<i>you were</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) era	<i>he/she/it was</i>	(essi / esse) erano	<i>they were</i>

Accent falls on the penultimate syllable of each of them, except for **erano**, whose stressed syllable is the antepenultimate (pronounced "*ehrahnoh*").

Imperfect tense is usually translated with English simple past, although it expresses the concept of an action carried out in the past which has not necessarily come to an end. In many cases, the English form "*I used to be*" could be used instead of "*I was*"; since Italian has no such form, you may translate imperfect tense with both English forms:

ero bravo = *I was clever* or *I used to be clever* (the fact of being clever is a condition lasting throughout the time the sentence refers to)

era un cattivo studente = *he/she was a bad student* or *he/she used to be a bad student* (again, a condition, with no definite end)

erano quattro uomini = *they were four men* (again, a condition lasting throughout the period which the sentence refers to, although the form "*they used to be...*" would not be proper in this case)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) sarò	<i>I shall be</i>	(noi) saremo <i>we shall be</i>
2nd person	(tu) sarai	<i>you will be</i> (singular)	(voi) sarete <i>you will be</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) sarà	<i>he/she/it will be</i>	(essi / esse) saranno <i>they will be</i>

All accents fall on the penultimate syllable of each inflection, except **sarò** and **sarà** which have an accent on the last syllable (pronounced "*sahroh*", "*sahrah*").

In a few cases, Italian future tense might have a meaning of probability, or chance: for example, if the phone rings, the expression **sarà Carlo** translates the English form *it might be Charles*.

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) fui	<i>I was</i>	(noi) fummo <i>we were</i>
2nd person	(tu) fosti	<i>you were</i> (singular)	(voi) foste <i>you were</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) fu	<i>he/she/it was</i>	(essi / esse) furono <i>they were</i>

Accents fall on penultimate syllables, except in **fu** (only one syllable), obviously carrying stress, and **furono**, where the antepenultimate syllable is stressed (pronounced "*fwrohnoh*").

Notice that **fu** does not have an accented **u** because there is no other way of pronouncing the word.

This tense expresses the fact that the action has ended time ago, and is no longer in progress:

fu un brutto incidente = *it was a bad accident* (the fact happened long ago, and it is now over)

fu un grande musicista = *he was a great musician* (in the past, meaning "...now he is dead")

furono bravi a vincere = *they were clever to win* (on that specific occasion, not as a lasting condition).

4.4

THE VERB *AVERE*

PART I

SIMPLE INDICATIVE TENSES

Avere (*to have*) is another auxiliary verb used in compound tenses, therefore it is as much important as the previous one.

It is irregular, but less than **essere**.

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ho	<i>I have</i>	(noi) abbiamo	<i>we have</i>
2nd person	(tu) hai	<i>you have</i> (singular)	(voi) avete	<i>you have</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) ha	<i>he/she/it has</i>	(essi / esse) hanno	<i>they have</i>

Two considerations:

- accent falls on the penultimate syllable, except in those inflections which only have one, **ho**, **hai**, and **ha**, which sound like "oh" "ahyh" and "ah", spelled without an accented vocal on the last letter because no other accent would be possible (as in simple past inflection **fu**, see [paragraph 4.3](#));
- a second note is about the spelling of inflections starting with an **h**: in Italian, this consonant is absolutely soundless, so read the word as if the **h** was not there.

The reason for which **h** is added is that similar words (without an **h**) exist: **ai** = *to the* (pronounced exactly like **hai** = *you have*); **a** = *to* or *for* (pronounced exactly like **ha** = *he/she/it has*); **anno** = *year* (pronounced exactly like **hanno** = *they have*); etc.

So the consonant is merely graphic, to indicate the verb's inflections.

ha una bella casa = *he or she has a nice home*

hanno due gatti = *they have two cats*

tu hai un gatto, ma io ho un cane = *you have a cat, but I have a dog* (notice the use of pronouns for stressing the opposition)

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avevo	<i>I had</i>	(noi) avevamo	<i>we had</i>
2nd person	(tu) avevi	<i>you had</i> (singular)	(voi) avevate	<i>you had</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) aveva	<i>he/she/it had</i>	(essi / esse) avevano	<i>they had</i>

As for the same tense of the verb **essere**, accent falls on the penultimate syllable of each of them, except for **avevano**, whose stressed syllable is the antepenultimate (pronounced "*ahvehvahnoh*").

Always remember that the imperfect tense expresses the concept of a past action which has not necessarily come to an end:

l'uomo aveva un grosso naso = *the man had a big nose* (this is a condition, which obviously was lasting for the whole time the sentence refers to)

avevo tre automobili = *I had three cars* or *I used to have three cars* (probably I do no longer have them now, but nevertheless the expression carries the sense of "*some time ago I used to have them*", as a continuous condition).

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) avrò	<i>I shall be</i>	(noi) avremo <i>we shall be</i>
2nd person	(tu) avrai	<i>you will be</i> (singular)	(voi) avrete <i>you will be</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) avrà	<i>he/she/it will be</i>	(essi / esse) avranno <i>they will be</i>

Accents fall on the penultimate syllable of each inflection, except **avrò** and **avrà** which behave like **sarò** and **sarà** (see future tense of **essere**): although both verbs are irregular, their future tense has the same patterns.

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) ebbi	<i>I was</i>	(noi) avemmo <i>we were</i>
2nd person	(tu) avesti	<i>you were</i> (singular)	(voi) aveste <i>you were</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) ebbe	<i>he/she/it was</i>	(essi / esse) ebbero <i>they were</i>

A tense with very irregular inflections, where all accents fall on penultimate syllables, except in **ebbero**, whose antepenultimate syllable is stressed (pronounced "*eh'bbehroh*"). Although the past perfect of the verb **essere** (discussed in the previous paragraph) has some differences, accents and many of the inflections work in the same way.

Remember that this tense expresses ceased actions, no longer active:

l'uomo ebbe un incidente = *the man had an accident* (the accident itself did not last in time)

avemmo una grande fortuna = *we had a great luck* (we were lucky on that occasion)

ebbero due figli = *they had two sons* (in Italian this sounds like "*their two sons were born*", as a non-lasting action, while the imperfect tense **avevano due figli** would express the fact that during their lives "*they had two sons*", as a continuous condition).

4.5

VERBS OF THE 1st CONJUGATION

PART I

SIMPLE INDICATIVE TENSES

Verbs whose infinitive tense has the inflection **...are**, belong to the 1st conjugation.

Most verbs belonging to this conjugation are regular. Tenses will be discussed by using the verb **parlare** (= *to speak, to talk*). Sample sentences will also use these other few regular verbs:

lavorare = *to work*

tirare = *to pull*

cantare = *to sing*

ascoltare = *to listen*

cucinare = *to cook*

comprare = *to buy*

pagare = *to pay*

attaccare = *to attack*

mangiare = *to eat*

fischiare = *to whistle*

pescare = *to fish*

pagare = *to pay*

portare = *to carry, to bring*

sbirciare = *to peep*

strisciare = *to creep*

saltare = *to jump*

cambiare = *to change*

scappare = *to escape, to run away*

Comparing them with the two irregular verbs **essere** and **avere** already discussed, you will surely find that

many inflections are similar (but many others are different).

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) parlo	<i>I talk</i>	(noi) parliamo	<i>we talk</i>
2nd person	(tu) parli	<i>you talk (singular)</i>	(voi) parlate	<i>you talk (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) parla	<i>he/she/it talks</i>	(essi / esse) parlano	<i>they talk</i>

As in all previous verbs, accent falls on the penultimate syllable, except for the 3rd plural person, whose antipenultimate syllable is stressed (pronounced "*pahr^hlahnoh*").

parla bene = *he or she speaks well*

tiro una fune = *I pull a rope*

gli uccelli cantano = *the birds sing*

--- PHONETIC CHANGES ---

When the last letter of the verb's root is **c** or **g**, for phonetic reasons the inflections of the 2nd singular person and 1st plural person (**...i** and **...iamo**) need an **h** :

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) gioco	<i>I play</i>	(noi) giochiamo	<i>we play</i>
2nd person	(tu) giochi	<i>you play (singular)</i>	(voi) giocate	<i>you play (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) gioca	<i>he/she/it plays</i>	(essi / esse) giocano	<i>they play</i>

note the **h** in the 2nd singular and the 1st plural persons: it enables consonant **c** to keep a "hard" or guttural sound (English sound: "*johkyh*", "*johkyahmoh*"); without an **h**, the pronunciation would be "*johchyh*", "*johchahmoh*".

pago = *I pay*,

paghi = *you pay* (not **pagi**),

paghiamo = *we pay* (not **pagiamo**)

attacco = *I attack*,

attacchi = *you attack*,

attacchiamo = *we attack*

When the root of the verb ends with vowel **i**, the 2nd singular person and the 1st plural person drop this vowel:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) mangio	<i>I eat</i>	(noi) mangiamo	<i>we eat</i>
2nd person	(tu) mangi	<i>you eat (singular)</i>	(voi) mangiate	<i>you eat (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / essa) mangia	<i>he/she/it eats</i>	(essi / esse) mangiano	<i>they eat</i>

Note how the root of verb **mangiare** is **mangi...**, but the 2nd singular and the 1st plural persons lose the vowel **i**;

sbircio = *I peep*,

sbirci = *you peep* (not **sbircii**),

sbirciamo = *we peep* (not **sbirciiamo**)

striscio = *I creep*,

strisci = *you creep* (not **striscii**),

strisciamo = *we creep* (not **strisciiamo**)

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) parlavo	<i>I talked</i>	(noi) parlavamo	<i>we talked</i>
2nd person	(tu) parlavi	<i>you talked</i>	(voi) parlavate	<i>you talked</i>
person		(singular)		(plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) parlava	<i>he/she/it talked</i>	(essi / esse) parlavano	<i>they talked</i>
person				

Also in this case, all accents falls on the penultimate syllable of each person, except for **parlavano**, whose stressed syllable is the antepenultimate (pronounced "*pahr^lah^vahn^o*").

le tre donne compravano il pane = *the three women bought [the] bread* (as a continuous action: this could be translated as *the three women used to buy bread*, not only on that occasion, but usually, often, etc.; also note the use of an article where English omits it)

l'uomo portava un pacco = *the man carried a parcel* (obviously, in this case the man did not usually carry a parcel, but the use of imperfect gives a sense of "*the man was carrying the parcel*", as a continuous action, almost as to show the man with the parcel still in his hands)

ascoltavo la radio = *I listened to the radio* (again, suggesting a continuous action: this could be translated as "*I was listening to the radio*", maybe only on that occasion, but as an action in progress; note how in Italian the verb is transitive, and does not require preposition "*to*")

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) parlerò	<i>I shall talk</i>	(noi) parleremo	<i>we shall talk</i>
2nd person	(tu) parlerai	<i>you will talk</i>	(voi) parlerete	<i>you will talk</i>
person		(singular)		(plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) parlerà	<i>he/she/it will talk</i>	(essi / esse) parleranno	<i>they will talk</i>
person				

Accent falls on the penultimate syllable of each inflection, except **parlerò** and **parlerà**, whose stress is on the last syllable (pronounced "*pahr^leh^roh*" and "*pahr^leh^rah*"): also the two irregular verbs already discussed have the same pattern.

cucineremo una bistecca = *we'll cook a steak*

il cane salterà lo steccato e scapperà = *the dog will jump [over] the fence and will run away* (in Italian the verb *to jump* is transitive, and does not require preposition "*over*")

--- PHONETIC CHANGES ---

When the last consonant of the verb's root is **c** or **g**, all future tense inflections needs an **h** for phonetic reasons:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) giocherò	<i>I shall play</i>	(noi) giocheremo	<i>we shall play</i>
2nd person	(tu) giocherai	<i>you will play</i>	(voi) giocherete	<i>you will play</i>
person		(singular)		(plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) giocherà	<i>he/she/it will play</i>	(essi / esse) giocheranno	<i>they will play</i>
person				

Again, the **h** gives a "hard" guttural sound (English sound: "*joh^keh^roh*", "*joh^keh^rah^y*", etc.); without an **h**, the pronunciation would be "*joh^keh^roh*", etc.

pagherò = *I shall pay*

attaccherò = *I shall attack*

Instead, verbs whose last letter of the root is **i**, drop this vowel when it becomes phonetically redundant:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) mangerò	<i>I shall eat</i>	(noi) mangeremo <i>we shall eat</i>
2nd person	(tu) mangerai	<i>you will eat (singular)</i>	(voi) mangerete <i>you will eat (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) mangerà	<i>he/she/it will eat</i>	(essi / esse) mangeranno <i>they will eat</i>

the root of verb **mangiare** is **mangi...**, but in future tense inflections it drops the **i** and becomes **mang...**, because since these inflections start with vowel **e**, there is no need to keep vowel **i**: both **mangerò** (correct) and **mangierò** (incorrect) sound like "*mahnjehroh*", with a palatal sound.

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) parlai	<i>I talked</i>	(noi) parlammo <i>we talked</i>
2nd person	(tu) parlasti	<i>you talked (singular)</i>	(voi) parlaste <i>you talked (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) parlò	<i>he/she/it talked</i>	(essi / esse) parlarono <i>they talked</i>

The penultimate syllables carry the accent, except in **parlò** (3rd singular person), sounding as a truncated word (pronounced "*pahrloh*"), and **parlarono** (3rd plural person), whose antepenultimate syllable is stressed (pronounced "*pahr^lahroh^{no}*").

Be careful not to mistake **parlò** with **parlerò** (1st singular person, future tense), and **parlarono** with **parlano** (3rd plural person, present tense).

Always remember that this tense is used when the past action expressed by the sentence is already over.

le tre donne comprarono il pane = *the three women bought [the] bread* (in comparison with a similar sentence shown for the imperfect tense, here the three women bought bread on a specific occasion, not as a usual action)

il cielo cambiò colore = *the sky changed colour* (the change is an action with very limited duration)

tu parlasti, e io ascoltavi = *You spoke, and I listened* (note the use of pronouns to give stress to the different subjects; the sentence refers specifically to one past occasion: should this situation have occurred often or usually, imperfect tense would express the fact: **io cucinavo e tu mangiavi**).

4.6

VERBS OF THE 2nd CONJUGATION

PART I

SIMPLE INDICATIVE TENSES

Verbs whose infinitive tense has the inflection **...ere**, belong to the 2nd conjugation.

But, as explained in [paragraph 4.2](#), the accent may fall on the penultimate syllable or on the antepenultimate one.

Most verbs in the latter subgroup are regular; despite this, past perfect tense is partially irregular in all cases, but this will be discussed later on.

Instead, almost every verb in the first subgroup has peculiarities in one or more tenses, so these ones will be discussed in a further paragraph, at a more advanced stage; only one important verb of this subgroup, **vedere** (= *to see, to watch*) is shown in this page, as a comparison with other verbs.

As a help for the reader, I will spell the Italian infinitive tense with one accented vowel (the vowel which carries the stress), but remember that this never happens in common spelling. Also take note how vowel **e** may have an "open" sound (**è**) or a "closed" sound (**é**), according to the verb.

Standard inflections will be shown by using the verb **chiedere** (= *to ask for*), whose accent falls on the

antepenultimate syllable (pronounced "kyehdehreh").

Other verbs used in sample sentences are:

chiùdere = to close	muòvere = to move	còrrere = to run
ròmperere = to break	risòlvere = to solve	scéndere = to come down, to descend
prèndere = to take	discùtere = to discuss	ripètere = to repeat
vìncere = to win	pèrdere = to lose	nàscere = to be born
spìngere = to push	pùngere = to prick	tìngere = to dye, to colour
vedére = to see	ridere = to laugh	piàngere = to cry

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) chiedo	<i>I ask</i>	(noi) chiediamo	<i>we ask</i>
2nd person	(tu) chiedi	<i>you ask (singular)</i>	(voi) chiedete	<i>you ask (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) chiede	<i>he/she/it asks</i>	(essi / esse) chiedono	<i>they ask</i>

Accents fall on the same syllable as in present tense of the 1st conjugation (see [paragraph 4.5](#)).

In order to memorize this tense more easily, concentrate on the following differences with the 1st conjugation:

the inflection of 3rd singular person turns from **...a** (1st conj.) into **...e** (2nd conj.);

the 2nd plural person turns from **...ate** into **...ete**, for the same reason;

the 3rd plural person changes from **...ano** into **...ono**.

i turisti chiedono un buon ristorante = *the tourists ask [for] a good restaurant* (note the shortening of **buono** into **buon**, according to the rule discussed in [paragraph 2.4](#))

discutiamo un argomento = *we discuss a topic*

tu ridi ma lui piange = *you laugh but he cries* (note the use of pronouns, to stress the contrast of subjects)

--- PHONETIC CHANGES ---

When the last letter of the verb's root is **c** or **g**, verbs of the 2nd conjugation behave in a different way from the 1st one: they do NOT add a phonetic **h**. Therefore, no change occurs in the verb's root: this means that the sound of **c** or **g** actually changes from "hard" (guttural) to "soft" (palatal), according to the vowel following this consonant:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) vinco	<i>I win</i>	(noi) vinciamo	<i>we win</i>
2nd person	(tu) vinci	<i>you win (singular)</i>	(voi) vincete	<i>you win (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) vince	<i>he/she/it wins</i>	(essi / esse) vincono	<i>they win</i>

the 1st singular person sounds like "vynkoh" ("hard" or guttural **c**), the 2nd singular like "vynchyh" ("soft" or palatal **c**), the 3rd singular "vyncheh" ("soft" again), the 1st plural "vynchahmoh" ("soft"), the 2nd plural "vynchehteh" ("soft"), the 3rd plural "vynkohnoh" ("hard").

tingo ("tyngoh") = *I dye*, **tingi** ("tynjyh") = *you dye*, etc.

spingo ("spynghoh") = *I push*, **spingi** ("spynjyh") = *you push*, etc.

piango ("pyahngoh") = *I cry*, **piangi** ("pyahnjyh") = *you cry*, etc.

nasco ("nahskoh") = *I am born*, **nasci** ("nahshyh") = *you are born*, etc.

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) chiedevo	<i>I asked</i>	(noi) chiedevamo	<i>we asked</i>
2nd person	(tu) chiedevi	<i>you asked (singular)</i>	(voi) chiedevate	<i>you asked (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) chiedevo	<i>he/she asked</i>	(essi / esse) chiedevano	<i>they asked</i>

Compared to the 1st conjugation, the first vowel of all inflections is **e**. The accents, instead, are the same.

chiedevano sempre aiuto = *they always asked [for] help* (continuous action, as also suggested by "always")

vendevamo tappeti = *we sold carpets or we used to sell carpets* (as an activity, therefore a lasting action)

prendeva l'autobus = *he / she took the bus* (as a customary action)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) chiederò	<i>I shall ask</i>	(noi) chiederemo <i>we shall ask</i>
2nd person	(tu) chiederai	<i>you will ask (sing.)</i>	(voi) chiederete <i>you will ask (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) chiederà	<i>he/she will ask</i>	(essi / esse) chiederanno <i>they will ask</i>

Both accent and inflections are the same as in 1st conjugation.

chiederemo un'informazione = *we shall ask [for] an information* (note the apostrophe in article **un'**, because the gender of **informazione** is feminine)

l'atleta correrà la maratona = *the athlete will run the marathon*

As mentioned in the introduction, verb **vedere** (accent on the penultimate syllable) has a slightly different inflection for future tense, losing the first **e**:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) vedrò	<i>I shall see</i>	(noi) vedremo <i>we shall see</i>
2nd person	(tu) vedrai	<i>you will see (singular)</i>	(voi) vedrete <i>you will see (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) vedrà	<i>he/she will see</i>	(essi / esse) vedranno <i>they will see</i>

This is not a standard change, so other verbs of the same subgroup do not follow this pattern.

PASSATO REMOTO

This tense is always partially irregular: changes do not occur in inflections, but in the roots of 1st singular, 3rd singular and 3rd plural persons:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) chiesi	<i>I talked</i>	(noi) chiedemmo <i>we talked</i>
2nd person	(tu) chiedesti	<i>you talked (singular)</i>	(voi) chiedeste <i>you talked (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) chiese	<i>he/she/it talked</i>	(essi / esse) chiesero <i>they talked</i>

The first evident difference is the change of root; as a general rule, 1st and 3rd singular and 3rd plural persons have a different root than the others (which keep the original one); obviously, the new root is the same for all three persons. In this case, the normal root **chied...** has turned into **chies...**, and for many other verbs the change is similar: the last consonant turns into **s**. But for some verbs the change is more consistent (past perfect might be a nightmare for beginners, and a real test for well-taught Italian speakers). This is why, in common speech, many Italians too often prefer to use the present perfect tense (a compound tense, discussed in a further paragraph) instead of past perfect, although this choice would be considered slightly incorrect.

The second important difference with the same tense of the 1st conjugation is that no inflections have an accent on the last syllable (no one ends with an accented vowel).

Despite the change of root, though, all inflections are regular and do not change.

This is an example of how other verbs behave, according to the "simple" rule:

chiudere (to close)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) chiusi	<i>I closed</i>	(noi) chiudemmo <i>we closed</i>
2nd person	(tu) chiudesti	<i>you closed (singular)</i>	(voi) chiudeste <i>you closed (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) chiuse	<i>he/she/it closed</i>	(essi / esse) chiusero <i>they closed</i>

risolvere (to solve)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) risolsi	<i>I solved</i>	(noi) risolvemmo <i>we solved</i>
2nd person	(tu) risolvesti	<i>you solved (singular)</i>	(voi) risolveste <i>you solved (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) risolse	<i>he/she/it solved</i>	(essi / esse) risolsero <i>they solved</i>

spingere (to see)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) spinsi	<i>I pushed</i>	(noi) spingemmo <i>we pushed</i>
2nd person	(tu) spingesti	<i>you pushed (singular)</i>	(voi) spingeste <i>you pushed (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) spinse	<i>he/she/it pushed</i>	(essi / esse) spinsero <i>they pushed</i>

ridere (to laugh)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) risi	<i>I laughed</i>	(noi) ridemmo <i>we laughed</i>
2nd person	(tu) ridesti	<i>you laughed (singular)</i>	(voi) rideste <i>you laughed (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) rise	<i>he/she laughed</i>	(essi / esse) risero <i>they laughed</i>

But here are some others whose root changes more evidently:

prendere (to take)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) presi	<i>I took</i>	(noi) prendemmo <i>we took</i>
2nd person	(tu) prendesti	<i>you took (singular)</i>	(voi) prendeste <i>you took (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) prese	<i>he/she/it took</i>	(essi / esse) presero <i>they took</i>

vedere (to see)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) vidi	<i>I saw</i>	(noi) vedemmo <i>we saw</i>
2nd person	(tu) vedesti	<i>you saw (singular)</i>	(voi) vedeste <i>you saw (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) vide	<i>he/she/it saw</i>	(essi / esse) videro <i>they saw</i>

rompere (to break)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) ruppi	<i>I broke</i>	(noi) rompemmo <i>we broke</i>
2nd person	(tu) rompesti	<i>you broke (singular)</i>	(voi) rompeste <i>you broke (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ruppe	<i>he/she/it broke</i>	(essi / esse) ruppero <i>they broke</i>

muovere (to move)

	singular		plural
1st person	(io) mossi	<i>I moved</i>	(noi) muovemmo <i>we moved</i>
2nd person	(tu) muovesti	<i>you moved (singular)</i>	(voi) muoveste <i>you moved (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) mosse	<i>he/she/it moved</i>	(essi / esse) mossero <i>they moved</i>

nascere (to be born)

	singular		plural
1st person	(io) nacqui	<i>I was born</i>	(noi) nascemmo <i>we were born</i>
2nd person	(tu) nascesti	<i>you were born (singular)</i>	(voi) nasceste <i>you were born (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli/ella) nacque	<i>he/she/it was born</i>	(essi / esse) nacquero <i>they were born</i>

chiusi la porta = *I closed the door* (the action is over)

vedesti un grosso animale = *you saw a big animal*

due uomini scesero le scale = *two men came down the steps* (they did so on this occasion; had the sentence been "usually, they came down the steps", the imperfect tense would have been used: ...**scendevano le scale**)

4.7

VERBS OF THE 3rd CONJUGATION

PART I

SIMPLE INDICATIVE TENSES

Verbs whose infinitive tense has the inflection **...ire**, belong to the 3rd conjugation.

This is the conjugation with the least number of verbs, and most of them are regular.

Verb **capire** (= *to understand*) is used to discuss the tenses; others used in sample sentences are:

agire = <i>to act</i>	proibire = <i>to forbid</i>	finire = <i>to finish</i>
sparire = <i>to disappear</i>	fornire = <i>to provide with</i>	obbedire = <i>to obey</i>
garantire = <i>to grant</i>	reagire = <i>to react</i>	punire = <i>to punish</i>
seguire = <i>to follow</i>	partire = <i>to leave</i>	sentire = <i>to feel</i>
scoprire = <i>to discover</i>	fuggire = <i>to escape</i>	dormire = <i>to sleep</i>
aprire = <i>to open</i>	cucire = <i>to sew</i>	mentire = <i>to lie</i>

PRESENTE

Present tense of the 3rd conjugation is slightly more difficult than others because two different inflections may occur, according to the verb:

	singular		plural
1st person	(io) capisco	<i>I understand</i>	(noi) capiamo <i>we understand</i>
2nd person	(tu) capisci	<i>you understand (sing.)</i>	(voi) capite <i>you understand (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) capisce	<i>he/she/it understands</i>	(essi / esse) capiscono <i>they understand</i>

This pattern is the most common one, and the first nine verbs listed in the table above use these inflections. Note how the inflection of all singular persons and of the 3rd plural person is longer than in other

conjugations (i.e. there is a cluster "isc.." before the final vowel).

This causes a certain difference in pronunciation (see [paragraph 1.2](#)):

...**isco** sounds as "...yskoh", thus **capisco** sounds as "kahpyskoh"

...**isci** sounds as "...yshyh", thus **capisci** sounds as "kahpyshyh"

...**isce** sounds as "...ysheh", thus **capisce** sounds as "kahpysheh"

...**iscono** sounds as "...yskohnoh", thus **capiscono** sounds as "kahpyskohnoh"

Note how the **sc** cluster changes sound, from "hard" to "soft", according to the following vowel.

But a fewer number of verbs, as the following nine ones of the table above, have simple inflections, like the ones used for present tense of the 1st and the 2nd conjugation:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) scopro	<i>I discover</i>	(noi) scopriamo <i>we discover</i>
2nd person	(tu) scopri	<i>you discover (singular)</i>	(voi) scoprite <i>you discover (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) scopre	<i>he/she/it discover</i>	(essi / esse) scoprono <i>they discover</i>

Unfortunately, there is no specific rule to tell whether a verb of the 3rd conjugation follows the first or the second pattern, but present tense is the only one with this dual situation: all other tenses have simply one inflection.

In both cases, accent always falls on the penultimate syllable, except the 3rd plural person (accent on the antepenultimate syllable), like in present tense of the 1st and 2nd conjugation.

capisco la situazione = *I understand the situation*

...**BUT**

apro il giornale = *I open the newspaper*

forniscono le informazioni = *they provide the informations*

...**BUT**

seguono una persona = *they follow a person*

capiamo le istruzioni = *we understand the instructions*

apriamo la porta = *we open the door*

fornite gli attrezzi = *you (plur.) provide the tools*

pulite la stanza = *you clean up the room*

(no difference for 1st and 2nd plural persons)

--- PHONETIC CHANGES ---

In very few cases, a verb whose root ends with **c** or **g** (i.e. **fuggire** = *to run away*, or **cucire** = *to sew*) follows the second pattern.

Some of them add a phonetic **i** to the root, so to keep the consonant's "soft" sound:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) cucio	<i>I sew</i>	(noi) cuciamo <i>we sew</i>
2nd person	(tu) cuci	<i>you sew (singular)</i>	(voi) cucite <i>you sew (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) cuce	<i>he/she sews</i>	(essi / esse) cuciono <i>they sew</i>

Note that the root of **cucire** is **cuc...**, but the 1st singular and 3rd plural persons have **cuci...**: in this way, consonant **c** sounds "soft", or palatal: **cucio** (pronounced "kwchoh") and **cuciono** (pronounced "kwchohnoh"). Without the **i**, they would have sounded "kwkoh" and "kwkohnoh", i.e. guttural.

Instead, other verbs do not add the phonetic **i**, so the root remains graphically unchanged, but the sound of the consonant changes according to the following vowel:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) fuggo	<i>I run away</i>	(noi) fuggiamo <i>we run away</i>
2nd person	(tu) fuggi	<i>you run away (singular)</i>	(voi) fuggite <i>you run away (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) fugge	<i>he/she runs away</i>	(essi / esse) fuggono <i>they run away</i>

Note the pronunciation: **fuggo** sounds as "fw'ggoh", "hard", i.e. guttural, whereas **fuggi** sounds as "fw'djyh", "soft", i.e. palatal.

But almost every other verb of the 3rd conjugation whose root ends with **c** or **g** follows the first pattern (i.e. **reagire**, **agire**, **marcire**, **ruggire**, etc.), for which phonetic changes are not required, because all inflections start with vowel **i**:

agisco ("ahjyskoh"), **agisci** ("ahjyshyh"), **agisce** ("ahjysheh"), etc.

So, try to memorize only the two aforesaid irregular patterns, and don't worry about others.

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) capivo	<i>I understood</i>	(noi) capivamo <i>we understood</i>
2nd person	(tu) capivi	<i>you understood (singular)</i>	(voi) capivate <i>you understood (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli/ella) capiva	<i>he/she understood</i>	(essi/esse) capivano <i>they understood</i>

Accents are the same as in the 1st and 2nd conjugation.

The first vowel of the inflection is **i**. No special phonetic change occurs with any verb.

sentivamo freddo = *we felt cold* (or "*we were feeling cold*")

finivano il lavoro = *they finished the work* (or "*they were finishing the work*")

cucivano tutti i giorni = *they sewed every day*

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) capirò	<i>I shall understand</i>	(noi) capiremo <i>we shall understand</i>
2nd person	(tu) capirai	<i>you will understand (sing.)</i>	(voi) capirete <i>you will understand (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli/ella) capirà	<i>he/she will understand</i>	(essi/esse) capiranno <i>they will understand</i>

Accents are the same as in the 1st and 2nd conjugation (two of them fall on the last syllable).

Again, the first vowel of the inflection is **i**.

aprirà un negozio = *he will open a shop*

partiremo domani = *we shall leave tomorrow*

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) capii	<i>I understood</i>	(noi) capimmo <i>we understood</i>
2nd person	(tu) capisti	<i>you understood (singular)</i>	(voi) capiste <i>you understood (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) capì	<i>he/she understood</i>	(essi / esse) capirono <i>they understood</i>

These inflections are rather similar to the ones of the 1st conjugation. Only the 3rd singular person is slightly different, because it has an accented **i** instead of an accented **o**.

Also note how the 1st singular person ends with two vowels **i**: both of them must be heard, pronouncing "*ahpryh*" (like a long English "*ee*" sound), with the accent on the first **i**; this should not be confused with the 3rd singular person, whose only **i** is accented, and therefore carries the stress: "*ahpryh*" (thus ending with a very short sound).

5.1

SIMPLE PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are short words which express conditions, directions, specifications, such as *of, over, to, from*, etc.

The Italian language has nine basic prepositions:

DI	A	DA	IN	CON	PER	SU	TRA	FRA
----	---	----	----	-----	-----	----	-----	-----

When a definite article follows them, they bind to it. When they are not followed (and bound) to articles, as above, they are called "simple prepositions".

Each of them will be discussed individually, showing their basic use.

You don't need to memorize all their meanings now, but reading the page will let you become more familiar with these prepositions and with their use. You may also use this page as a reference, for translating exercise sentences.

Most of these prepositions will be more deeply discussed in further specific paragraphs.

DI

The first important meaning of this preposition is *of*, so that it can be easily translated in most expressions:

un bicchiere di vino = *a glass of wine*

la città di Roma = *the city of Rome*

un tipo di musica = *a kind of music*

But Italian also uses **di** to express specifications, which in English sometimes behave as adjectives:

un bastone di legno = *a wooden stick* (literally: "*a stick of wood*")

una forchetta di plastica = *a plastic fork* (literally: "*a fork of plastic*")

un topo di campagna = *a country mouse* (literally: "*a mouse of country*")

i giorni di festa = *the holidays* (literally: "*the days of holiday*")

il piano di sopra = *the upper floor* (literally: "*the floor of up*")

Furthermore, since Italian does not have a genitive case, **di** also translates the English saxon genitive, indicating possession (either actual or metaphorical):

il libro di Paolo = *Paul's book* (literally: "*the book of Paul*")

la madre di Roberto = *Robert's mother*

i dischi di Bob Dylan = *Bob Dylan's records*

il giorno di Natale = *Christmas day*

In a similar way, **di** is also used as English *by* (i.e in works by an artist, songs by a composer, etc., almost considered as the author's belonging):

un affresco di Michelangelo = *a fresco by Michelangelo*

una sinfonia di Beethoven = *a symphony by Beethoven*

una commedia di Shakespeare = *a play by Shakespeare*

un racconto di Maupassant = *a novel by Maupassant*

Geographic origin is also expressed by possession (as if people belonged to where they come from):

io sono di Roma = *I am from Rome*

i due ragazzi sono di Berlino = *the two boys are from Berlin*

When **di** is followed by a verb (always infinitive tense!) it has the English meaning of *for* (+ gerundive), or *to* (+ infinitive):

decido di mangiare un panino = *I decide to eat a sandwich*
il modo di costruire un modello = *the way of building a model*

A further meaning of **di** is English *on*, used for days (as a habitual circumstance):

di sabato = *on Saturdays* (note that in Italy this expression has a singular form, literally "*on [every] Saturday*")
di mercoledì = *on Wednesdays*

it is also sometimes used with seasons of the year; when the season's name starts with a vowel, the preposition drops the **i**, and its place is taken by an apostrophe:

d'estate = *in summer*
d'inverno = *in winter*

A (AD)

When preposition **a** is followed by another word starting with a vowel, for mere phonetic reasons it changes to **ad**. The first important meaning of this preposition is *to*, as a dative case:

regalo il libro a Stefania = *I give the book to Stephanie*
venderò la bicicletta a Carlo = *I shall sell the bicycle to Charles*
mandai un pacco ad Alberto = *I sent Albert a parcel* (literally: "*I sent a parcel to Albert*").

In a similar way, **a** indicates directions:

a sinistra = *to the left*
a destra = *to the right* (note how in Italian the two directions have no article)
tornerò ad Amburgo = *I shall return to Hamburg*

It also translates English *at*, or sometimes *in*, when stating locations:

a casa = *at home*
a scuola = *at school*
siamo a letto = *we are in bed*
tu vivi a Roma = *you live in Rome*

When this preposition is between two verbs (the first one usually indicating movement, the second one always in infinitive tense), it indicates the goal of an action, thus translating English *to* (or sometimes *and*):

corsi a portare le buone notizie a Paolo = *I ran to carry the good news to Paolo*
tornano a restituire i libri = *they come back to return the books*
scenderò a cercare il cane = *I shall go down and look for the dog* (or *...to look for the dog*)

Preposition **a** is also used with the verb **giocare** (to play), which in Italian is intransitive, and is therefore followed by this preposition which in English is not required:

giocare a carte = *to play cards*
giocare a tennis = *to play tennis*
giocare a biliardo = *to play billiards*

DA

The main use is that of English *from* or *since* or *as of*, indicating an origin (either in time or in space, or a person):

da Parigi a Vienna = *from Paris to Vienna*

da qui a lì = *from here to there*

da padre a figlio = *from father to son*

da ieri = *since yesterday*

da lunedì 25 marzo il negozio chiuderà presto = *as of monday, March 25th, the shop will close early*

riceverai una lettera da Francesco = *you will receive a letter from Frances*

When followed by a verb (always infinitive!), it has the meaning of English "*has to be...*" or "*needs to be...*" or "*can be...*":

il pacco è da spedire = *the parcel has to be sent or the parcel is to be sent*

l'indirizzo è da verificare = *the address has to be checked or the address needs to be checked*

il sistema è da cambiare = *the system needs to be changed*

IN

It basically corresponds to the English preposition *in* or *into*:

in certi casi = *in certain cases*

entrò in dieci negozi = *he/she entered [into] ten shops*

ho dieci monete in tasca = *I have ten coins in my pocket*

Sometimes it corresponds to English *by*: **arrivarono in automobile** = *they arrived by car*

un giro in bicicletta = *a ride by bicycle*

traverseremo il fiume in barca = *we will cross the river by boat*

etc. etc.

Another common Italian use for preposition **in** is to describe the quantity of people in groups or parties, when only the number is stated:

siamo in sette = *we are seven*

tirano la fune in cinque = *they are five [people] to pull the rope*

Preposition **in** is also the most commonly used with seasons of the year (the other preposition mentioned above, **di**, is an alternative)

in estate = *in summer*

in autunno = *in autumn*

in primavera = *in spring*

CON

It translates the English *with*, and is very similar in use:

ho comprato il libro con pochi soldi = *I bought the book with little money*

il bambino era con un adulto = *the child was with an adult*

scrivo con una penna = *I write with a pen*

etc.

It is also often used as an alternative to **in** when indicating transport, but in this case it is followed by an article (either definite or indefinite):

torno con il treno = *I come back by train* (literally "*with the train*")

the same sentence could be expressed by using **in**:

torno in treno = *I come back by train*

PER

It can translate English *for, to, by, or even as*, according to the different use.

ho un biglietto per il teatro = *I have a ticket for the theatre*

il pacco è per la signora = *the parcel is for the lady*

una medicina per il dolore = *a medicine for [the] pain* (note the use of an article in Italian)

dipingeva per puro divertimento = *he/she painted for pure pleasure*

lavoravano per i soldi = *they worked for the money*

tornammo per vedere un amico = *they came back to see a friend*

per favore = *please* (literally: "as a favour")

il treno per Roma = *the train [going] to Rome*

teneva il bambino per la mano = *he/she held the child by the hand*

SU

The most common meanings are *on* and *over*.

l'aereo vola su Firenze = *the plane flies over Florence*

It can also mean *about* when indicating a topic:

un libro su Roma = *a book about Rome*

Since in most cases this preposition is followed by an article, it will be discussed more throughoutly in the following paragraph.

TRA & FRA

Both prepositions translate the English *between* and *among*, and any of the two may be used, according to one's own choice.

l'insegnante è fra fra gli alunni = *the teacher is among the pupils*

(but ...è **tra** gli alunni would have been the same)

l'albero fra le due case è alto = *the tree between the two houses is tall*

(but **l'albero tra le due case...** would have been the same)

The same prepositions also translate the English *in* when speaking of a time length in the future:

l'autobus passerà fra due ore = *the bus will pass in two hours time*

(it could also have been ...**passerà tra due ore**)

fra due mesi tornerò a Napoli = *in two months time I will return to Naples*

(it could also have been **tra due mesi...**)

5.2

COMPOUND PREPOSITIONS

Due to phonetic reasons, simple prepositions **di, a, da, in, su**, followed by an article bind to it, thus creating a compound preposition.

Most of these changes concern both spoken and written language.

DI

with singular articles:

DI + LO = **DELLO** DI + IL = **DEL** DI + L' = **DELL'** DI + LA = **DELLA**

with plural articles:

DI + I = **DEI** DI + GLI = **DEGLI** DI + LE = **DELLE**

il traffico della città = *the city's traffic* (literally: *the traffic of the city*)

i rami dell'albero = *the branches of the tree* (or *the tree's branches*)

i bagagli dei turisti = *the tourists' luggage*

notice that the Italian word for luggage, **bagagli**, is plural

A

with singular articles:

A + LO = **ALLO** A + IL = **AL** A + L' = **ALL'** A + LA = **ALLA**

with plural articles:

A + I = **AI** A + GLI = **AGLI** A + LE = **ALLE**

regaleranno un libro all'insegnante = *they will give a book to the teacher*

porta l'automobile al garage = *he/she takes the car to the garage*

chiederò agli amici di restare = *I will ask the friends to stay*

notice that the verb **chiedere** = *to ask* needs preposition **a** (*to*) before the person whom the request is addressed to: only the object is introduced without a preposition.

DA

with singular articles:

DA + LO = **DALLO** DA + IL = **DAL** DA + L' = **DALL'** DA + LA = **DALLA**

with plural articles:

DA + I = **DAI** DA + GLI = **DAGLI** DA + LE = **DALLE**

viaggerò dal nord al sud del paese = *I will travel from the north to the south of the country*

riconosco il suo cane dalla coda = *I can tell his/her dog by the tail*

l'evoluzione delle specie, dalla scimmia all'uomo = *the evolution of species, from ape to man*

notice that many nouns expressing general categories (*species, ape, man, etc.*) in Italian require an article, therefore compound prepositions have to be used.

IN

with singular articles:

IN + LO = **NELLO** IN + IL = **NEL** IN + L' = **NELL'** IN + LA = **NELLA**

with plural articles:

IN + I = **NEI** IN + GLI = **NEGLI** IN + LE = **NELLE**

il vino è nella bottiglia = *the wine is in the bottle*

appesero i vestiti negli armadi = *they hung the clothes into the wardrobes*

l'indice dell'opera è nell' ultimo volume = *the work's index is in the last volume*

SU

Unlike other prepositions, **con** might link to the following article, but especially in recent times the two words are left separate.

with singular articles:

SU + LO = **SULLO** SU + IL = **SUL** SU + L' = **SULL'** SU + LA = **SULLA**

with plural articles:

SU + I = **SUI** SU + GLI = **SUGLI** SU + LE = **SULLE**

la casa sulla montagna = *the house on the mountain*

ho lasciato i libri sul tavolo = *I left the books on the table*

un documentario sugli insetti = *a documentary about insects* (in Italian the definite article is needed)

All other prepositions (**con**, **per**, **tra**, **fra**) do not bind to the article, and remain separate:

il regalo è per la signora = *the gift is for the lady*

l'accordo con gli avversari = *the agreement with the opponents*

il nido dell'uccello è fra i rami dell'albero = *the bird's nest is among the tree's branches*

Only preposition **con** is sometimes used in the compound form, but only in spoken language. Many of its combinations have become almost obsolete in written language, and the simple form (i.e. unbound, **con** + article) is now preferred in most texts. Since these changes are merely phonetic, spoken language may use either of the two forms.

with singular articles:

CON + LO = **COLLO** CON + IL = **COL** CON + L' = **COLL'** CON + LA = **COLLA**

with plural articles:

CON + I = **COI** CON + GLI = **COGLI** CON + LE = **COLLE**

If you are in doubt, use the unbound form which is correct in both cases:

l'uomo con il cane = *the man with the dog*

(**l'uomo col cane** would be the form used in spoken language, but both are correct)

la donna con la borsa = *the woman with the hand-bag*

(**la donna colla borsa** would be more common in spoken language, both correct)

5.3

POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES AND PRONOUNS

In Italian, possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns are exactly the same. They correspond to the English ones, but while in English possession is expressed by two different forms, one as adjective (*my, your, his, her, etc.*) and one as pronoun (*mine, yours, etc.*), Italian has only one form, used in both cases.

mio	<i>my - mine</i>
tuo	<i>your - yours</i>
suo	<i>his/her/its - hers</i>
nostro	<i>our - ours</i>
vostro	<i>your - yours (plural)</i>
loro	<i>their - theirs</i>

But as any other Italian adjective and pronoun, they are gender- and number-sensitive (except one): feminine and plural inflections are almost the same ones used for common adjectives:

<i>masculine singular</i>	<i>feminine singular</i>	<i>masculine plural</i>	<i>feminine plural</i>
mio	mia	miei (irregular)	mie
tuo	tua	tuoi (irregular)	tue
suo	sua	suoi (irregular)	sue
nostro	nostra	nostri	nostre
vostro	vostra	vostri	vostre
loro	loro	loro	loro

POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES AND PRONOUNS USED AS SUBJECTS

An important difference with English is that either used alone (as pronouns) or followed by a noun (used as adjectives), they always need an article (definite or indefinite), while in English always rejects articles before a possessive adjective or pronoun.

la mia automobile è veloce = *my car is fast* (here *my* acts as an adjective for the noun *car*)

la loro è lenta = *theirs is slow* (here *theirs* is a pronoun, meaning *their car*, not mentioned)

il suo gatto prese un topo = *his cat caught a mouse*

anche **il tuo prese un topo** = *also yours caught a mouse*

il vostro albero è alto = *your (plur.) tree is tall*

il loro è basso = *theirs is short*

un tuo parente = *a relative of yours* (or *one of your relatives*)

uno mio = *one of mine*

(this last example also recalls the rule for indefinite articles used as pronouns, explained in [paragraph 2.4](#)).

Only when the possessed noun is a specific family relative the article is dropped, as in English:

mio padre è alto (not "**il mio padre**") = *my father is tall*

mia madre è giovane (not "**la mia madre**") = *my mother is young*

mio fratello è pigro (not "**il mio fratello**") = *my brother is lazy*

This will be explained again further down in the page, in a more detailed way, with further examples.

Another important difference is that while in English the gender of the possessive pronoun matches the possessor, in Italian it matches the possessed subject:

mio padre ha una bicicletta = *my father has a bicycle*

la sua bicicletta (*sua* matches **bicicletta**, feminine) = *his bicycle* (*his* matches *father*, masculine)

mia madre ha un cane = *my mother has a dog*

il suo cane (*suo* matches **cane**, masculine) = *her dog* (*her* matches *mother*, feminine)

Number too must match the possessed subjects (English possessive pronouns do not have a plural):

mio padre ha due biciclette = *my father has two bicycles*

le sue biciclette (*sue* matches **biciclette**, feminine plural)

mia madre ha tre cani = *my mother has three dogs*

i suoi cani (*suoi* matches **cani**, masculine plural)

The article too matches the possessed subject (noun) for gender and number, but it matches the possessive pronoun for phonetics. If this seems difficult, focus this sample sentence:

la mia automobile è veloce = *my car is fast*

- **la** is a feminine singular article, since **automobile** is a feminine singular noun;
- **mia** is a feminine singular possessive pronoun, for the same noun.

Had the pronoun **mia** not been there, the sentence would have read:

l'automobile = *the car*

where the article **la** would have been shortened in **l'**, phonetically matching **automobile**. But in the previous sentence, the the word next to the article is not the noun but **mia**, which has to be phonetically matched.

These are more sentences with the same situation.

l'occhio *the eye*

il mio occhio *my eye*

la casa *the house*

la tua casa *your house* (singular)

lo studio *the study*

il loro studio *their study*

un'amica a friend (feminine)

una mia amica a friend of mine (feminine)

The definite article is omitted only when nouns indicate a family relationship:

padre = *father* ; **madre** = *mother* ;

fratello = *brother* ; **sorella** = *sister* ;

marito = *husband* ; **moglie** = *wife* ;

figlio = *son* ; **figlia** = *daughter* ;

zio = *uncle* ; **zia** = *aunt* ;

nonno = *grand-father* ; **nonna** = *grand-mother* ;

nipote (both sexes) = *nephew / niece / grand-son / grand-daughter* ;

suocero = *father-in-law* ; **suocera** = *mother -in-law* ;

genero = *son-in-law* ; **nuora** = *daughter-in-law* .

Therefore:

il mio amico = *my friend* (note the use of the article **il**)

.....*BUT*

mio padre = *my father* (without an article)

la madre del mio amico = *my friend's mother* (with compound preposition **del** = **di** + **il**)

.....*BUT*

l'amico di mia madre = *my mother's friend* (with simple preposition **di**)

regalerò un libro al mio amico = *I shall give a book to my friend* (preposition **al** = **a** + **il**)

.....*BUT*

regalerò un libro a mio zio = *I shall give a book to my uncle* (with simple preposition **a**)

If the noun is plural, it requires an article in any case:

mia sorella = *my sister* (without an article)

.....*BUT*

le mie sorelle = *my sisters* (with an article)

la casa di mio nonno = *my grandfather's home* (with simple preposition **di**)

.....*BUT*

la casa dei miei nonni = *my grandparents's home* (with compound preposition **dei**)

comprerò un regalo per tuo genero = *I will buy a gift for your son-in-law* (without an article)

.....*BUT*

comprerò un regalo per i tuoi generi = *I will buy a gift for your sons-in-law* (with an article)

(notice that preposition **per** does not form compounds with articles)

Indefinite articles, instead, are always used, also for relatives:

mio zio = *my uncle*

un mio zio = *an uncle of mine* (or *one of my uncles*), with an article

mia nonna = *my grand-mother*

una mia nonna = *one of my grand-mothers*, with an article

Notice that, as for most other nouns, when a family relation name is plural, the masculine form may refer either to masculine gender only or to both genders (meaning masculine and feminine together, i.e. uncles and aunts, grand-father and grand-mother, etc.), while feminine plural only refers to feminine relatives.

Instead, when nouns describing different sexes have a different root, both nouns are actually mentioned:

zio	<i>uncle</i>	zia	<i>aunt</i>
zii	<i>uncles or uncles and aunts</i>	zie	<i>aunts (only)</i>
nonno	<i>grand-father</i>	nonna	<i>grand-mother</i>
nonni	<i>grand-fathers or grand-parents</i>	nonne	<i>grand-mothers (only)</i>
	... <i>BUT</i>		
fratello	<i>brother</i>	sorella	<i>sister</i>
fratelli e sorelle	<i>brothers and sisters</i>		
genero	<i>son-in-law</i>	nuora	<i>daughter-in-law</i>
generi e nuore	<i>sons- and daughters-in-law</i>		

POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES AND PRONOUNS USED AS OBJECTS OR COPULAS

Pronouns and adjectives do not change inflection when they are used as an object or as a copula (i.e. when they follow verb *to be*, thus indicating a condition of property or possession). What may change is the use of an article before the pronoun. It is more easy to discuss the two cases separately.

USED AS OBJECTS

Either used before a noun (adjective) or alone (pronoun) as direct objects, they always require an article:

leggo il mio giornale = *I read my newspaper* (adjective)

leggo il mio = *I read mine* (pronoun)

comprammo i loro libri = *we bought their books*

comprammo i loro = *we bought theirs*

prenderò le sue carte = *I will take his/her cards*

prenderò le sue = *I will take his/hers*

When the object is a family person (in singular form), the article is required only for pronouns (not for adjectives, as explained above):

vedo tua madre e la sua = *I see your mother* (adjective) *and his/hers* (pronoun)

incontrò **tu** fratello, e poi incontrò **il mio** = *he/she met your brother, and then he/she met mine*

tu padre è alto, **il nostro** è basso = *your father is tall, ours is short*

USED AS COPULAS

When used as the copula's adjective (i.e. they are followed by a noun), they behave exactly as above, requiring an article:

è **il mio** libro = *it is my book*

era **la sua** scuola = *it was his/her school*

saranno **le vostre** insegnanti = *they will be your teachers (femin.)*

è **mio** zio = *he is my uncle*

è **sua** nipote = *she is his/her niece*

sono **i miei** nonni = *they are my grand-parents*

When used after the verb **essere** (*to be*) as an actual copula, they describe a state of possession as if it was a quality of the object, and therefore the article is not required:

il libro è **mio** = *the book is mine*

la casa era **loro** = *the house was theirs*

il cane sarà **tu** = *the dog will be yours*

Nevertheless, a similar form which requires an article does exist, with a rather specific meaning. Focus the following example:

il libro è **mio** = *the book is mine*

il libro è **il mio** = *the book is mine*

In the second sentence, where **mio** has an article, the actual meaning is "*the book is **the one** belonging to me*", and **mio** acts both as an adjective and a pronoun, at the same time.

This form is used to indicate the possessed object among others of similar nature. While the standard form puts the stress on the owner of the object, the latter form stresses which of the objects among the present ones are possessed:

la casa piccola è **mia** = *the small house is mine*

(meaning "*the small house belongs to me*")

la casa piccola è **la mia** = *the small house (among other houses) is mine*

(meaning "*among the other houses, I own the small one*")

il cane con il collare bianco è **tu** = *the dog with the white collar is yours*

il cane con il collare bianco è **il tuo** = *the dog with the white collar (among others) is yours*

le foto sul tavolo sono **sue** = *the pictures on the table are his*

le foto sul tavolo sono **le sue** = *the pictures on the table (among others) are his*

(notice that **foto** is feminine, despite the **-o** inflection, because it is the shortened form of the original word **fotografia** = *photograph* (and **foto** is therefore either singular or plural, see also [paragraph 2.3](#), "*foreign truncated and shortened nouns*").

This form is not compulsory, but it is very commonly used.

5.4

INTERROGATIVE AND NEGATIVE FORMS

Interrogative and negative forms are much more simple in Italian than they are in English.

INTERROGATIVE FORM

This is simply obtained by adding a question mark at the end of the sentence, while in speech only the inflection of the voice expresses a question.

hai una penna rossa = *you have a red pen*
hai una penna rossa ? = *do you have a red pen ?*

l'albero è nel giardino = *the tree is in the garden*
l'albero è nel giardino ? = *is the tree in the garden ?*

In spoken language, the question will be expressed by simply raising the pitch of the voice while approaching the end of the sentence, especially stressing the last one or two words (in the two examples above: **...penna rossa** and **...nel giardino**).

The only situation in which words change order is when verb **essere** (*to be*) introduces a copula, expressing a quality, a condition, etc. (not a direct object).

Compare the following examples with the previous ones:

la penna è rossa = *the pen is red*
è rossa la penna ? = *is the pen red ?*

The verb and the copula go before the rest of the sentence, and the subject is postponed.

More examples:

la casa era fredda = *the house was cold*
era fredda la casa ? = *was the house cold ?*

il mio gatto è nero = *my cat is black*
è nero il mio gatto ? = *is my cat black ?*

tuo marito è alto e grosso = *your husband is tall and stout*
è alto e grosso tuo marito ? = *is your husband tall and stout ?*

il mese sarà grigio e piovoso = *the month will be dull and rainy*
sarà grigio e piovoso il mese ? = *will the month be dull and rainy ?*

la donna grassa è sua madre = *the fat lady is his/her mother*
è sua madre la donna grassa ? = *is the fat lady his/her mother ?*

But when there is no definite subject to be postponed, the interrogative form is simply obtained by adding a question mark:

è un treno lungo = *it's a long train*
è un treno lungo ? = *is it a long train ?*

sarà un esame difficile = *it will be a difficult exam*
sarà un esame difficile ? = *will it be a difficult exam ?*

The interrogative form will be discussed again, at a more advanced stage.

NEGATIVE FORM

It is simply obtained by adding **non** = *not* to the sentence, just before the verb.

il tuo albero è una quercia = *your tree is an oak*
il tuo albero non è una quercia = *your tree is not an oak*

preparò un pranzo per dodici persone = *he/she prepared a lunch for twelve persons*
non preparò un pranzo per dodici persone = *he/she did not prepare a lunch for twelve persons*

i miei amici vivono a Parigi = *my friends live in Paris*
i miei amici non vivono a Parigi = *my friends do not live in Paris*

mangerete in casa ? = *will you eat at home ?*
non mangerete in casa ? = *will you not eat at home ?*

era facile = *it was easy*
non era facile = *it was not easy*

5.5

DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS AND DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVES

DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

They are used to indicate a person or an object, as if pointing towards it with a finger.

QUESTO (*this, this one*) - QUELLO (*that, that one*)

These pronouns are used as in English, with two differences:

- in Italian they are gender-sensitive, according to the object they indicate;
- the Italian ones can translate both *this* and *this one*.

questo *this / this one* (masculine) **questa** *this / this ones* (feminine)

questi *these / these ones* (masculine) **queste** *these / these ones* (feminine)

quello *that / that one* (masculine) **quella** *that / that ones* (feminine)

quelli *those / those ones*
(masculine)

quelle *those / those ones*
(feminine)

questo è il tuo cane = *this is your dog, or this one is your dog*

quella è mia madre = *that one (= that woman) is my mother*

quelli sono i suoi libri = *those are his/her books, or those ones are his/her books*

queste sono le nostre zie = *these are our aunts or these ones are our aunts*

questa e quella sono identiche = *this one and that one are identical*

questi sono i loro figli = *these (ones) are their children*

These pronouns may be used either as a subject of the sentence (as in the previous examples), or as an object (as in the following sentences), in which case the English translation always includes ...*one*:

(egli / ella) non prese questa, ma quella = *he / she did not take this one, but that one*

(tu) comprerai quelli = *you will buy those ones*

domani vernicerò questi = *tomorrow I will paint these ones*

preferite questo o quello? = *do you prefer this one or that one?*

They may be used for any other case (genitive, dative, etc.):

cominciammo da queste = *we started from these ones* (feminine)

ripareranno la bicicletta con questa = *they will repair the bicycle with this one* (feminine)

la scatola gialla è per questo, non per quello = *the yellow box is for this one, not for that one*

Sometimes, when demonstrative pronouns are the subject of a nominal sentence (a sentence whose verb is *to be*, which describes a condition or a quality rather than a real action), it is possible to reverse the subject of the sentence: this gives more emphasis to the pronoun, shifted at the bottom, as it also happens in English:

questo è il tuo cane = *this (one) is your dog*

il tuo cane è **questo** = *your dog is this one*

quelle sono le mie penne = *those (ones) are my pens*

le mie penne sono **quelle** = *my pens are those ones*

quella sarà la nostra scuola = *that one will be our school*
la nostra scuola sarà **quella** = *our school will be that one*

questo era il tuo ufficio = *this (one) was your office*
il tuo ufficio era **questo** = *your office was this one*

questi sono i loro abiti = *these are their clothes*
il tuo posto è **questo** = *their clothes are these ones*

The postponement of the sentence's subject will be dealt with more in detail in a future paragraph.

Especially in the spoken language, **questo** and **quello** are often strengthened by the use of the following adverbs:

qui	qua	lì	là
<i>here</i>	<i>here</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>there</i>

The result is as follows:

(masculine)	(feminine)	(masculine)	(feminine)
questo qui	questa qui	quello lì	quella lì
questo qua	questa qua	quello là	quella là
<i>this one here</i>	<i>this one here</i>	<i>that one there</i>	<i>that one there</i>
questi qui	queste qui	quelli lì	quelle lì
questi qua	queste qua	quelli là	quelle là
<i>these ones here</i>	<i>these ones here</i>	<i>those ones there</i>	<i>those ones there</i>

Note that while in **qua** and **qui** the last vowel is not accented (although they sound as if it really was), **là** and **lì** are spelt with an accented vowel, not to be mistaken with **la** (definite article) and **li** (personal pronoun used as an object, discussed at a further stage).

questa qui (or **questa qua**) è la mia penna = *this one here is my pen*

quelli là (or **quelli lì**) sono i miei genitori = *those one (there) are my parents*

(essi / esse) scelsero **quello là** (or **quello lì**) = *they chose that one there*

(noi) compreremo **questo qui** (or **questo qua**) = *we shall buy this one here*

In written language, instead, it is preferable to avoid adding these adverbs to the pronouns.

COSTUI (*that man*) - **COSTEI** (*that woman*)

COSTORO (*those people*)

These pronouns have no equivalent in English, so their translation can vary according to the text, or to the speech.

They are somewhat similar in meaning to **egli** (*he*), **ella** (*she*) and **essi / esse** (*they*), discussed in [paragraph 4.1](#), but they carry an intrinsic meaning of detachment from whom is speaking, as if referring to a stranger, or to somebody whom the speaker is not in relation with, or sometimes even to express contempt, as in making a reproach or describing the villain of a novel. For this reason their English translation is more often *that man* rather than *this man*, but several other expressions would be correct: *that fellow*, *the bloke*, *the guy*, *he*, *she*, and so on, according to the context.

Instead, these pronouns would never be used to address a friend, or somebody who is well-known, or the main character of a novel, and so on.

They are not too frequently used in the spoken language, while they are very common in literature.

(egli) afferrò un lungo bastone = *he grabbed a long stick*

costui afferrò un lungo bastone = *the bloke / the fellow grabbed a long stick*

(ella) non rispettò l'appuntamento = *she did not observe the rules*

costei non rispettò l'appuntamento = *this woman did not observe the rules*

(essi / esse) nascosero i soldi sotto un mattone = *they hid the money under a brick*

costoro nascosero i soldi sotto un mattone = *those people hid the money under a brick*

(essi / esse) arrivano sempre tardi = *they always arrive late*

costoro arrivano sempre tardi = *those people always arrive late*

QUESTI (*this / that person*)

Used mainly in written language, especially in literature, **questi** (note the inflection, apparently the plural form of **questo**), may be sometimes used as an alternative for **costui**, i.e. a singular pronoun.

It still carries a meaning of "person rather new to the context", for instance it could be used for a side character in a novel, but it never expresses contempt.

(egli) afferrò un lungo bastone = *he grabbed a long stick*

costui afferrò un lungo bastone = *the bloke grabbed a long stick*

questi afferrò un lungo bastone = *he / the man grabbed a long stick*

(egli) veniva da un paese lontano = *he came from a faraway country*

costui veniva da un paese lontano = *the man / the fellow came from a faraway country*

questi veniva da un paese lontano = *he / this person came from a faraway country*

Note how the verb's inflections are always singular after this particular **questi**, and this would be enough to mark its meaning:

questi veniva da un paese lontano = *he / this person came from a faraway country*

questi venivano da un paese lontano = *these (ones) came from a faraway country*

The student will rarely hear this pronoun in spoken language, although it is a good thing to know it exists, not to mistake this singular **questi** with its more frequent plural meaning.

CIÒ (*this / that*)

This very common pronoun, equals in meaning to **questo**, discussed above, is used to indicate inanimate objects, general concepts, situations, etc.

Once again, the written language uses it more than the spoken language (which often prefers **questo** to **ciò**), but it is not a merely literary pronoun.

ciò è bene per tutti = **questo è bene per tutti** (spoken language) = *this is good for everybody*

(egli) rubò il gioiello, e **ciò** è molto grave = *he stole the jewel, and this is very serious*

ciò non migliorò la nostra situazione = *this did not improve our situation*

While **questo** and **quello** (variously inflected) may be turned into adjectives, as will be explained in the second part of this paragraph, **costui** and **ciò** are pure pronouns.

DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVES

When demonstrative pronouns **questo** (**questa, questi, queste**) and **quello** (**quella, quelli, quelle**) are followed by a noun, they turn into adjectives.

In this case, a few changes occur to match phonetically the first letter of the following word:

QUESTO - QUELLO (masculine singular)

When **questo** is followed by a noun beginning with a vowel, it makes an elision, i.e. it drops the last **...o**, whose place is taken by an apostrophe:

questo cane = *this dog*

quest'occhio = *this eye*

quest'anno = *this year*

quest'uomo = *this man*

quest'inverno = *this winter*

Forms such as **questo occhio, questo anno**, etc. are still accepted, although the most correct form is the one with an elision.

Pronoun **quello** instead, changes according to the same rule described for article **lo** (see [paragraph 2.4](#)):

- when the following name begins with a vowel it turns into **quell'**, with an apostrophe;
- when the following name begins with **Z** or with **S** + consonant (**sb...**, **sc...**, **sd...**, etc.) it remains as it is;
- when the following name starts with a consonant it turns into **quel** (simply dropping **...lo**, without an apostrophe).

quel cane = *that dog*

quell'uomo = *that man*

quello sport = *that sport*

quel tavolo = *that table*

quell'anno = *that year*

quello zucchero = *that sugar*

QUESTA - QUELLA (feminine singular)

questa only makes an elision (i.e. **quest'** with an apostrophe) if the following name begins with a vowel:

questa casa = *this house*

quest'automobile = *this car*

questa strada = *this road*

quest'orchestra = *this orchestra*

questa penna = *this pen*

quest'acqua = *this water*

And **quella** changes in a similar way:

quella casa = *that house*

quell'automobile = *that car*

quella strada = *that road*

quell'orchestra = *that orchestra*

quella penna = *that pen*

quell'acqua = *that water*

The elision may be sometimes omitted to give these demonstrative pronouns a stronger emphasis, almost as underlining the noun they refer to:

quest'uomo generically translates *this man*

questo uomo translates *this man*, as if meaning *...not any other one*

quell'automobile è veloce plainly translates *that car is fast*

quella automobile è veloce gives the sentence a meaning of *that car is fast (not this one)*

In these cases, they are spelt (and pronounced) throughoutly, to stress their meaning.

QUESTI - QUESTE AND QUELLI - QUELLE (plural)

Pronouns **questi**, **queste** and **quelle** do not have any phonetic changes:

questi uomini = *these men*

questi numeri = *these numbers*

questi alberi = *these trees*

questi scudi = *these shields*

queste idee = *these ideas*

queste carte = *these cards*

queste armi = *these weapons*

queste zone = *these zones*

questi idioti = *these idiots*

questi giardini = *these gardens*

questi operai = *these workmen*

questi strumenti = *these instruments*

The adjective **quelli**, instead, changes into **quei** or into **quegli**, according to the same rules by which definite articles **i** or **gli** are used (see [paragraph 2.4](#)):

quegli is used when the following word begins with a vowel, or with **z...**, or with cluster **s** + consonant (**sb...**; **sc...**; etc.)

quegli uomini = *those men*
quegli occhiali = *those glasses*
quegli zoccoli = *those clogs*
quegli schermi = *those screens*
quei is used in all other cases:
quei tavoli = *those tables*
quei piatti = *those dishes*
quei serpenti = *those snakes*
quei libri = *those books*

Remember that such phonetic changes take place according to the next following word, not necessarily to the noun which the adjective relates to:

quei piatti = *those dishes*
quegli ottimi piatti = *those excellent dishes*

quegli zoccoli = *those clogs*
quei brutti zoccoli = *those ugly clogs*

These rules are summarized in the following table:

the following noun starts with...	masculine singular	feminine singular	masculine plural	feminine plural
<i>pronoun used alone (no noun)</i>	questo	questa	questi	queste
<i>followed by any vowel</i>	quest'	quest'	questi	queste
<i>followed by any consonant</i>	questo	questa	questi	queste
<i>pronoun used alone (no noun)</i>	quello	quella	quelli	quelle
<i>followed by any vowel</i>	quell'	quell'	quegli	quelle
<i>followed by Z, or S + consonant</i>	quello	quella	quegli	quelle
<i>followed by any other consonant</i>	quel	quella	quei	quelle

Note that expressions such as **quell'uomo** (*that man*) and **quel ragazzo** (*that boy*) are formally equals to **costui** and **questi** (previously discussed), although the intrinsic meaning that the two latter pronouns carry, as explained above, would account for choosing each of them according to the context of the speech. In the same way, **quella donna** (*that woman*), or **quella ragazza** (*that girl*) would match **costei** in formal meaning, and **quelle persone** (*those people*), **quegli uomini** (*those men*), **quelle donne** (*those women*), etc. would all correspond to **costoro**.

DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVES USED AS PRONOUNS

In [paragraph 2.4](#) (see INDEFINITE ARTICLES USED AS PRONOUNS) we found that the indefinite articles **uno** and **una**, when followed by an adjective without a noun, replace the latter acting as its pronoun. For instance:

un grosso libro = *a large book*
uno grosso = *a large one*

una bella penna = *a nice pen*
una bella = *a nice one*

un prodotto economico = *a cheap product*
uno economico = *a cheap one*

In the same way, **quello** and its feminine and plural forms may be used to obtain the definite equivalent of the aforesaid pattern:

un grosso libro = *a large book*

uno grosso = *a large one*

quello grosso = *the large one*

una bella penna = *a nice pen*

una bella = *a nice one*

quella bella = *the nice one*

un prodotto economico = *a cheap product*

uno economico = *a cheap one*

quello economico = *the cheap one*

i ragazzi giovani = *the young boys*

quelli giovani = *the young ones*

le bevande fredde = *the cold drinks*

quelle fredde = *the cold ones*

i ragazzi giovani = *the young boys*

quelli giovani = *the young ones*

i monumenti antichi = *the ancient monuments*

quelli antichi = *the ancient ones*

Note that also **quello** and **quella**, when used for this purpose, never undergo an elision to make a phonetic match with the adjective. For instance:

quell'abile artigiano = *that skillful craftsman*

quello abile = *the skillful one*

quell'ottima ricetta = *that excellent recipe*

quella ottima = *the excellent one*

quell'attore famoso = *that famous actor*

quello famoso = *the famous one*

Also note that the masculine plural form used for this purpose is always **quelli**, whereas before a true adjective or a noun **quegli** or **quei** would have to be used:

quegli scomodi letti = *those uncomfortable beds*

quelli scomodi = *the uncomfortable ones*

quei bravi giocatori = *those clever players*

quelli bravi = *the clever ones*

quegli amici stranieri = *those foreign friends*

quelli stranieri = *the foreign ones*

quei vestiti eleganti = *those elegant clothes*

quelli eleganti = *the elegant ones*

Try to become as more confident as possible with these schemes, since they will be brought again into discussion at a further stage.

6.1

THE VERB *ESSERE*

PART II

COMPOUND INDICATIVE TENSES

To proceed with this paragraph you should feel confident with the simple tenses of this verb ([paragraph 4.3](#)).

For an introduction to these tenses, see [paragraph 4.2](#).

As explained in paragraph 4.2, compound tenses are made of two parts: an auxiliary verb (used in one of the simple tenses previously discussed) and the actual verb (used in past participle tense).

Essere (*to be*) is a transitive verb, so **avere** (*to be*) should be used as an auxiliary verb; but **essere** is a very irregular verb, so as an exception, the same verb **essere** is also used as the auxiliary one.

The past participle of the verb **essere** is **stato** (irregular). Actually, **stato** is the regular past participle of the verb **stare** = *to stay, to be* (physically), which is though used also by **essere**, because often the meaning of these two verbs overlaps.

The verb **stare** will be dealt with more in depth in paragraph 20.1

PASSATO PROSSIMO

This tense is made by present + past participle:

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) sono stato <i>I have been</i>	siamo stati <i>we have been</i>
2nd person	(tu) sei stato <i>you have been</i> (singular)	siete stati <i>you have been</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli) è stato <i>he/it has been</i>	sono stati <i>they have been</i>

As will be explained more in detail in [paragraph 6.7](#), when **essere** acts as an auxiliary verb for a past participle, as in this case, the latter becomes gender- and number-sensitive: when **stato** is referred to feminine gender it becomes **(essa) è stata** (*she has been*), while their plurals are **(essi) sono stati** (*they have been*) and **(esse) sono state** (*they feminine have been*).

è stato un bello spettacolo = *it has been a nice show*

sono state settimane terribili = *they have been terrible weeks*

è stata la segretaria del ministro = *she has been the secretary of the minister*

tutti noi siamo stati giovani = *all of us have been young*

TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO

This tense is made by imperfect + past participle:

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) ero stato <i>I had been</i>	(noi) eravamo stati <i>we had been</i>
2nd person	(tu) eri stato <i>you had been</i> (singular)	(voi) eravate stati <i>you had been</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli) era stato <i>he/it had been</i>	(essi) erano stati <i>they had been</i>

Actions expressed by this tense have taken place in the past, translating the English form "*I had been*". Once again, for feminine and plural the past participle changes its inflections in **stata, stati, state**.

eri stato allo zoo = *you (masculine) had been to the zoo*

ero stata a Roma quattro volte = *I (feminine) had been to Rome four times*

eravamo stati al museo = *we (masculine) had been to the museum*

erano state con un amico = *they (feminine) had been with a friend*

TRAPASSATO REMOTO

This tense is made by past perfect + past participle.

singular

plural

1st person **(io) fui stato** *I had been*

(noi) fummo stati *we had been*

2nd person **(tu) fosti stato** *you had been (singular)* **(voi) foste stati** *you had been (plural)*

3rd person **(egli) fu stato** *he had been*

(essi) furono stati *they had been*

Due to the fact that the verb *essere* acts both as an auxiliary verb and as a main verb, this tense is not commonly used, and other forms (which will be discussed further on) are more commonly used to express the same concept.

Remember the change of inflection for feminine and plurals (**stata, stati, state**).

FUTURO ANTERIORE

This tense is made by future + past participle:

singular

plural

1st person **(io) sarò stato** *I will have been*

(noi) saremo stati *we will have been*

2nd person **(tu) sarai stato** *you will have been (sing.)* **(voi) sarete stati** *you will have been (pl.)*

3rd person **(egli) sarà stato** *he/she/it will have been*

(essi) saranno stati *they will have been*

The futuro anteriore can express two concepts:

- when used in a future sentence, it indicates an action that has already happened by that time:
*tomorrow, by 10 o'clock, you **will have gone** to work.*
- more often, this tense expresses the chance that an action has already been carried out, but we have no proof of it, or we are not sure:

sarà stato a Firenze = *he might have been to Florence*

sarà stata a Londra = *he might have been to London*

saranno state in casa = *they (feminine) might have been at home*

sarà stato un incidente = *it might have been an accident*

saranno stati in cinque = *they might have been five (people)*

A similar concept of chance is sometimes expressed also by simple future tense, as explained in [paragraph 4.3](#).

6.2

THE VERB *AVERE*

PART II

COMPOUND INDICATIVE TENSES

Avere (*to have*) is transitive, so it will also be used as an auxiliary verb.

The past participle of the verb is **avuto** (regular past participle inflection).
When **avere** is used before the past participle, the latter is insensitive to gender and number, so **avuto** will be the participle for both masculine and feminine, both singular and plural forms.

PASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) ho avuto	<i>I have had</i>	(noi) abbiamo avuto <i>we have had</i>
2nd person	(tu) hai avuto	<i>you have had</i> (singular)	(voi) avete avuto <i>you have had</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) ha avuto	<i>he/she has had</i>	(essi / esse) hanno avuto <i>they have had</i>

The tense expresses an action which has happened in a near past, and is now over. It may be translated with the English corresponding tense ("*I have had*"), but the use of simple past tense is commonly preferred:

ho avuto un incidente = *I had an accident* (actual translation: *I have had an accident*)

hanno avuto una grande fortuna = *they had a big luck* (actually: *they have had a big luck*)

The difference with passato remoto tense is that the latter expresses an action happened a long time ago:

ieri ho avuto un incidente = *yesterday I had an accident* (tense: passato prossimo)

lo scorso anno ebbi un incidente = *last year I had an accident* (tense: passato remoto)

As a colloquial form, passato prossimo tense is more popular, despite being compound, irrespectively of time: in common speech, the last sentence above could often be turned into:

lo scorso anno ho avuto un incidente (less correct, but very common).

TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) avevo avuto	<i>I had had</i>	(noi) avevamo avuto <i>we had had</i>
2nd person	(tu) avevi avuto	<i>you had had</i> (singular)	(voi) avevate avuto <i>you had had</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) aveva avuto	<i>he/she/it had had</i>	(essi / esse) avevano avuto <i>they had had</i>

Actions expressed by this tense have taken place in the past, translating the English past perfect "*I had been*".

avevamo avuto un gatto = *we had had a cat*

(but in English, a different verb would often be used to avoid repeating "*had*" twice: "*we had owned a cat*", etc.)

TRAPASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) ebbi avuto	<i>I had had</i>	(noi) avemmo avuto <i>we had had</i>
2nd person	(tu) avesti avuto	<i>you had had</i> (singular)	(voi) aveste avuto <i>you had had</i> (plural)
3rd person	(egli / ella) ebbe avuto	<i>he/she/it had had</i>	(essi / esse) ebbero avuto <i>they had had</i>

Actions expressed by this tense have taken place in the past, and were already over by the time the sentence refers to. It is usually translated with the English form "I had had". When this tense is used, the action expressed is followed by another action, in passato remoto tense.

In English, this pattern can be turned into an alternative form: "having" + past participle. For example: "after he had received his wage, he came back from work" could be turned into "after having received his wage, he came back from work". This literally means: "at first he received his wage, then he came back from work".

In Italian, this sentence would require a past pluperfect (trapassato remoto) for the first verb, and a past perfect (passato remoto) for the second one:

dopo che ebbe avuto la paga, tornò dal lavoro

ebbe avuto = trapassato remoto, **tornò** = passato remoto

IMPORTANT NOTE

In Italian, the English form "to have something done" is translated in a completely different way, so expressions like "he has the car washed", or "he had the car washed" are NEVER translated with any of the tenses discussed above.

FUTURO ANTERIORE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avrò avuto	<i>I will have had</i>	(noi) avremo avuto	<i>we will have had</i>
2nd person	(tu) avrai avuto	<i>you will have had</i> (sing.)	(voi) avrete avuto	<i>you will have had</i> (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / ella) avrà avuto	<i>he/she will have had</i>	(essi / esse) avranno avuto	<i>they will have had</i>

Again, this tense is mostly used for expressing chance:

il treno avrà avuto un problema = *the train might have had a problem*

avranno avuto bel tempo = *they might have had fine weather*

avrà avuto una brutta giornata = *you might have had a bad day*

But in fewer cases it does express a past action in the future:

pagherò quando avrò avuto una risposta = *I will pay when I will have had a reply*

(in English, it would be more common to say "I will pay after having received a reply").

torneranno quando avranno avuto la loro parte = *they'll return when they will have had their share*

6.3

PAST PARTICIPLE

Before introducing compound tenses of the three conjugations, it is necessary to become familiar with past participle.

NOTE

accented vowels are used to mark the accent (stress) in verbs of the 2nd conjugation, but remember that they are not used in common spelling

Many verbs have a regular past participle, whose inflections are as follows:

1st CONJUGATION: infinitive ...**are**, past participle**ato**

2nd CONJUGATION: infinitive ...**ere**, past participle**uto**

3rd CONJUGATION: infinitive ...**ire**, past participle**ito**

camminare (to walk)

camminato (walked)

mangiare (to eat)

mangiato (eat)

saltare (to jump)

saltato (jumped)

véndere (to sell)	venduto (sold)
sedére (to sit)	seduto (sat)
prèmere (to press)	premuto (pressed)
capire (to understand)	capito (understood)
sentire (to hear)	sentito (heard)
partire (to leave)	partito (left)

Verbs of the 1st and 3rd conjugation have regular past participles in most cases, while very often verbs of the 2nd conjugation have an irregular one. Most dictionaries state irregular past participles:

a common inflection is **...so**:

prèndere (to take)	preso (taken)
scéndere (to come off, to come down)	sceso (come off)
estèndere (to extend)	esteso (extended)
spèndere (to spend)	speso (spent)
delùdere (to disappoint)	deluso (disappointed)
evàdere (to escape)	evaso (escaped)
chiùdere (to close)	chiuso (come off)

Some verbs double the **s**:

flèttere (to flex)	flesso (flexed)
méttere (to put, to place)	messo (put, placed)
sopprìmere (to cancel, to kill)	soppresso (cancelled, killed) notice the change of i into e
esprìmere (to express)	espresso (cancelled, killed) same as above
discùtere (to discuss)	discusso (read)

Some verbs have a **...to** inflection:

spìngere (to push)	spinto (pushed)
piàngere (to cry)	pianto (cried)
avvòlgere (to wind)	avvolto (wound)
raccògliere (to pick up)	raccolto (picked up) for phonetic reasons, gli turns into l

Some verbs have a similar inflection, but double the **t**:

lèggere (to read)	letto (read)
cuòcere (to cook)	cotto (cooked) the u is dropped
dirìgere (to direct)	diretto (directed) the second i turns into e

Sometimes a compound of **...so** and **...to** occurs, forming **...sto**:

chiedere (to ask)	chiesto (asked)
nascondere (to hide)	nascosto (hidden)
vedére (to see, to watch)	visto (seen, watched) the regular form veduto is also allowed

A special case is that of two verbs belonging to the 3rd conjugation, whose past participle inflection is **...to**, but with a number of changes in the verb's root:

soffrire (to suffer)	sofferto (suffered)
aprire (to open)	aperto (opened)

Notice how in the two cases above letter **r** swaps position with vowel **i**, which turns into **e**.

Obviously you don't need to learn all forms at once, but try to get slowly familiar with them, because it is important to tell a past participle from other words (a noun, an adjective, etc.) whose last part mimics the above-mentioned inflections:

vaso (*vase*, noun);
brutto (*ugly*, adjective);
cesto (*basket*, noun);
piatto (*dish*, noun);
sotto (*under - below*, adverb); etc.

Also try to focus how verbs with similar phonetic structure often behave in the same way: if the past participle of **spingere** is **spinto**, verbs with a similar sound (**tingere**, **vincere**, **dipingere**, etc.) have a similar past participle. But this is not an absolute rule.

Some past participles can be used both as a verbal tense and as an adjective; this happens also in English:
rotto (*broken*): *I have broken the stick* (verb) - *the stick is broken* (adjective);
sigillato (*sealed*): *you had sealed the envelope* - *the sealed envelope*;
rubato (*stolen*): *they had stolen the car* - *the stolen car*;
etc. etc.

It is also important to learn how to trace back the verb's root (thus, the verb's infinitive) from its past participle. It's easy when the participle is regular:

preparato comes from **preparare** (*to prepare*)

goduto comes from **godere** (*to enjoy*)

fuggito comes from **fuggire** (*to run off*)

It's less easy for irregular participles:

compreso comes from **comprendere** (*to comprehend, to understand*)

compresso (notice, double s) comes from **comprimere** (*to press*)

chiuso comes from **chiudere** (*to close*)

aperto comes from **aprire** (*to open*)

and so on.

6.4

VERBS OF THE 1st CONJUGATION

PART II

COMPOUND INDICATIVE TENSES

As previously said, compound tenses are formed by the auxiliary verb **avere** when the verb is transitive (i.e. when the action expressed by the verb may have a direct object).

Things are a little more complicated when the verb is intransitive (i.e. when the action may not have a direct object); in these cases, the auxiliary verb used may be **avere**, as well, but some require **essere**; dictionaries usually indicate which auxiliary intransitive verbs use in compound tenses.

Therefore, the following examples show both situations, by using the transitive verb **alzare** (*to lift, to raise*) and the intransitive verb **scappare** (*to run off, to escape*).

But a few examples with **telefonare** (*to phone*) will also be shown: unlike the English verb, in Italian it is an intransitive verb, and it always requires preposition **a** = *to* before the object, but the auxiliary verb is **avere** all the same.

Most verbs of the 1st conjugation are transitive, despite some of them might seem intransitive at first sight: for example, **lavorare** = *to work* is not often followed by a direct object, but you can still *work something* (*clay, wood, etc.*), so it's perfectly transitive).

PASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ho alzato	<i>I have lifted</i>	(noi) abbiamo alzato	<i>we have lifted</i>
2nd person	(tu) hai alzato	<i>you have lifted (sing.)</i>	(voi) avete alzato	<i>you have lifted (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ha alzato	<i>he/she has lifted</i>	(essi / esse) hanno alzato	<i>they have lifted</i>

1st person	(io) sono scappato	<i>I have escaped</i>	(noi) siamo scappati	<i>we have escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) sei scappato	<i>you have escaped (sing.)</i>	(voi) siete scappati	<i>you have escaped (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) è scappato	<i>he has escaped</i>	(essi) sono scappati	<i>they have escaped</i>

You will notice that the intransitive verb's past participle changes its inflections.

This depends on the fact that when **essere** is used as an auxiliary verb, the following past participle behaves almost as if it was an adjective.

So, when a past participle follows the verb **essere**, it is gender- and number-sensitive.

sono scappato = *I (masculine) have escaped* **siamo scappati** = *we (masculine) have escaped*

sono scappata = *I (feminine) have escaped* **siamo scappate** = *we (feminine) have escaped*

This tense is used to translate actions which have been carried out a small time ago (a few minutes, up to a few weeks ago, but there is no fixed time limit). For older actions, *passato remoto* (English simple past) should be more properly used.

In common speech, though, this tense is often used in place of *passato remoto* also for older actions.

When translating this tense into English, often the closest equivalent is a simple past, not the actual compound tense (i.e. present perfect), but this is not a strict rule.

Some elements in the sentence might help to decide which of the two is better.

questa mattina ho preso l'autobus = *this morning I took the bus*

ha mangiato una grossa bistecca = *he has eaten a big steak* (but "*he ate a big steak*" would be a fair translation, as well)

abbiamo telefonato a casa = *we phoned home* (notice how Italian requires the use of preposition **a**)

In the first sentence, Italian uses *passato prossimo* because "*this morning*" is a short time ago. English instead would use simple past: it sounds uncommon to use present perfect *this morning I have taken the bus*.

In the same way, in Italian a simple past (**questa mattina non presi l'autobus: camminai**) would sound rather incorrect.

So, when turning Italian into English, in most cases *passato prossimo* will require simple past; when doing the opposite translation (English into Italian), rely on how much time ago the action happened, but if you find difficulties with *passato remoto* tense, you can use the easier *passato prossimo*, in any case.

TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avevo alzato	<i>I had lifted</i>	(noi) avevamo alzato	<i>we had lifted</i>
2nd person	(tu) avevi alzato	<i>you had lifted (s.)</i>	(voi) avevate alzato	<i>you had lifted (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) aveva alzato	<i>he/she had lifted</i>	(essi / esse) avevano alzato	<i>they had lifted</i>
1st person	(io) ero scappato	<i>I had escaped</i>	(noi) eravamo scappati	<i>we had escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) eri scappato	<i>you had escaped (s.)</i>	(voi) eravate scappati	<i>you had escaped (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) era scappato	<i>he/she/it had escaped</i>	(essi) erano scappati	<i>they had escaped</i>

In this case, the English past perfect corresponds more or less precisely to the Italian tense:

avevi alzato il volume della radio = *you (singular) had raised the radio volume*

erano scappate da casa = *they (feminine) had ran away from home*

avevate telefonato a Paolo = *you (plural) had phoned Paul*

due elefanti erano scappati = *two elephants had run away*

TRAPASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ebbi alzato	<i>I had lifted</i>	(noi) avemmo alzato	<i>we had lifted</i>
2nd person	(tu) avesti alzato	<i>you had lifted (s.)</i>	(voi) aveste alzato	<i>you had lifted (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ebbe alzato	<i>he/she had lifted</i>	(essi / esse) ebbero alzato	<i>they had lifted</i>
1st person	(io) fui scappato	<i>I had escaped</i>	(noi) fummo scappati	<i>we had escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) fosti scappato	<i>you had escaped (s.)</i>	(voi) foste scappati	<i>you had escaped (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) fu scappato	<i>he/she had escaped</i>	(essi) furono scappati	<i>they had escaped</i>

The use of this tense, less common than others, has already been discussed; here are a few more examples.

quando tutti i gatti furono scappati, il cane tornò indietro = *when all the cats had run away, the dog came back*

Note how this tense describes an early action, which has already finished when the following action starts. The latter is in passato remoto tense (English simple past). Had there not been a following action, the trapassato prossimo tense would have been used:

tutti i gatti erano scappati, così il cane tornò indietro = *all the cats had run off, so the dog came back*

FUTURO ANTERIORE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avrò alzato	<i>I shall have lifted</i>	(noi) avremo alzato	<i>we shall have lifted</i>
2nd person	(tu) avrai alzato	<i>you will have lifted (s.)</i>	(voi) avrete alzato	<i>you will have lifted (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) avrà alzato	<i>he/she will have lifted</i>	(essi / esse) avranno alzato	<i>they will have lifted</i>
1st person	(io) sarò scappato	<i>I shall have escaped</i>	(noi) saranno scappati	<i>we shall have escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) sarai scappato	<i>you will have escaped (s.)</i>	(voi) sarete scappati	<i>you will have escaped (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) sarà scappato	<i>he/she will have escaped</i>	(essi) saranno scappati	<i>they will have escaped</i>

As previously said, this tense is mostly used for expressing chance, rather than its actual meaning of past action in the future.

Always remember to inflect the past participle when **essere** is the auxiliary verb.

la scimmia sarà scappata da uno zoo = *the monkey might have escaped from a zoo*

ieri avrò camminato almeno dieci chilometri = *yesterday I might have walked at least ten kilometers*

avrà telefonato all'ufficio questa mattina = *he might have phoned the office this morning*

saranno tornate da Vienna = *they (feminine) might have returned from Vienna*

But in fewer cases it expresses a past action in the future:

telefonerò ad Enrico quando avrò parlato con suo figlio = literally *I will phone Henry when I will have spoken to his son* (but in English, it would be better to say "I will phone Henry as soon as I have spoken to his son", or "...after having spoken to his son").

6.5

VERBS OF THE 2nd CONJUGATION

PART II

COMPOUND INDICATIVE TENSES

To choose the right auxiliary verb, follow the same rule as the 1st conjugation: for transitive verbs use **avere**, while intransitive ones more often require **avere**, as well, but some use **essere** (check the dictionary). Since some verbs may be either transitive or intransitive according to different meanings, the auxiliary verb may change: for example **crescere** = *to grow* requires **essere** in expressions such as *this plant has grown*, *the dog had rapidly grown*, etc., but it requires verb **avere** when it is used with a transitive meaning i.e. *he grew (up) two children*, etc.

Tables will be shown by using **spingere** = (*to push*, transitive), whose past participle is **spinto**, and **scendere** (*to go down, to come off*, always intransitive, requiring **essere**), whose past participle is **sceso**.

PASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ho spinto	<i>I have pushed</i>	(noi) abbiamo spinto	<i>we have pushed</i>
2nd person	(tu) hai spinto	<i>you have pushed (s.)</i>	(voi) avete spinto	<i>you have pushed (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ha spinto	<i>he/she has pushed</i>	(essi / esse) hanno spinto	<i>they have pushed</i>
1st person	(io) sono sceso	<i>I have come down</i>	(noi) siamo scesi	<i>we have come down</i>
2nd person	(tu) sei sceso	<i>you have come down (s.)</i>	(voi) siete scesi	<i>you have come down (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) è sceso	<i>he/she has come down</i>	(essi) sono scesi	<i>they have come down</i>

Also in this case the intransitive verb using **essere** treats past participles as adjectives, using both singular and plural forms.

sono sceso = *I (masculine) have come down/come off* - **siamo scesi** = *we (masculine) have come down/come off*

sono scesa = *I (feminine) have come down/come off* - **siamo scese** = *we (feminine) have come down/come off*

ho spinto il carrello = *I (both genders) have pushed the trolley (or I pushed the trolley)*

abbiamo spinto il carrello = *we (both genders) have pushed the trolley (or we pushed the trolley)*

sono sceso dall'aereo = *I (masculine) have come off the plane (or I came off the plane)*

sono scesa dall'aereo = *I (feminine) have come off the plane (or I came off the plane)*

siamo scese dall'aereo = *we (feminine) have come off the plane (or we came off the plane)*

TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avevo spinto	<i>I had pushed</i>	(noi) avevamo spinto	<i>we had pushed</i>
2nd person	(tu) avevi spinto	<i>you had pushed (s.)</i>	(voi) avevate spinto	<i>you had pushed (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) aveva spinto	<i>he/she had pushed</i>	(essi / esse) avevano spinto	<i>they had pushed</i>
1st person	(io) ero sceso	<i>I had escaped</i>	(noi) eravamo scappati	<i>we had escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) eri sceso	<i>you had escaped (s.)</i>	(voi) eravate scappati	<i>you had escaped (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) era sceso	<i>he/she had escaped</i>	(essi) erano scappati	<i>they had escaped</i>

In this case the English compound tense corresponds more or less precisely to the Italian tense:

avevamo spinto la porta = *we had pushed the door*

le donne erano scese al primo piano = *the women had gone down to the first floor*

TRAPASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ebbi spinto	<i>I had pushed</i>	(noi) avemmo spinto	<i>we had pushed</i>
2nd person	(tu) avesti spinto	<i>you had pushed (s.)</i>	(voi) aveste spinto	<i>you had pushed (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ebbe spinto	<i>he/she had pushed</i>	(essi / esse) ebbero spinto	<i>they had pushed</i>
1st person	(io) fui sceso	<i>I have escaped</i>	(noi) fummo scappati	<i>we have escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) fosti sceso	<i>you have escaped (s.)</i>	(voi) foste scappati	<i>you have escaped (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) fu sceso	<i>he/she has escaped</i>	(essi) fummo scappati	<i>they have escaped</i>

dopo che ebbero spinto l'automobile fino al garage, entrarono nella casa = *after they had pushed the car up to the garage, they entered the house*

quando fu scesa dal treno, telefonò al principale = *when she had come off the train, she phoned the boss*

FUTURO ANTERIORE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avrò spinto	<i>I shall have pushed</i>	(noi) avremo spinto	<i>we shall have pushed</i>
2nd person	(tu) avrai spinto	<i>you will have pushed (s.)</i>	(voi) avrete spinto	<i>you will have pushed (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) avrà spinto	<i>he/she will have pushed</i>	(essi / esse) avranno spinto	<i>they will have pushed</i>
1st person	(io) sarò sceso	<i>I shall have escaped</i>	(noi) saremo scappati	<i>we shall have escaped</i>
2nd person	(tu) sarai sceso	<i>you will have escaped (s.)</i>	(voi) sarete scappati	<i>you will have escaped (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) sarà sceso	<i>he/she will have escaped</i>	(essi) saranno scappati	<i>they will have escaped</i>

a quest'ora, sarà scesa dall'aereo = *by this time, she might have come off the plane*

avrò spinto la bicicletta per almeno due ore = *I might have pushed the bicycle for at least two hours*

quando avrete spinto il pulsante l'ascensore scenderà = *literally when you will have pushed the button, the lift will come down*

6.6

VERBS OF THE 3rd CONJUGATION PART II COMPOUND INDICATIVE TENSES

Verbs of the third conjugation are less irregular than the ones of the 2nd, so most of them have a regular past participle (...**ito**).

Tables will be shown by using **udire** = (*to feel*, transitive), and **partire** (*to leave*, intransitive, requiring **essere**); both past participles are regular.

PASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ho udito	<i>I have heard</i>	(noi) abbiamo udito	<i>we have heard</i>
2nd person	(tu) hai udito	<i>you have heard (sing.)</i>	(voi) avete udito	<i>you have heard (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ha udito	<i>he/she/it has heard</i>	(essi / esse) hanno udito	<i>they have heard</i>
1st person	(io) sono partito	<i>I have left</i>	(noi) siamo scesi	<i>we have left</i>
2nd person	(tu) sei partito	<i>you have left (sing.)</i>	(voi) siete scesi	<i>you have left (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) è partito	<i>he/she/it has left</i>	(essi) sono scesi	<i>they have left</i>

Also in this case the intransitive verb using **essere** causes the following past participle to use different inflections for feminine and plural forms.

ho udito un rumore = *I heard a noise*

hanno udito un rumore = *they heard a noise*

è partita ieri = *she left yesterday*

sono partiti ieri = *they (masculine) left yesterday*

sono partite ieri = *they (feminine) left yesterday*

TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avevo udito	<i>I had heard</i>	(noi) avevamo udito	<i>we had heard</i>
2nd person	(tu) avevi udito	<i>you had heard (s.)</i>	(voi) avevate udito	<i>you had heard (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) aveva udito	<i>he/she/it had heard</i>	(essi / esse) avevano udito	<i>they had heard</i>
1st person	(io) ero partito	<i>I had left</i>	(noi) eravamo scappati	<i>we had left</i>
2nd person	(tu) eri partito	<i>you had left (s.)</i>	(voi) eravate scappati	<i>you had left (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) era partito	<i>he/she/it had left</i>	(essi) erano scappati	<i>they had left</i>

A few examples:

avevamo udito quella esplosione = *we had heard that blast*

la sua amica non era partita = *his/her friend had not left*

le sue amiche non erano partite = *his/her friends had not left*

TRAPASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) ebbi udito	<i>I had heard</i>	(noi) avemmo udito	<i>we had heard</i>
2nd person	(tu) avesti udito	<i>you had heard (s.)</i>	(voi) aveste udito	<i>you had heard (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) ebbe udito	<i>he/she/it had heard</i>	(essi / esse) ebbero udito	<i>they had heard</i>
1st person	(io) fui partito	<i>I had left</i>	(noi) fummo partiti	<i>we had left</i>
2nd person	(tu) fosti partito	<i>you had left (s.)</i>	(voi) foste partiti	<i>you had left (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) fu partito	<i>he/she/it had left</i>	(essi) furono partiti	<i>they had left</i>

appena i ragazzi ebbero finito i compiti, uscirono in strada = *as soon as the boys had finished their homework, they came out in the street*

quando Paolo fu partito, tornammo a casa = *when Paul had left, we returned home*

note how **casa** (*home, or house*) needs preposition **a** (*to*), like any other place

FUTURO ANTERIORE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) avrò udito	<i>I shall have heard</i>	(noi) avremo udito	<i>we shall have heard</i>
2nd person	(tu) avrai udito	<i>you will have heard (s.)</i>	(voi) avrete udito	<i>you will have heard (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) avrà udito	<i>he/she/it will have heard</i>	(essi / esse) avranno udito	<i>they will have heard</i>
1st person	(io) sarò partito	<i>I shall have left</i>	(noi) saremo scappati	<i>we shall have left</i>
2nd person	(tu) sarai partito	<i>you will have left (s.)</i>	(voi) sarete scappati	<i>you will have left (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) sarà partito	<i>he/she/it will have left</i>	(essi) saranno scappati	<i>they will have left</i>

avranno udito la chiamata? = *will they have heard the call ?*

sarà partita per Parigi = *she might have left for Paris*

quando saranno partite venderanno la casa = *when they (feminine) will have left, they will sell the house*

7.1

THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

ALSO INTRODUCING THE ADVERB *QUANDO*

Before discussing several topics concerning time, it is useful to memorize the adverb **quando**, which means *when*, both in positive and interrogative sentences:

quando tornerete ? = *when will you (plur.) return ?*

quando avremo finito il nostro lavoro = *when we will have finished our work*

To indicate a future action, it is not strictly necessary to use a future tense after **quando**: present tense still gives the idea of something yet to come, although it may also indicate a habitual action, depending on the context and the meaning of the sentence:

quando comprerà la nuova automobile = *when he/she will buy the new car*

quando compra la nuova automobile = *when he/she buys the new car (future action)*

quando compra qualcosa = *when he/she buys something (habitual action)*

An idiomatic expression contains this adverb twice: **di quando in quando**, meaning *every now and then, from time to time, occasionally*.

di quando in quando andiamo al cinema = *from time to time we go to the movies*

THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

The Italian names of the seven days of the week are:

lunedì	<i>Monday</i>
martedì	<i>Tuesday</i>
mercoledì	<i>Wednesday</i>
giovedì	<i>Thursday</i>
venerdì	<i>Friday</i>
sabato	<i>Saturday</i>
domenica	<i>Sunday</i>

The Italian week always starts with *Monday*, while sometimes in English, especially in charts, in tables, etc., it starts with *Sunday*. Also notice how these names never have a capital (uppercase) letter, as they usually do in English.

These names are all masculine, except **domenica** which is feminine.

Most names end with **...dì** (notice the accent), because the word **dì**, truncated form of the Latin *dies*, means *day* (which has the same Latin origin).

In modern Italian, **dì** alone is not very commonly used, and another word for *day*, **giorno**, is often preferred.

Many Italian names of the week have an astronomical-mythological origin, referring to planets (which often bear the name of ancient roman gods and goddesses), but also a few English names have this peculiar origin:

- **lunedì** means "the day of the Moon" (like English *monday*);
- **martedì** means "the day of Mars";
- **mercoledì** means "the day of Mercurius";
- **giovedì** means "the day of Jupiter";
- **venerdì** means "the day of Venus";
- **sabato** curiously is of Jewish origin (*shabbath* = Jewish saturday); the English name is linked to Saturn;
- **domenica** means "the day of the Lord" (Latin *dominus*); the English name, instead, is linked to the Sun.

When using these names to indicate a precise date, (*I will come on Monday*, etc.), Italian does not use any preposition to match English *on*.

venerdì comprerò un nuovo televisore = *on Friday I will buy a new TV set.*

mercoledì, quando sei partito, hai dimenticato le chiavi = *on Wednesday, when you left, you forgot the keys*

oggi è martedì = *today is Tuesday*

The same form is used when days are not specified:

due giovedì di questo mese = *two Thursdays in this month* (literally "...of this month"), but it can also mean *on two Thursdays in this month*

The use of a preposition or an article gives the day a habitual meaning: there are several forms for doing so. A definite article is often used:

il lunedì lavoro a casa = *on Mondays I work at home*

il sabato vado al mare = *on Saturdays I go to the seaside*

la domenica i negozi sono chiusi = *on Sundays the shops are closed*

The name of the day can be shifted to the end of the sentence, to give it more emphasis, and in this case the simple preposition **di** is preferred (though not compulsory):

lavoro a casa di lunedì = *I work at home on Mondays*

vado al mare di sabato = *I go to the seaside on Saturdays*

i negozi sono chiusi di domenica = *the shops are closed on Sundays*

Instead of **di**, the compound preposition **al** (= **a** + **il**) or **alla** (= **a** + **la**) can be used:

lavoro a casa al lunedì = *I work at home on Mondays*

vado al mare al sabato = *I go to the seaside on Saturdays*

i negozi sono chiusi alla domenica = *the shops are closed on Sundays*

But, to make things easier, you can simply memorize either the use of articles, or of preposition **di**.

A further way to indicate habitual days is to use a definite article in singular form:

il lunedì lavoro a casa = *on Mondays I work at home*

il sabato vado al mare = *on Saturdays I go to the seaside*

la domenica i negozi sono chiusi = *on Sundays the shops are closed*

The same form is also used to indicate a very specific day (usually, a further specification occurs in the sentence):

il venerdì prima di Natale = *Friday before Christmas* (but this can also read **on Friday before Christmas**)

il prossimo martedì = *next Tuesday* or **on next Tuesday**

la domenica di Pasqua = *Easter Sunday* (literally "*the Sunday of Easter*") or **on Easter Sunday**

But when the specific day is introduced by a demonstrative adjective, the article is always dropped:

il sabato prima di Natale = *Saturday before Christmas* (or *on Saturday before Christmas*)

...BUT

quel sabato prima di Natale = *that Saturday before Christmas* (or *on that Saturday before...*)

NOTE - in the latter case, the specification "before Christmas" is almost redundant, because the use of "that" indicates how this day has already been introduced as a topic, or specified

Some sentences refer to more than one specific day (i.e. *the winter Sundays, all Wednesdays in March*, etc.), in which case Italian always uses a definite article in plural form:

i giovedì di quest'anno = *Thursdays of this year*

tutti i sabati = *all Saturdays*

le domeniche estive = *the summer Sundays*

i primi lunedì del mese = *the first Monday of each month*, whose literal translation is "*the first Mondays of the month*", in this case with an actual meaning of "*each*", but this topic will be discussed at a further stage. In the sentences above, **giovedì** and **lunedì** are plural, although the inflection is the same as singular forms because these nouns are truncated (see [paragraph 2.3](#)).

Instead, **sabato** and **domenica** have standard plurals: **sabati** and **domeniche**; notice the phonetic **h**, added to keep the guttural sound of **c** (i.e. as an English *k*) before the vowel **e**.

7.2

MONTHS & SEASONS OF THE YEAR

MONTHS

The Italian names of the twelve months of the year are:

gennaio	<i>January</i>
febbraio	<i>February</i>
marzo	<i>March</i>
aprile	<i>April</i>
maggio	<i>May</i>
giugno	<i>June</i>
luglio	<i>July</i>
agosto	<i>August</i>
settembre	<i>September</i>
ottobre	<i>October</i>
novembre	<i>November</i>
dicembre	<i>December</i>

They are not very different from the English version, in which the Latin root is even more evident than in Italian.

In most cases, these names have an ancient roman origin: **gennaio** comes from Janus, the god who patroned the beginning of all events, to whom the first month was dedicated; **marzo** comes from Mars, god of war; **agosto** was probably given after the name of the first worshipped emperor, Augustus; **settembre** through **dicembre** come from the fact that in ancient times the year had ten months, and these names simply numbered the last ones (Latin *septem* = 7, *octo* = 8, *novem* = 9 and *decem* = 10).

A main difference with English is that, in Italian, they always have a small (or lowercase) initial letter.

Usually simple preposition **in** is used to indicate an event taking place within the month:

in giugno partiremo per Berlino = *in June we shall leave for Berlin*

Natale cade in dicembre = *Christmas falls in December*

Preposition **a** can be used instead of **in**, especially in spoken language:

a settembre cambierò lavoro = *in September I shall change job*

quest'anno Pasqua cade a marzo = *this year Easter falls in March*

Any of the two prepositions can be used: **in** is more formal, while **a** is more colloquial.

Unlike day names, months never use a definite article in habitual forms:

febbraio è un mese freddo = *february is a cold month*

ad (or in) agosto andiamo sempre al mare = *in August we always go to the seaside*

(notice the phonetic use of **ad** instead of **a**, because the following word too starts with vowel **a**)

The article can be used only to indicate a very precise month:

il luglio più caldo fu nel 1947 = *the hottest July was in (the) 1947*

(disregard the comparative form now: it will be discussed further on)

questo è stato un novembre piovoso = *this has been a rainy November*

dal maggio del 1963 = *as of (the) May (of the) 1963* (next paragraph 7.3 will discuss years)

nel giugno del 1970 = *in (the) June (of the) 1970*

Notice that while English preposition *in* can be translated either with **a** or with **in** when the month does not require an article (as said above), only preposition **in** is used in forms with an article, as shown again in the following examples:

in gennaio or **a gennaio** = *in January*

...BUT

nel gennaio del 1985 (only form) = *in January 1985*

But when introduced by a demonstrative adjective, the article is always dropped:

durante il gennaio del 1985 = *during January 1985*

...BUT

durante quel gennaio del 1985 = *during that January 1985*

(notice how in this case the specification "1985" is almost redundant, because the use of "that" indicates that this month already was a topic of discussion)

Both in common speech and written language, months are very often introduced by **mese di** (*month of*), which affects the need of an article, because **mese** requires it:

in gennaio le fontane ghiacciano = *in January, fountains freeze*

(but using **mese**)

nel mese di gennaio le fontane ghiacciano = *in (the month of) January, fountains freeze*

da agosto in poi = *from August onwards*

(but using **mese**)

dal mese di agosto in poi = *from (the month of) August onwards*

notice how compound prepositions **nel** (= **in** + **il**) and **dal** (= **da** + **il**) had to be used, instead of simple prepositions **in** and **da** because **mese** cannot stand without a definite article when it introduces a definite month.

SEASONS

The Italian names of the four seasons are:

primavera	<i>spring</i>
estate	<i>summer</i>
autunno	<i>autumn or fall</i>
inverno	<i>winter</i>

Italian also has adjectives referring to each season:

primaverile	<i>(of) spring</i>
estivo (fem. estiva)	<i>(of) summer</i>
autunnale	<i>(of) autumn or fall</i>
invernale	<i>(of) winter</i>

The simple preposition **in** is commonly used with seasons:

in primavera gli uccelli tornano dai paesi caldi = *in spring birds come back from (the) hot countries*

i contadini fanno il vino in autunno = *(the) peasants make (the) wine in autumn*

Sometimes, simple preposition **di** is used, especially with **estate** and **inverno**, in which case it is phonetically shortened in **d'** (with an apostrophe). It is less commonly used with **autunno**.

Obviously, **primavera** would require a full **di**, but this preposition is not really used at all with this noun.

d'estate il tempo è bello = *in summer the weather is fine*

quando d'inverno nevicata, accendiamo il fuoco = *when in winter it snows, we light the fire*

In some expressions, as the ones above, **di** is more commonly used, but preposition **in** could have also been used, and both forms would have been correct, as well.

An article is only used to indicate seasons when no event is related to them:

detesto l'autunno = *I hate (the) autumn*

i fiori sono simboli della primavera = *(the) flowers are symbols of (the) spring*

l'inverno giunse presto = *(the) winter came soon*

When adjectives are used, no special rule is required:

i lunghi mesi invernali = *the long winter months*

il clima autunnale è grigio e piovoso = *the autumn weather is dull and grey*

(notice that **clima** is a masculine noun, despite the **...a** inflection)

le vacanze estive sono sempre troppo corte = *(the) summer holidays are always too short*

7.3

YEARS & CENTURIES

NOTE

before you go any further, be sure to master Italian numbers; you might wish to check again [paragraph 3.1](#).
Some sentences also use compound prepositions, so if you are in doubt check again [paragraph 5.2](#).

YEARS

In Italian years are pronounced as if they were simple numbers:

1963 *nineteen sixty-three* **millenovecentosessantatré** *(one thousand nine hundred and sixty-three)*

1500 *fifteen hundred* **millecinquecento** *(one thousand five hundred)*

1701 *seventeen hundred and one* **(millesettecentouno)** *one thousand seven hundred and one*

...and so on.

Unlike English, Italian years need a definite article, because they are referred to the word **anno** (= year).

il 1950 (read **il millenovecentocinquanta**) = *nineteen fifty*

nel 1950 = *in nineteen fifty*

dal 1950 = *from (or as of) nineteen fifty*

fino al 1950 = *until or through nineteen fifty*

fra il 1950 e il 1960 = *between nineteen fifty and nineteen sixty*

When a month is referred to a specific year, the latter needs an article, unlike the English form:

il maggio del 1963 = *May 1963*
nel dicembre del 1995 = *in December 1995*
dal febbraio del '48 = *as of February '48*

Sometimes, when the year might be mistaken with a number, the word **anno** is used:
l'anno 2000 (read **l'anno duemila**) = *year two thousand*
nell'anno 2 = *in year 2*
dall'anno 500 = *as of (or from) year 500*

CENTURIES

The Italian word for century is **secolo** (vowel **e** has been accented for mere tutorial reasons). When writing a specific ordinal number before this word, usually roman numbers are used (see [paragraph 3.2](#)). Also western numbers can be used, but a roman numeral is always considered a more elegant choice. If you don't feel confident with roman numbers, check [appendix 1](#).
il XIV secolo (read **il quattordicesimo secolo**) = *the 14th century*
nel XX secolo (read **nel ventesimo secolo**) = *in the 20th century*

The English forms *BC* (*Before Christ*) and *AD* (*Anno Domini* = Latin for "in the Year of the Lord") correspond to Italian forms **aC** (**avanti Cristo**) and **dC** (**dopo Cristo** = *after Christ*).

Only when two or more centuries are mentioned, the numeral part may come after the word **secolo**:
nel I secolo aC e nel III secolo dC = *in the 1st century BC and in the 3rd century AD*
may be turned into
nei secoli I aC e III dC = *literally in the centuries 1st BC and 3rd AD*

7.4

DATES

Italian dates are always in the following standard:

- day, always spelled in western numbers
- month, spelled either with letters (abbreviated or in full length) or with numbers (western or roman)
- year, spelled either in full length or by the last two digits

Separators are more often hyphens (-) or dots (. or ·), but backslashes (/) are also common, or no separator at all.

A few examples:

3 · 5 · 1970 = *May 3rd, 1970* (...never March 5th!)

1 gen 1990 = *January 1st, 1990*

2 - XII - 65 = *December 2nd, 1965*

Unlike English dates, Italian ones need a definite article, referred to the word **giorno** (= *day*). As all articles, they require a phonetical match with the number of the day (the first word following the article).

Another important difference is that in Italian date numbers are cardinal, not ordinal as in English:

il 25 aprile (read **il venticinque aprile**) = *April 25th* (or *on April 25th*)

dal 7 giugno (read **dal sette giugno**) = *as of June 7th*

Only number 1 may be read in both ways:

l'1 maggio (read **l'uno maggio**) = *May 1st* (or *on May 1st*)

can also be turned into

il 1° maggio (read **il primo maggio**) = *May 1st* (or *on May 1st*)

Notice how in this case a roman number is never used.

The cardinal number is more common when the month is followed by a year, in a full date:

1.12.1955 would be **l'uno dicembre millenovecentocinquantacinque**

but

1.12 would more often be **il primo dicembre**

Anyway, both forms are correct in either case.

Quite often, the simple preposition **di** (*of*) is used between number and month:

il 24 settembre = *September 24th* (or *on September 24th*)

can also be

il 24 di settembre = *the 24th of September* (or *on the 24th of September*)

In official or bureaucratic papers, dates may be read by their numbers:

23.8.97 could sound as **ventitré otto novantasette**

7.5

WHAT TIME IS IT ?

The expression *what time is it?* in Italian is **che ore sono?** (literally "*which hours are they?*"), but also the singular form **che ora è?** is used.

Italian hours always need a definite article, referring to the noun **ora** (*hour*), which is though usually omitted.

l'una	<i>one o'clock</i>
le due	<i>two o'clock</i>
le tre	<i>three o'clock</i>
.....
le dodici	<i>twelve o'clock</i>

It should be noticed how the article is always plural, because the full expressions would be "*the two hours*", "*the three hours*", and so on; only *one o'clock* is singular. All forms are obviously feminine, because the noun **ora** to which they refer is feminine too.

Italian can use both the 12-hour format and the 24-hour format, the latter being more formal (used in timetables, or in official speech, etc.).

le tredici	<i>one o'clock PM</i>
le quattordici	<i>two o'clock PM</i>
le quindici	<i>three o'clock PM</i>
.....
le ventiquattro	<i>twelve o'clock PM</i>

A practical rule to convert the 24-hour format into the 12-hour format is to subtract 2 from the hour, and then 10:

21:00 **21-2 = 19**, then **19-10 = 9** **9:00 PM**

In common speech, though, the 12-hour format is much more commonly used; the "AM" or "PM" specification is usually omitted, since the context of the sentence will provide enough elements to understand which of the two is the right one.

Should the time be possibly mistaken, the hour can be followed by the expressions **antemeridiane** (= *antemeridian, AM*) or **pomeridiane** (= *postmeridian, PM*). But in common speech and in most texts more common expressions take the place of these "official" ones:

di mattina or **del mattino** (= *in the morning*), from 4 or 5 AM to 12 AM

di pomeriggio or **del pomeriggio** (= *in the afternoon*), from 1 PM to 5 PM (or 6 PM)

di sera (= *in the evening*), from 6 or 7 PM to 11 PM

di notte (= *at night*), , from midnight to 2 or 3 AM

Notice how some forms may use either simple preposition **di**, or the relevant compound preposition, as an alternative. The form **di mattina** has **del mattino** as an alternative (**mattina** is feminine, **mattino** is masculine, but both nouns mean *morning*).

le dieci di mattina (or **le dieci del mattino**) = *ten o'clock AM*

le due di pomeriggio or **le quattordici** = *two o'clock PM*

le dieci di sera or **le ventidue** = *ten o'clock PM*

le due di notte = *two o'clock AM*

Obviously, time limits are not too strict:

le quattro del mattino (*4 o'clock AM*) could also be **le quattro di notte**

le sei di pomeriggio (*6 o'clock PM*) could also be **le sei di sera**

etc. etc.

Since hours require a plural article, also verb tenses need to be in plural form:

sono le cinque = *it's five o'clock*

sono le quindici = *it's three o'clock PM*

sono le cinque = *it's five o'clock*

...BUT

è l'una = *it's one o'clock*

Due to the need of a definite article, only compound preposition are used:

dalle due alle quattro = *from two to four*

all'una = *at one o'clock*

sono tornato alle dieci = *I came back at ten o'clock*

The word **ora** (literally *hour*, but whose meaning corresponds to English *o'clock*) is seldom used, either in case the hour might be mistaken with a different numerical category, or to give emphasis to the expression:

il treno parte alle ore quattordici = *the train leaves at two o'clock PM*

la bomba esplose alle ore sedici in punto = *the bomb exploded at four o'clock PM sharp*

But omitting the noun, both sentences would be perfectly correct all the same.

The last sentence also shows how the expression **in punto** corresponds to English *sharp* (referred to an hour).

FRACTIONS OF THE HOUR

When mentioning fractions of hours, the terms *minutes* (in Italian: **minuti**) is usually omitted.

The English form *past* is translated **e** (= *and*):

le cinque e venti = *twenty (minutes) past five*

le quindici e cinque = *five (minutes) past three PM*

The English form *to* is translated **meno** (= *less*):

le otto meno dieci = *ten to eight*

le tre meno cinque = *five to three*

In Italian, the form "e" can be used all round the hour:

le sette e quaranta = *ten to eight*

le due e cinquantanove = *two fifty-nine (one minute to three)*

The form "meno" instead is only used for a time length of twenty minutes or less:

le nove meno cinque = *five to nine*

le tre meno venti = *twenty to three*



So **7:50** could be either **le sette e cinquanta** (more formal) or **le otto meno dieci** (more colloquial).
Instead **4:35** would always be **le quattro e trentacinque**.

A very colloquial form is also **mancano minuti alle**, which uses the verb **mancare** = *to lack*, with the meaning of "a few minutes (are lacking) to reach the given hour":

sono le sette meno dieci = *it's ten to seven*

mancano dieci minuti alle sette = *it's ten minutes to seven*

sono le due meno cinque = *it's five to two*

mancano cinque minuti alle due = *it's five minutes to two*

sono le dieci meno uno = *it's one to ten*

manca un minuto alle dieci = *it's one minute to ten*

Unlike the verb **essere** in the previous form, here **mancare** refers to the number of minutes, not to the hour: for this reason the last sentence above needs a singular inflection (**manca**), since **un minuto** (= *one minute*) is singular.

When using this colloquial form, the word **minuti** (or **minuto** if singular) must be used.

This form exists also without a verb:

mancano dieci minuti alle sette = *it's ten (minutes) to seven*

dieci minuti alle sette = *ten (minutes) to seven*

mancano cinque minuti alle due = *it's five (minutes) to two*

cinque minuti alle due = *five (minutes) to two*

When the time fraction is **...:15**, **...:30** or **...:45** minutes, the expressions **un quarto** (*a quarter*), **mezza** (*half*) and **tre quarti** (*three quarters*) are commonly used:



le cinque e un quarto = *a quarter past five*

le otto e mezza = *half past eight* (notice the feminine form **mezza**, related to **ora** = *hour*)

le due e tre quarti (or **le tre meno un quarto**) = *two forty-five* (or *a quarter to three*)

le sei meno un quarto = *a quarter to six*

Also in this case it is possible to use the form **manca un quarto alle**

5:45 = **un quarto alle cinque** (literally *a quarter to five*), though other colloquial alternatives could be **le cinque e tre quarti**, or **le sei meno un quarto**, while the "official" form (in timetables, etc.) would be **le cinque e quarantacinque**.

Since **un quarto** is singular, notice how the verb inflection too (**manca**) is singular.

MEZZOGIORNO, LA MEZZA, MEZZANOTTE

The Italian word for *mid-day* is **mezzogiorno**, and it can be used in place of **le dodici** (12 AM); unlike the latter, **mezzogiorno** does not need an article, and since it is singular, it requires singular verb tenses.

Also fractions of the hour can be referred to **mezzogiorno**:

è mezzogiorno = *it's mid-day*

sono le dodici = *it's twelve o'clock*

partiranno a mezzogiorno e venti = *they will leave at twenty (minutes) past twelve*

partiranno alle dodici e venti = *they will leave at twenty (minutes) past twelve*

era mezzogiorno e tre quarti = *it was twelve forty-five*

erano le dodici e tre quarti = *it was twelve forty-five*

sarà mezzogiorno meno un quarto = *it might be a quarter to twelve*

saranno le dodici meno un quarto = *it might be a quarter to twelve*

As you see, **mezzogiorno** rejects the definite article, thus requiring simple prepositions, and is singular; **le dodici** instead needs the article, therefore it requires compound prepositions, and is a plural form.

The specific time **12:30** is commonly referred to as **la mezza** (*the half*), but it is only used alone.

è quasi la mezza = *it's almost half past twelve*

torno da scuola alla mezza = *I come back from school at half past twelve*

The Italian for *midnight* is **mezzanotte**, and it is often preferred to **le dodici** (12 PM), since the latter is more often used for 12 AM.

Also either alone or in fractions of the hour.

Also **mezzanotte** can be used with fractions of the hour; as **mezzogiorno**, it rejects an article, it needs simple prepositions, and behaves as a singular noun.

è mezzanotte = *it's midnight*

tornò a mezzanotte e cinque = *he/she came back at five (minutes) past midnight*

fino a mezzanotte meno un quarto = *until a quarter to midnight*

da mezzanotte alle due = *from midnight to two o'clock*

7.6

TIME ADVERBS & DURATION FORMS

Before introducing duration forms, it is useful to memorize a few adverbs related to time, some of which have already been used in the previous exercises: try to learn them, little by little, as they occur quite often, both in texts and in common speech.

oggi	<i>today</i>
domani	<i>tomorrow</i>
dopodomani	<i>the day after tomorrow</i>
ieri	<i>yesterday</i>
l'altroieri	<i>the day before yesterday</i> (this Italian adverb requires a definite article)
adesso	<i>now</i>
ora	<i>now</i> (remember that, as a noun, ora means <i>hour</i>)
spesso	<i>often</i>
frequentemente	<i>frequently</i>
qualche volta	<i>sometimes</i> (literally: " <i>some time</i> ")
talvolta	<i>sometimes</i>
di rado	<i>seldom</i>
raramente	<i>rarely</i>
prima	<i>before</i>
dopo	<i>after</i>
durante	<i>during</i>
sempre	<i>always</i>
mai	<i>never</i>

These adverbs follow the same scheme as adjectives: they may be used either before or after the main subject. Which of the two positions depends on which part of the sentence is more emphasized, since in Italian language the last part of the sentence usually carries more "stress":

uso molto spesso il computer = *I use the computer very often* (emphasis on **the computer**)

uso il computer molto spesso = *I use the computer very often* (emphasis on **very often**)

di rado lavoro = *I seldom work* (slight emphasis on **work**)

lavoro di rado = *I seldom work* (**seldom** is more emphasized)

The two adverbs **sempre** and **mai**, instead, are used according to a further rule, which will be the subject of a future paragraph. By now, simply memorize their meaning.

DURATION FORMS

The simple preposition **da** (or its compound, depending on whether the subject requires a definite article or not) is used to express the starting time of a duration, thus translating several English forms:

- the form *as of ...*:

da giovedì = *as of thursday*

da oggi = *as of today*

dal 13 maggio = *as of May 13th*

- the form *since ...*:

da giugno del 1958 = *since June 1958*

dall'altroieri = *since the day before yesterday*

da mercoledì scorso = *since last wednesday*

da quel giorno = *since that day*

- the form *from ...*, when followed by *to ...* (see below for the second part of this expression):

dal 1975 al 1980 = *from 1975 to 1980*

da settembre a ottobre = *from September to October*

dalle cinque alle nove = *from five (o'clock) to nine*

da adesso in poi = *from now on*

The simple preposition **a ...** indicates the end of a time length.

Remember that when **a** is followed by a vowel (especially another **a**), it changes to **ad**.

This preposition translates English *to*, when introduced by *from* (same case as above):

da lunedì a domenica = *from monday to sunday*

dal lunedì alla domenica = *from (every) monday to (every) sunday*

dalle cinque alle sette = *from five (o'clock) to seven*

da maggio ad agosto = *from May to August* (notice **ad** instead of **a**, due to **agosto**)

But, as explained in [paragraph 7.5](#), the same preposition **a** is also used for stating an hour, as English *at*:

alle sette e mezza = *at half past seven*

alle nove meno dieci = *at ten to nine*

all'una e venti = *at twenty past one*

a mezzanotte = *at midnight*

When a time length has no definite origin, and only the finishing time is stated, **fino a ...** is used to express the latter, translating several English forms:

- the form *until* (or *till*):

fino a sabato = *until saturday*

fino a domani = *until tomorrow*

fino alle cinque = *until five o'clock*

- the form *up to ...* (also generally used with numbers, measures, etc.):

fino al 1950 = *up to 1950*

fino ad ora = *up to now* (notice **ad** instead of **a**, because of **ora**)

fino al quindici = *up to number fifteen*

fino a sei metri = *up to six metres*

fino a qui = *up to here*

- the form *through ...*:

catalogo dei prezzi fino al 31 giugno = *price catalogue through June 31st*

questa tessera è valida fino al 2001 = *this card is valid through 2001*

Sometimes, when the deadline is not a given day but a month, a year, etc. (as in the second sample sentence), the adjective **tutto** = *all* is added to the form (**fino a tutto ...**), to indicate that the month or year mentioned is included within the period. Therefore, the above-mentioned sentence would often be:

questa tessera è valida fino a tutto il 2001

The English preposition *for* ..., expressing duration, is translated by preposition **per** ...:

per cinque settimane = *for five weeks*

ho lavorato lì per cinque giorni = *I have worked there for five days*

l'ingresso è gratis per tutto il 1995 = *the entrance is free for the whole (year) 1995*

In expressing time length, English always uses *for* + the duration of the action, but Italian also uses another form: **da** + the duration of the action.

This is the only tricky bit in translating these forms into Italian, so be sure to focus it well.

lavoro da due anni = *I have been working for two years*

non vedo Paolo da cinque mesi = *I haven't seen Paul for five months*

la radio non funziona da due settimane = *the radio has not been working for two weeks*

piove da due giorni = *it has been raining for two days*

In Italian, this form is rather different from the previous one, although it might seem similar in English:

ho lavorato per cinque settimane = *I have worked for five weeks*

this sentence mainly gives stress to the time length of the action, and little importance is given to *when* the action started;

lavoro da cinque settimane = *I have been working for five weeks*

the English form gives stress to the fact that the action has taken place habitually for the given time (i.e. *"I have worked every day for a time length of five weeks"*), while the Italian form carries a meaning of *"I have been working every day starting from five weeks ago"*: this is why preposition **da** is used, as if to say *"from a starting moment, five weeks ago"*.

So, as a practical rule, preposition **per** gives a sense of duration in time as any similar English form, while **da** always has a meaning of *"time elapsed from that moment"*, either referring to the future (translating English *from, as of*, etc. as explained in an earlier part of this paragraph), or in the past, as in this case, though in English it has to be turned into a different form.

Also notice that when preposition **da** is used for English *since*, the Italian tense always refers to the latest moment of the action, as if looking at the action back in time, while the English tense refers to the starting moment of the action, or anyway to an earlier time than its end:

non vedo Paolo dal 1975 = *I have not seen Paul since 1975*

vedo (present tense) is referred to "now", while *have seen* (present perfect tense) refers to "1975"

dormo da due ore = *I have been sleeping for two hours*

dormo (present tense) is referred to "now", while *have been* refers to "two hours ago"

Also when the action happens in the past, there is a difference between the Italian tense and the English one:

non vedevo Paolo dal 1975 = *I had not seen Paul since 1975*

vedevo (imperfect tense) is referred to the time of the sentence, while *had seen* (present perfect tense) refers to an earlier time ("1975")

dormivo da due ore = *I had been sleeping for two hours*

dormivo is referred to the time of the sentence, while *had been* refers to an earlier time ("two hours before")

ADVERBS *prima, dopo, durante*

The English adverb *before* is translated **prima**. In Italian it is always followed by preposition **di** when introducing a noun or a date; instead, it is followed by conjunction **che** (*that*) when introducing a subordinate clause, requiring subjunctive tenses.

This page only focuses the first case (**prima di** ...):

prima di giugno = *before June*

prima del 1970 = *before 1970*

prima di domani = *before tomorrow*

lunedì viene prima di martedì = *monday comes before tuesday*

The same adverb may also translate *before* in sequences (almost suggesting a progression in time):

il sette viene prima dell'otto = *number seven comes before number eight*

la M viene prima della N = *(letter) M comes before (letter) N*

The adverb *after* is translated **dopo**. In Italian it is usually not followed by any preposition (although **di** is needed in a very limited number of situations, which will be explained in a future paragraph).

dopo giugno = *after June*

dopo il 1970 = *after 1970*

dopo i fatti di ieri = *after yesterday's events*

martedì viene dopo lunedì = *tuesday comes after monday*

Also in this case, **dopo** can be used for sequences, as well:

l'otto viene dopo il sette = *number eight comes after number seven*

la F viene dopo la E = *(letter) F comes after (letter) E*

The adverb *during ...* is translated **durante ...** (without any preposition), and it is used in the same way as in English:

durante la vacanza = *during the holiday*

durante l'anno = *during the year*

abbiamo mangiato il popcorn durante la partita = *we eat the popcorn during the match*

8.1

PERSONAL PRONOUNS USED AS A DIRECT OBJECT

In [paragraph 4.1](#) we have already met personal pronouns as subjects of a sentence.

When these pronouns are used in other cases, they work in a different way according to which verbal tense is used.

At first sight they will probably appear complicated, but if you follow the page step by step they will turn out to be easier to learn than you might think.

The standard personal pronouns used as direct object are:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	me	<i>me</i>	noi	<i>us</i>
2nd person	te	<i>you (singular)</i>	voi	<i>you (plural)</i>
3rd person	lui	<i>him</i>	loro	<i>them</i>
	lei	<i>her</i>		
	esso	<i>it (masculine)</i>		
	essa	<i>it (feminine)</i>		

You will notice how only some of them change. There is a curious coincidence between the Italian and English form for the 1st singular person (**me**), although be sure to pronounce it "*meh*", with a "narrow" e sound (i.e. acute e, like "*may*" omitting the final "y").

But for each of these pronouns, Italian also has a parallel form, somewhat shorter than the previous one, which is used either as an individual word (not bound to the following word) or as a suffix (bound at the end of the word). I will therefore refer to these ones respectively as "short" forms or as suffixes, according to how they behave, while "full" forms will be the ones already mentioned (**me, te, lui**, etc.):

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	mi (for me)	<i>me</i>	ci (for noi)	<i>us</i>
2nd person	ti (for te)	<i>you (singular)</i>	vi (for voi)	<i>you (plural)</i>
3rd person	lo (for lui and esso)	<i>him, it</i>	li (for loro)	<i>them (masculine)</i>
	la (for lei and essa)	<i>her, it</i>	le (for loro)	<i>them (feminine)</i>

Notice how "short" forms (or suffixes) do no longer make a difference between masculine/feminine and neutre genders. As said in earlier paragraphs, Italian language is affected by this difference very little.

USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS AS DIRECT OBJECT

At first, we shall focus the use of pronouns as direct objects.

INFINITIVE

As a general rule, infinitive tense uses the suffix pattern, dropping the last vowel of the verb:

vedere = *to see, to watch*

vedermi = *to see me*

vederci = *to see us*

vederti = *to see you*

vedervi = *to see you, plural*

vederlo = *to see him*

vederli = *to see them (masculine)*

vederla = *to see her*

vederle = *to see them (feminine)*

This same pattern is used with any other verb:

mangiare = to eat - **mangiarlo** = to eat it
salutare = to greet - **salutarvi** = to greet you (plural)
notare = to notice - **notarli** = to notice them (masculine)
capire = to understand - **capirci** = to understand us

It is also possible to use the other form, not as a suffix though, by simply placing the pronoun after the verb. This gives the pronoun a somewhat stronger emphasis:

vedere me = to see me	vedere noi = to see us
vedere te = to see you	vedere voi = to see you, plural
vedere lui = to see him	vedere loro = to see them
vedere lei = to see her	

These expressions have a sense of "to see specifically me (or you, etc.), not somebody else".

To summarize direct object pronouns used with the infinitive tense:

common form

emphatic form

infinitive-suffix

infinitive + pronoun

INDICATIVE TENSES

All indicative tenses require the pronoun to be used *before* the verb.

mi vedo = I see myself (literally: I see me)
ti vedo = I see you
lo vedo = I see him
la vedo = I see her
vi vedo = I see you (plural)
li vedo = I see them (masculine)
le vedo = I see them (feminine)

The same pattern is valid with any person:

mi vedi = you see me
ti vedono = they see you
lo vediamo = we see him
la vede = he/she sees her
li vedono = they see them
ci vede = he/she sees us
ci vedete = you see us (plural)

As for infinitive discussed above, also indicative tenses may use a full pronoun *after* the verb, but this will give specific emphasis to the pronoun:

mi vedi = you see me
may also be turned into
vedi me (meaning you see *me*, not somebody else)

ci vedete = you see us
may also be turned into
vedete noi etc. etc.

In these cases, even more stress may be obtained by specifying the subject's own pronoun:

mi vedi = you see me (no emphasis)

vedi me = you see me (strong emphasis on "me")

tu vedi me = you see me (everything is emphasized)

It should be noticed that the "short" form of personal pronouns (**mi**, **ti**, etc.) is also used for reflexive forms, with a meaning of *myself*, *yourself*, etc.

Reflexive forms will be dealt with in paragraph 8.3, so for the time being we shall disregard this aspect, using "short" pronouns only as already explained above (i.e. *me*, *you*, *him*, etc.).

All patterns shown in the examples above (in present tense) may be used with any other indicative tense:

ti vedevo = *I saw you*

lo vedrò = *I'll see him*

la vidi = *I saw her*

mi hanno visto = *they have seen me*

ti avevano visto = *they had seen you*

etc. etc.

So, to summarize direct object pronouns for any indicative tense:

common form

"short" pronoun + verb

emphatic form

verb + "full" pronoun

GENDER AND NUMBER OF PAST PARTICIPLE

Discussing compound tenses in previous paragraphs, it had been stated that the Italian past participle (in the above case, **visto**) is gender- and number-insensitive when the auxiliary verb is **avere**, while it is gender- and number-sensitive when the auxiliary verb is **essere** (as required by many intransitive verbs).

When using personal pronouns as a direct object, though, also participles supported by verb **avere** require a match with gender and number of the pronoun.

Focus the following examples:

ho visto un treno = *I have seen a train*

ho visto quattro treni = *I have seen four trains*

ho visto una farfalla = *I have seen a butterfly*

ho visto tre farfalle = *I have seen three butterflies*

...**BUT**

lo ho visto = *I have seen it* (masculine in Italian)

li ho visti = *I have seen them* (masculine)

la ho vista = *I have seen it* (feminine in Italian)

le ho viste = *I have seen them* (feminine)

In the first group of sentences, participle **visto** is in masculine singular form ("standard" form), gender- and number-insensitive because supported by auxiliary verb **avere**.

In the second group of sentences, the same participle becomes gender- and number-sensitive, because personal pronouns are used as objects.

Obviously, this rule applies to every other person:

hai visto un amico = *you have seen a friend*

lo hai visto = *you have seen him*

hanno visto una mostra = *they have seen an exhibition*

la hanno vista = *they have seen it* (neutre turns feminine in Italian)

avevamo visto molte nuvole = *we had seen many clouds*

le avevamo viste = *we had seen them* (feminine)

avranno visto la televisione = *they might have watched the TV*

la avranno vista = *they might have watched it* (feminine)

ha visto molti film = *he/she has seen many movies*

li ha visti = *he/she has seen them* (masculine)

avevo visto le indicazioni = *I had seen the notices*
le avevo viste = *I had seen them* (feminine)

PRONOUNS *LO* AND *LA* FOLLOWED BY INFLECTIONS OF VERB *VERE*

In the same way that definite articles **la** and **lo** are shortened (elision) by dropping their last vowel and taking an apostrophe when followed by a vowel (i.e. **l'occhio**, **l'aria**, **l'edera**, **l'uovo**, etc.), also pronouns spelled in the same way undergo the same elision when they are followed by inflections of verb **avere** (almost every inflection of this verb starts with **a...**). Also when verbal inflections start with **ha...**, the elision occurs because **h** is mute, considered as a mere graphic sign, simply to tell the verb from other similar words spelled without an **h** (see again [paragraph 4.4](#) about this topic).

As a general rule:

- the change always occurs when **la** comes either before **a...** or **ha...**:
la abbiamo = **l'abbiamo**
la hai = **l'hai**
la hanno = **l'hanno**
- the change might occur when **lo** comes either before **a...** or **ha...**, but you may also leave things as they are (as a free choice):
lo avevate is correct, but also **l'avevate** is OK
lo hai, but also **l'hai**
- no change occurs when any other personal pronoun (**li**, **le**, **mi**, **ti**, **ci**, **vi**) comes either before **a...** or before **ha...**

Therefore, some of the sentences given in the previous example (see [above](#)) need a slight "retouch":

lo hai visto

is correct, but it can also be spelled (and pronounced)

l'hai visto

la hanno vista

must be spelled (and pronounced)

l'hanno vista

la avranno vista

must be spelled (and pronounced)

l'avranno vista

Instead, other ones do not change, according to the general rules explained above.

Although it might appear complicated, as a final note to this page I would like to show a comparison between a transitive verb supported by auxiliary verb **avere**, and an intransitive verb supported by **essere**. The sample verbs will be **vedere** (*to see, to watch*), and **tornare** (*to return, to come back*).

As usual, focus the examples before the discussion:

(egli / ella) ha visto
he/she has seen

(egli) è tornato
he/it has come back

(ella) è tornata
she has come back

(essi / esse) hanno visto
they have seen (masc. and fem.)

(essi) sono tornati
they have come back (masc.)

(esse) sono tornate
they have come back (fem.)

You can easily notice how the past participle **visto** is gender- and number-insensitive, because supported by verb **avere** (which is transitive).

Past participle **tornato**, instead, supported by verb **essere**, needs to match the gender and number of the sentence's subject.

Now let's see what happens to **visto** by using a personal pronoun as direct object (obviously we cannot give **tornato** a direct object, being this verb intransitive).

lo ha visto
he/she has seen him/it

l'ha vista (= **la ha vista** after the elision)
he/she has seen her

li ha visti
he has seen them (masc.)

le ha viste
he has seen them (fem.)

Can you notice the big difference?

Now **visto** is no longer insensitive, though what it will match is the gender and number of the **object** (i.e. of the pronoun), not the subject's.

This is a very important concept, which should be focused and understood before going any further, to avoid getting mixed up with the two situations.

Summarizing once again, past participles supported by **avere** only become gender- and number-sensitive when the object is a personal pronoun: in this case they match the object (i.e. the same personal pronoun). In any other case they use the "standard" form (masculine singular). The past participle of intransitive verbs requiring **essere**, instead, always has to match the subject's own gender and number. Since these verbs are intransitive, they will never have personal pronouns as direct object (nor any other direct object at all).

8.2

PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN DATIVE CASE

Dative (from the Latin *dare* = *to give*) is the case which indicates the receiver of an action ("*you gave something to me*", or "*you gave me something*"), either materially or in a metaphoric sense ("*he tells something to you*", "*you buy him something*", etc.).

As for direct objects, Italian has two possible ways of translating dative: by using a "full" personal pronoun, or by using a "short" form.

The "full" pronouns are the same as direct object's ones, but to show dative case they must be introduced by simple preposition **a** (or **ad** if followed by a vowel), meaning *to*:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	a me	<i>to me</i>	a noi	<i>to us</i>
2nd person	a te	<i>to you (singular)</i>	a voi	<i>to you (plural)</i>
3rd person	a lui	<i>to him</i>	a loro	<i>to them</i>
	a lei	<i>to her</i>		
	ad esso	<i>to it (masculine)</i>		
	ad essa	<i>to it (feminine)</i>		

The "short" pronouns too are the same as direct object's ones, except for 3rd persons, which have different ones.

These forms do no longer require preposition **a**:

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	mi	<i>to me</i>	ci	<i>to us</i>
2nd person	ti	<i>to you (singular)</i>	vi	<i>to you (plural)</i>
3rd person	gli	<i>to him, to it</i>	loro (no change)	<i>to them</i>
	le	<i>to her, to it</i>		

The 3rd plural form **loro** does not behave as all the other short forms: the latter are sometimes used as suffixes, and sometimes used before the verb; **loro** instead always behaves as the "full" pronouns, following the verb. Anyway, this will be explained in detail.

Since many of the pronouns used for dative case are in common with the ones used as direct object, according to the action described by the verb they will either mean *me* or *to me*, *you* or *to you*, *him* or *to him*, etc. etc.

USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN DATIVE CASE

Their use is very similar to direct object.

INFINITIVE

As a general rule, the infinitive tense uses the "short" pronouns as suffixes, dropping the last vowel of the tense's inflection (vowel **e**):

regalare = <i>to give</i> (a present, a gift)	
regalarmi = <i>to give (to) me</i>	regalarci = <i>to give (to) us</i>
regalarti = <i>to give (to) you</i>	regalarvi = <i>to give (to) you, plural</i>
regalargli = <i>to give him</i>	regalare loro = <i>to give them</i>
regalarle = <i>to give her</i>	

The direct object of the sentence always *follows* the pronoun suffix:

regalarti** una penna** = *to give you a pen*
regalarle** un anello** = *to give her a ring*
regalarvi** un'automobile nuova** = *to give you a new car*
regalare **loro un libro** = *to give them a book*

Notice how only **loro** does not bind to the verb because, as previously mentioned, this pronoun is only used as a "full" form, following the verb not as a suffix, although it belongs to the "short" pronouns.

The same forms shown above can be used with any other verb:

dare = *to give* - **darg**li**** = *to give (to) him*
passare = *to pass* - **passar**le**** = *to pass (to) her*
comprare = *to buy* - **comprar**vi**** = *to buy (for) you (plural)*
scrivere = *to write* - **scrivere **loro**** = *to write (to) them*

Obviously, only verbs who express a "giving" action would require dative case. So, according to the verb, you can use the same pronoun suffixes as dative or as direct object:

dare = *to give* - **darc**i** una penna** = *to give us a pen* (-**ci** is dative)
vedere = *to see* - **veder**ci**** = *to see us* (-**ci** is direct object)
scrivere = *to write* - **sciverv**i** una lettera** = *to write you (plural) a letter* (-**vi** is dative)
ringraziare = *to thank* - **ringraziar**vi** per il regalo** = *to thank you (plural) for the present* (-**vi** is direct object)

3rd persons, instead, have different "short" forms, according to whether they are used for dative or for direct object:

dare = *to give* - **darg**li** una penna** = *to give him a pen* (-**gli** can only be dative)
vedere = *to see* - **veder**lo**** = *to see him/it* (-**lo** can only be direct object)
scrivere = *to write* - **sciver**le** una lettera** = *to write her a letter* (-**le** can only be dative)
ringraziare = *to thank* - **ringraziar**la** per l'invito** = *to thank her for the invitation* (-**la** can only be direct object)
comprare = *to buy* - **comprare **loro** un regalo** = *to buy them a present* (**loro** is dative)
rimproverare = *to reproach* - **rimproverar**li** per il ritardo** = *to reproach them for the delay* (-**li** can only be direct object)

For the sake of precision, it should be said that **loro** may sometimes act also a direct object, see previous [paragraph 8.1](#), though with an emphatic sense (meaning "right them, not somebody else"), sparingly used. So in most cases **loro** acts as a dative.

Some verbs which in English do not require a dative in Italian do so, since they are followed by preposition **a**, although they do not express a "giving" action.

A few examples:

chiedere a = to ask (somebody)

domandare a = to ask (somebody)

credere a = to believe in (somebody, something)

portare a = to bring / take to (somebody), to fetch (somebody)

prendere a = to take from

rubare a = to steal from (somebody)

strappare a = to grab, snatch from (somebody, something)

togliere a = to take away from (somebody, something)

In most cases, this preposition **a** is not an actual dative, but simply a reminiscence of Latin preposition *a* (= *from*) which has survived in Italian. However, in the case a verb is followed by preposition **a** it requires the same pronouns as in the "real" dative case.

chiedermi = to ask me

domandarti = to ask you

credergli = to believe in him

prenderle = to take from her

rubarci = to steal from us

strapparvi = to snatch from you [plural]

togliere loro = to take away from them

EMPHATIC FORM

Also for dative case it is possible to use the other form, i.e. the "full" pronoun after the verb, though this requires the use of preposition **a**.

This form gives much more emphasis to the pronoun:

regalare a me = to give to me (meaning "to me, not to others")

regalare a te = to give to you

regalare a loro = to give to them

Notice how **loro** never binds to the verb, but only in this last case it requires preposition **a**.

Without the preposition **a**, these pronouns would indicate a direct object.

In this emphasized form, direct object has to be used **before** the pronoun:

regalare la penna a me = to give the pen to me (meaning "to me, not to others")

regalare un libro a te = to give a book to you

regalare qualcosa a loro = to give something to them

So, to summarize dative case for the infinitive tense:

common form

emphatic form

without
direct object

infinitive-suffix

infinitive + **a** + "full" pronoun

with
direct object

infinitive-suffix + direct object

infinitive + direct object + **a** + "full" pronoun

INDICATIVE TENSES

All indicative tenses require the "short" pronouns **before** the verb.

mi regalo = I give (to) myself (literally: I give me)

ti regalo = I give (to) you

gli regalo = I give (to) him

le regalo = I give (to) her

vi regalo = I give (to) you (plural)

regalo loro = I give (to) them

Two observations:

- **ci** (*to us*) cannot be used with the 1st singular person, exactly as it happens for direct object (see previous paragraph), because it would mean "I give (to) us", which is nonsense, but it can be normally used with all other persons:
ci regali = *you give (to) us*
ci regala = *he/she gives (to) us*
ci regalano = *they give (to) us*, etc...
- **loro** is always used after the verb, although it has the same meaning as the "short" pronoun forms.

Also indicative tenses may use the other form, i.e. a "full" pronoun, always **after** the verb, to give the pronoun a greater emphasis:

le regalo un libro = *I give her a book* (plain form, no emphasis)

...may also be turned into:

regalo un libro a lei (emphasis on **her**)

...but also into this other form:

a lei regalo un libro (emphasis on **her**)

Notice how in the first emphasized form, when "full" dative pronouns are used, the direct object (i.e. **un libro**) comes before the pronoun, meaning "*I give a book to her (not to somebody else)*".

The second form, instead, uses again the same "full" dative pronoun, but this time at the beginning of the sentence, with a meaning of "*I give a book to her (while I give others something else)*".

Here is another example:

gli scriverò una lettera = *I will write to him a letter* (no emphasis)

scriverò una lettera a lui, "*I will write a letter to him*" ("*...not to somebody else*")

a lui scriverò una lettera, again emphasis on "*to him*", meaning something like "*...instead to others I will simply talk*"

So, to summarize dative case for all indicative tenses:

	<u>common form</u>	<u>emphatic forms</u>
without direct object	"short" pronoun + verb	verb + a + "full" pronoun
with direct object	"short" pronoun + verb + direct object	verb + direct object + a + "full" pronoun <i>and, with different meaning,</i> a + "full" pronoun + verb + direct object

USING DATIVE AND OBJECT PRONOUNS IN THE SAME SENTENCE

Now let's try to put together in one same sentence a dative pronoun and a direct object one.

In such sentences, the dative pronoun always comes before the object one.

When this happens, all dative pronouns whose final vowel is **i** (**mi, ti, ci, vi**) turn it into **e** (**me, te, ce, ve**), while **gli, le** and **loro** all turn into **glie-**.

No change occurs to the object pronoun, which comes immediately after.

An example:

io rubo la bicicletta a te = *I steal the bicycle from you* (no pronoun, i.e. as in the emphatic form)

io ti rubo la bicicletta = *I steal from you the bicycle* (dative pronoun **ti** has been used)

io la rubo a te = *I steal it from you* (object pronoun **la** has been used)

io te la rubo = *I steal it from you* (**ti** has turned into **te** before **la**)

The full table of "dative + object" pronoun combinations is as follows:

dative + object = combination

dative + object = combination

<i>first person</i>	mi	+ lo	= me lo	ci	+ lo	= ce lo
	"	+ la	= me la	"	+ la	= ce la
	"	+ li	= me li	"	+ li	= ce li
	"	+ le	= me le	"	+ le	= ce le
<i>second person</i>	ti	+ lo	= te lo	vi	+ lo	= ve lo
	"	+ la	= te la	"	+ la	= ve la
	"	+ li	= te li	"	+ li	= ve li
	"	+ le	= te le	"	+ le	= ve le
<i>third person</i>	gli / le	+ lo	= glielo	loro	+ lo	= glielo
	" "	+ la	= gliela	"	+ la	= gliela
	" "	+ li	= glieli	"	+ li	= glieli
	" "	+ le	= glielle	"	+ le	= glielle

Here are more examples:

tu porti il giornale a noi = *you take the newspaper to us*

tu ce lo porti = *you take it to us*

noi regaliamo la penna a te = *we give the pen to you*

noi te la regaliamo = *we give it to you*

egli domanda l'ora a voi = *he asks the time to you*

egli ve la domanda = *he asks it to you*

io offro una birra a loro = *I offer a beer to them*

io gliela offro = *I offer it to them*

tu chiedi le chiavi a lui = *you ask him for the keys*

tu glielle chiedi = *you ask him for them*

If you find this pattern difficult, don't worry, it's a common feeling: one of the trickiest parts of the Italian grammar is to put together different pronouns in the same sentence.

As already explained in the previous [paragraph 8.1](#), when object pronouns are followed by a verb whose opening sound is similar to the last sound of the pronoun (i.e. -vowel vowel-), an elision occurs for phonetic reasons, and the pronoun takes an apostrophe:

te lo ho dato = *I gave it to you* becomes **te l'ho dato**

ve la offro = *I offer it to you* becomes **ve l'offro**

ce la apri? = *will you open it for us?* [note: present tense in Italian] becomes **ce l'apri?**

te li invieremo a casa = *we will send them to you at home* becomes **te l'invieremo a casa**

me le elencherete = *you will list them for me* becomes **me l'elencherete**

gliela ho rubata = *I stole it from him / her* becomes **gliel'ho rubata**

glieli ha comprati = *he / she bought them for him / her* becomes **gliel'ha comprati**

The elision may be omitted with plural pronouns **li**, **le**, but with singular ones **lo**, **la** or with compounds of **glie-** it is more correct to use it. In fact, the elision with plural pronouns might sometimes reduce the quantity of information expressed with the sentence:

te l'invieremo may be the contraction of each of the following:

te lo invieremo / te la invieremo = *we will send him / her / it to you*

te li invieremo / te le invieremo = *we will send them to you*

So omitting the elision with plural pronouns reduces the risk of misunderstanding.

Only trying again and again you will become confident with these pronoun combinations, but to do so you ought to know well all individual ones, both the object and the dative ones.

So the first step is to learn well the tables shown in [paragraph 8.1](#) and [8.2](#) (this page).

9.1

SUBJUNCTIVE

BASIC CONCEPTS AND PRESENT TENSE

Subjunctive tenses are not easy to handle for English speakers, simply because it is difficult to tell when these tenses are required. Subjunctive does not exist in English, with the only exception of the past tense used for the 1st singular person (*if I were you*).

Italian subjunctive has four tenses:

- **PRESENTE** (present)
- **IMPERFETTO** (past)

these are simple tenses, with their own inflections;

- **PASSATO** (perfect)
- **TRAPASSATO** (pluperfect)

these are compound tenses, respectively made of present subjunctive + past participle, and past subjunctive + past participle.

WHEN TO USE SUBJUNCTIVE

Subjunctive expresses several concepts; therefore, it is not left as a free choice, but has to be used when required:

- **uncertainty, doubt, possibility** (that something may happen or not)
I wonder whether you are there (= you may either be there or not)
it would be better if she returned (= she may have returned yet, or not)
it is useless for them to go there (= they may still either go there, or not)
I'm not sure that he can make it (= he may either make it or fail)
- **one's own personal judgement, comments, remarks**
it is better for you to go (in Italian this is turned into *it is better that you go*, see further on)
it is wise for them to study this subject
it is unfair that they blame you for this
it is nasty for them not to report this
- **wishing, hoping, one's own thoughts**
I thought that they might come (= it was my own consideration)
we hope that you may leave (= it is not sure you will be able to)
they didn't imagine that he would have failed (= it was their own consideration)
- **orders, demand**
I order that you come back (= an order is like a wish, until it comes true)
he wants you to go (in Italian this is turned into *he wants that you go*, see further on)
- **joy, sorrow, surprise, fear, anger** (personal feeling about somebody or something)
I'm happy that you phoned me
they regret that you did not come
I'm surprised that she is there
they fear that I might get into trouble
- **denying**
I deny that this is true
they denied that they were there
he denied that they might have come

One element in common for all these categories is that subjunctive is always used in subordinate clauses, introduced by a conjunction (more often *that*).

In Italian, the conjunction *that* is translated **che**.

When a subordinate clause expressing any of the above mentioned meanings is introduced by **che**, a subjunctive tense is needed.

This conjunction has also a number of compounds, which end with **...ché** (note the accented é). Each of them introduces a subordinate sentence, for which subjunctive is required:

affinché = *so that*

*I will return so that you **may** leave*

*lend me the brush, so that I **can** paint the wall*

benché = *although, despite*

*he left for Paris, although **he had** no money*

*despite the car **was** broken, I arrived in time*

perché = *in order to, in order for, so that*

*I came back in order for you **to see** me*

*he opened the window so that we **could take** a look inside*

(note that **perché** also means *why* and *because*, but with these shades of meaning subjunctive is not required)

purché = *provided that*

you can enter, provided that you wear a tie

*the show will take place, provided it **doesn't** rain*

a meno che = *unless*

*we will leave, unless you **change** your mind*

*you cannot stay here, unless you **are** a member*

prima che = *before*

*look at this before he **returns***

*let's go away before it **is** too late*

sebbene = *although* (same as **benché**)

*although he **was** ill, he came here*

*it's beautiful, although it **is** a bit expensive*

nonostante = *despite or notwithstanding* (same as **benché**)

*I did not listen to him, despite he **was asking** for help*

*despite the temperature **grew** hot, I liked the place*

Also the conjunction **se** = *if, whether* is always followed by a subjunctive tense, if the sentence introduces a conditional clause:

*if we **had** known, we would have gone away earlier*

*if I **were** rich, I wouldn't have to work so hard*

*had you **gone** there, you would have met him = [Italian form] if we had been at home, we would have met him*

*should they **come**, I'll prepare something special = [Italian form] if they come, I'll prepare something special*

However, since conditional tenses have not been introduced yet (they will be discussed in chapter 13), for the time being no Italian sentence referring to this particular case will be shown.

Do you think subjunctive is complicated? Don't worry, it's not only your impression: many Italians too find the use of subjunctive difficult to handle. Some people don't even use these tenses at all. But for the same reason, who is able to use subjunctive properly is considered a good speaker.

To use an indicative tense (or any other tense) when subjunctive is required, would not cause a misunderstanding of the sentence, but it would surely sound wrong.

It is finally time to face the first subjunctive inflections. The following tables show three regular verbs, each one belonging to a different conjugation: **lavare** = (1st, *to wash*), **prendere** (2nd, *to take*), and **aprire** (3rd, *to open*).

Although the use of subjunctive is difficult, compared to indicative tenses a simplification is that all three singular persons are identical in the present tense, and two of them are the same in the past (imperfect) tense.

CONGIUNTIVO PRESENTE (present subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
----- 1st conjugation -----			
1st person	(che io) lavi	<i>(that) I wash</i>	(che noi) laviamo <i>(that) we wash</i>
2nd person	(che tu) lavi	<i>(that) you wash (sing.)</i>	(che voi) laviate <i>(that) you wash (plur.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) lavi	<i>(that) he/she washes</i>	(che essi / esse) lavino <i>(that) they wash</i>
<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 10px auto;"/>			
----- 2nd conjugation -----			
1st person	(che io) prenda	<i>(that) I take</i>	(che noi) prendiamo <i>(that) we take</i>
2nd person	(che tu) prenda	<i>(that) you take (sing.)</i>	(che voi) prendiate <i>(that) you take (plur.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) prenda	<i>(that) he/she take</i>	(che essi / esse) prendano <i>(that) they take</i>
<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 10px auto;"/>			
----- 3rd conjugation -----			
1st person	(che io) apra	<i>(that) I open</i>	(che noi) apriamo <i>(that) we open</i>
2nd person	(che tu) apra	<i>(that) you open (sing.)</i>	(che voi) apriate <i>(that) you open (plur.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) apra	<i>(that) he/she opens</i>	(che essi / esse) aprano <i>(that) they open</i>

All the inflections of the third plural person carries the stress on the antepenultimate syllable (**âprano, prèndano, làvino**), as the corresponding indicative ones do (**âprono, prèndono, làvano**).
credo che lavino il cane molto spesso = *I think that they wash the dog very often*

spero che prenda la giusta decisione = *I hope that he / she takes (= will take) the right decision*

pensiamo che il negozio apra alle 8:00 = *we think that the shop opens at 8 o'clock*

sebbene prendano il treno, arrivano sempre tardi = *although they take the train, they always arrive late*

spero che la banca apra prima che voi prendiate il denaro da casa = *I hope that the bank opens before you take the money from home*

SUBJUNCTIVE IN SENTENCES WITH A DIFFERENT STRUCTURE

Sometimes, sentences that in Italian contain the conjunction **che** and require a subjunctive tense, in English may have a different structure, thus may be less easy to tell.

A first case is when the verb of the primary sentence is *to want*, used in the following pattern:
to want somebody / something to.... (verb)

which in Italian turns into

to want that somebody / something.... (verb)

For instance: *the boy wants the dog to sit*, in Italian turns into *the boy wants that the dog sits*, in which *sits*

will be subjunctive. These are a few more examples, in which the verb in red colour shows where subjunctive should be used:

the teacher wants you to come = [Italian form] *the teacher wants that you **come***

I want the car to be ready = [Italian form] *I want that the car **is** ready*

his mother wants him to return = [Italian form] *his mother wants that he **returns***

they want you not to remain there = [Italian form] *they want that you **do not remain** there*

This change specifically concerns the verb **volere** (*to want*), NOT others (e.g. *I asked you to stay*; *they helped us to carry the luggage*; *we put him to sleep*; etc. do not require subjunctive)

Since **volere** is an irregular verb, its full conjugation will be shown in a further paragraph, but for the time being it is useful to become confident with its present indicative tense, in order to start practicing this structure in exercises.

VOLERE (*to want*)

PRESENT INDICATIVE

	singular		plural	
1st person	(io) voglio	<i>I want</i>	(noi) vogliamo	<i>we want</i>
2nd person	(tu) vuoi	<i>you want (sing.)</i>	(voi) volete	<i>you want (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) vuole	<i>he/she wants</i>	(essi / esse) vogliono	<i>they want</i>

Here are a few sample sentences:

voglio che tu insista = *I want you to insist* (literally: *I want that you insist*)

vogliamo che i nostri amici tornino presto = *we want our friends to come back soon*

vuole che vi divertiate = *he / she wants you to have fun*

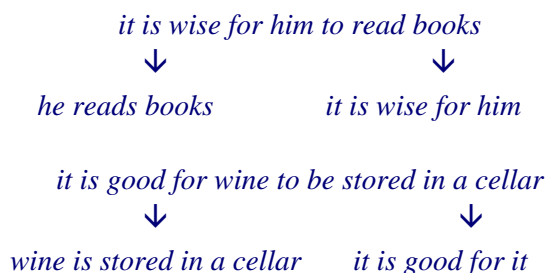
vuoi che la tavola sia pronta per le otto? = *do you want the table to be ready by eight o'clock?*

Another difference in structure occurs when the primary sentence is impersonal (e.g. *it is good...*, *it is right...*, *it is useless...*, etc.): in such case, in English often makes use of the preposition *for*: *it is wise for him to read books*; *it is good for the student to rehearse the lesson*; *it is good for wine to be stored in a cellar*; etc.

Therefore, this structure is: *for* + (subject of the subordinate sentence) + infinitive.

This does not exist in Italian, which uses a different structure: **che** + subjunctive.

To understand how this is obtained, we must split the example into its two parts.



So the Italian way of turning these sentences is: *it is wise that he **reads** books* and *it is good that wine **is stored** in a cellar* (the verbs requiring subjunctive are in red)

These are a few more examples in which the Italian structure uses the conjunction *that*, and the following verb requires a subjunctive tense (shown in red):

it is bad for him to smoke = [Italian form] *it is bad that he **smokes***

it is better for the shop to stay open = [Italian form] *it is better that the shop **stays** open*

it is customary for me to work at night = [Italian form] *it is customary that I **work** at night*

it is good for the flowers to be watered = [Italian form] *it is good that the flowers **are watered***

it is dangerous for us to remain there = [Italian form] *it is dangerous that we **remain** there*

The student should practice these changes until fully confident: turning similar sentences into the Italian form before translating them is a good exercise for telling where subjunctive tenses have to be used.

Obviously, not all sentences that start with *it is* (adjective) *for...* are impersonal ones, in which the conjunction *that* may replace the preposition *for*:

it is better for us to go = [Italian form] *it is better that we go*

it is famous for what happened here = "it" refers to a city or a site, *that* cannot be used

it is difficult for you to take a train = [Italian form] *it is difficult that you take a train*

it is handy for mending things = "it" refers to some kind of tool, *that* cannot be used

it is sad for them not to come = [Italian form] *it is sad that they don't come*

it is amusing for both adults and children = "it" refers to a game, a show, etc.

it is important for both adults and children to read the instructions = [Italian form] *it is important that both adults and children read the instructions*

If *that* cannot replace *for*, there is no need to use subjunctive: indicative tenses will be used (as in English).

However, the presence of the conjunction *that* is still not enough for requiring a subjunctive tense, which has to be used only when the verb has one of aforesaid shades of meaning (uncertainty, opinions, wishes, demand, personal feelings and denying). In the following sentences the verbs in red are the ones that require subjunctive. All the others are translated with indicative tenses:

it is useless for you to come = [Italian form] *it is useless that you come* → subjunctive (you may still decide whether to come or not)

he knew that you were sleeping → indicative (it is a fact that you were sleeping)

this is useless for us → indicative (*that* cannot replace *for*, there is no subordinate clause)

he denied that we had been there → subjunctive (is is a denial)

knowing that she was there, he too came → indicative (it is a fact that she was there)

I think that this may be of some help → subjunctive (it is a personal opinion)

we hope that you will have a good time → subjunctive (it is a wish)

they noticed that she was not there → indicative (it is a fact that she was not there)

they wanted him to stay = [Italian form] *they wanted that he stayed* → subjunctive (it is a command)

Sometimes the threshold between the meanings that require subjunctive and other meanings is faint:

I believe that this happened → subjunctive (it is a personal opinion)

I know that this happened → indicative (it is an actual fact)

I suspect that this happened → subjunctive (it is a personal opinion)

I deduce that this happened → indicative (it is an actual fact)

I think that this happened → in this case, it may be either of the two, depending on the context:

- *I think that this happened, but I'm not sure* → subjunctive (it is a personal opinion)

- *I think that this happened because nobody was there* → indicative (it is an actual fact)

(in the latter case, subjunctive is sometimes used, although indicative would be more appropriate)

Therefore, particular care should be taken in telling which sentence requires a subjunctive tense and which does not, before attempting the translation (the first exercise of this paragraph specifically deals with this).

Only practice and experience will avoid having to think every time whether subjunctive is needed or not.

THE USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS WITH SUBJUNCTIVE

Since the three singular persons have the same inflection, personal pronouns are very often added, not to mistake whom the verb refers to. For instance, the sentence **è meglio che prenda l'autobus** is not very clear, because according to the person it refers to it may have four different meanings:

- **è meglio che io prenda l'autobus** = *it is better for me to take the bus*

- **è meglio che tu prenda l'autobus** = *it is better for you to take the bus*

- **è meglio che egli prenda l'autobus** = *it is better for him to take the bus*

- **è meglio che ella prenda l'autobus** = *it is better for her to take the bus*

Therefore, the use of personal pronouns with subjunctive is much more common than with indicative tenses, especially for singular persons.

But when the subject is clearly understood from the context, there is no real need to use them:

(io) sono stanco, è meglio che prenda l'autobus = *I'm tired, it is better (for me) to take the bus*

(tu) sei stanco, è meglio che prenda l'autobus = *you are tired, it is better (for you) to take the bus*

and so on.

This is also the case of conditional sentences, dealt with in chapter 13, in which the subjunctive tense is followed by the conditional one: the latter makes clear whom the verb refers to, without the use of a

pronoun.

SUBJUNCTIVE AND FUTURE TENSES

Since subjunctive does not have any future tense, it is never used when the sentence specifically contains this tense. These are the same examples shown before, with both present and future tenses: only the former take subjunctive.

credo che lavino il cane molto spesso = *I think that they wash the dog very often* (subjunctive)

credo che laveranno il cane molto spesso = *I think that they will wash the dog very often* (indicative)

pensiamo che il negozio apra alle otto = *we think that the shop opens at 8 o'clock*

pensiamo che il negozio aprirà alle otto = *we think that the shop will open at 8 o'clock*

However, remember that in colloquial language it is common to use a present tense for a future action happening very close in time (e.g. later during the day, tomorrow, within the week, etc.), whereas in English the future tense is normally used. In these cases, subjunctive will be used for the present tense.

spero che verrete presto = *I hope you will come soon*

spero che veniate presto (colloquial)

crede che le scorte non basteranno fino a domani = *he/she thinks that the provisions won't last until tomorrow*

crede che le scorte non bastino fino a domani (colloquial)

pensiamo che presto il tempo cambierà = *we believe that soon the weather will change*

pensiamo che presto il tempo cambi (colloquial)

9.2

SUBJUNCTIVE PAST TENSE

The past tense of subjunctive (**imperfetto**) is used when the action expressed in a conditional sentence is not sure: *if I came...; in the case you went...; should he call...; etc.*

Since conditional sentences will be discussed in paragraph 10.1, after having introduced conditional tenses, only the part of the sentence needing subjunctive will be shown in this page.

CONGIUNTIVO IMPERFETTO (past subjunctive)

singular

plural

----- 1st conjugation -----

1st person	(che io) lavassi	<i>(that) I washed</i>	(che noi) lavassimo	<i>(that) we washed</i>
2nd person	(che tu) lavassi	<i>(that) you washed (sing.)</i>	(che voi) lavaste	<i>(that) you washed (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) lavasse	<i>(that) he/she washed</i>	(che essi / esse) lavassero	<i>(that) they washed</i>

----- 2nd conjugation -----

1st person	(che io) prendessi	<i>(that) I took</i>	(che noi) prendessimo	<i>(that) we took</i>
2nd person	(che tu) prendessi	<i>(that) you took (sing.)</i>	(che voi) prendeste	<i>(that) you took (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) prendesse	<i>(that) he/she took</i>	(che essi / esse) prendessero	<i>(that) they took</i>

----- 3rd conjugation -----

1st person	(che io) aprissi	<i>(that) I opened</i>	(che noi) aprissimo	<i>(that) we opened</i>
2nd person	(che tu) aprissi	<i>(that) you opened (sing.)</i>	(che voi) apriste	<i>(that) you opened (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) aprisse	<i>(that) he/she opened</i>	(che essi) aprissero	<i>(that) they opened</i>

A first consideration is that the inflection of the third singular person is not exactly as the first two, since it changes the last vowel into **e**.

A second observation is that also the first plural person has stress on the antepenultimate syllable (**lavàssimo, prendèssimo, aprìssimo**), in the same way as the third plural persons usually have. **se io lavassi il cane...** = *if I washed the dog...*

nel caso prendeste l'autobus... = *in the case you (plural) took the bus...*

se aprissero la porta... = *if they opened the door...*

Past subjunctive is only required when the other part of the sentence uses a conditional tense. The difference will be easy to understand focusing these examples (by now, disregard the conditional inflection):

se mi incontri, ti inviterò a pranzo = *if you meet me, I will invite you to lunch*
(no subjunctive required: present indicative for "meet", future for "will invite")

se mi incontrassi, ti inviterei a pranzo = *if you met me, I would invite you to lunch*
(past subjunctive required for "met", conditional required for "would invite")

volete che io rimanga = *you (plural) want me to stay* (literally: "you want that I stay")
(as explained in paragraph 9.1, present indicative for "want", present subjunctive for "stay")

vorreste che io rimanessi = *you would like me to stay* (literally: "you would like that I stayed")
(past subjunctive required for "would like", conditional required for "stay")

Further examples will be shown in paragraph 10.1.

9.3

SUBJUNCTIVE

PRESENT AND PAST TENSES OF VERBS

ESSERE AND AVERE

These are the tables of the same subjunctive tenses discussed in the previous two paragraphs. Take your time to learn them, since they will be required for the two compound tenses which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

Besides being auxiliary verbs, though, they may be also used alone, according to the same rules explained in paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2.

~ ESSERE ~

CONGIUNTIVO PRESENTE (present subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) sia	<i>(that) I are</i>	(che noi) siamo	<i>(that) we are</i>
2nd person	(che tu) sia	<i>(that) you are (sing.)</i>	(che voi) siate	<i>(that) you are (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) sia	<i>(that) he/she is</i>	(che essi / esse) siano	<i>(that) they are</i>

CONGIUNTIVO IMPERFETTO (past subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) fossi	<i>(that) I were</i>	(che noi) fossimo	<i>(that) we were</i>
2nd person	(che tu) fossi	<i>(that) you were (sing.)</i>	(che voi) foste	<i>(that) you were (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) fosse	<i>(that) he/she were</i>	(che essi / esse) fossero	<i>(that) they were</i>

~ AVERE ~

CONGIUNTIVO PRESENTE
(present subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) abbia	<i>(that) I have</i>	(che noi) abbiamo	<i>(that) we have</i>
2nd person	(che tu) abbia	<i>(that) you have (sing.)</i>	(che voi) abbiate	<i>(that) you have (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) abbia	<i>(that) he/she has</i>	(che essi / esse) abbiano	<i>(that) they have</i>

CONGIUNTIVO IMPERFETTO
(past subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) avessi	<i>(that) I had</i>	(che noi) avessimo	<i>(that) we had</i>
2nd person	(che tu) avessi	<i>(that) you had (sing.)</i>	(che voi) aveste	<i>(that) you had (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) avesse	<i>(that) he/she had</i>	(che essi / esse) avessero	<i>(that) they had</i>

A few samples of their use:

credo che tu abbia la febbre = *I think that you have a fever* (notice how a personal pronoun is needed in this case, because **abbia** may be referred to any singular person).

credevo che tu avessi la febbre = *I thought that you had a fever* (same as above, but in the past).

vive bene, nonostante sia povero = *he lives well, despite he is poor*

(notice how a personal pronoun is not really needed in this case, because the verb of the primary clause, **vive**, is clearly a third singular person).

viveva bene, nonostante fosse povero = *he lived well, despite he was poor*
(same as above, but in the past).

Past subjunctive is only required when the other part of the sentence uses a conditional tense. The difference will be easy to understand focusing these examples (by now, disregard the conditional inflection):

se mi incontri, ti inviterò a pranzo = *if you meet me, I will invite you to lunch*
(no subjunctive required: present indicative for "meet", future for "will invite")

se mi incontrassi, ti inviterei a pranzo = *if you met me, I would invite you to lunch*
(past subjunctive required for "met", conditional required for "would invite")

volete che io rimanga = *you (plural) want me to stay* (literally: "you want that I stay")
(as explained in paragraph 9.1, present indicative for "want", present subjunctive for "stay")

vorreste che io rimanessi = *you would like me to stay* (literally: "you would like that I stayed")
(past subjunctive required for "would like", conditional required for "stay")

Further examples will be shown in paragraph 9.4.

9.4

SUBJUNCTIVE PERFECT AND PLUPERFECT TENSES

These two compound tenses express the same concepts as the simple ones, but in the past. So, a few examples are:

"I don't know what he does", requiring a present subjunctive;

"I don't know what he did", requiring a past subjunctive;

"I don't know what he has done", requiring a perfect subjunctive;

"I don't know what he had done", requiring a pluperfect subjunctive.

Since past subjunctive is also used for subordinate clauses in conditional sentences (see paragraph 9.2), pluperfect subjunctive is used for the same kind of clause in the past:

"if you came..." requires a past subjunctive;

"if you had come..." requires a pluperfect subjunctive.

These compound tenses are made in the same way as the indicative ones (auxiliary verb + past participle of the main verb), though the two auxiliaries **essere** and **avere** use subjunctive inflections.

CONGIUNTIVO PASSATO (perfect subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
		----- 1st conjugation -----	
1st person	(che io) abbia lavato	<i>(that) I have washed</i>	(che noi) abbiamo lavato <i>(that) we have washed</i>
2nd person	(che tu) abbia lavato	<i>(that) you have washed (sing.)</i>	(che voi) abbiate lavato <i>(that) you have washed (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) abbia lavato	<i>(that) he/she has washed</i>	(che essi / esse) abbiano lavato <i>(that) they have washed</i>
		----- 2nd conjugation -----	
1st person	(che io) abbia preso	<i>(that) I have taken</i>	(che noi) abbiamo preso <i>(that) we have taken</i>
2nd person	(che tu) abbia preso	<i>(that) you have taken (sing.)</i>	(che voi) abbiate preso <i>(that) you have taken (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli/ella) abbia preso	<i>(that) he/she has taken</i>	(che essi / esse) abbiano preso <i>(that) they have taken</i>
		----- 3rd conjugation -----	
1st person	(che io) abbia aperto	<i>(that) I have opened</i>	(che noi) abbiamo aperto <i>(that) we have opened</i>
2nd person	(che tu) abbia aperto	<i>(that) you have opened (sing.)</i>	(che voi) abbiate aperto <i>(that) you have opened (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) abbia aperto	<i>(that) he/she has opened</i>	(che essi / esse) abbiano aperto <i>(that) they have opened</i>

CONGIUNTIVO TRAPASSATO (pluperfect subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
		----- 1st conjugation -----	
1st person	(che io) avessi lavato	<i>(that) I have washed</i>	(che noi) avessimo lavato <i>(that) we have washed</i>
2nd person	(che tu) avessi lavato	<i>(that) you have washed (sing.)</i>	(che voi) aveste lavato <i>(that) you have washed (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) avesse lavato	<i>(that) he/she has washed</i>	(che essi / esse) avessero lavato <i>(that) they have washed</i>
		----- 2nd conjugation -----	
1st person	(che io) avessi preso	<i>(that) I have taken</i>	(che noi) avessimo preso <i>(that) we have taken</i>
2nd person	(che tu) avessi preso	<i>(that) you have taken (sing.)</i>	(che voi) aveste preso <i>(that) you have taken (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) avesse preso	<i>(that) he/she has taken</i>	(che essi / esse) avessero preso <i>(that) they have taken</i>
		----- 3rd conjugation -----	
1st person	(che io) avessi aperto	<i>(that) I have opened</i>	(che noi) avessimo aperto <i>(that) we have opened</i>
2nd person	(che tu) avessi aperto	<i>(that) you have opened (sing.)</i>	(che voi) aveste aperto <i>(that) you have opened (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) avesse aperto	<i>(that) he/she has opened</i>	(che essi / esse) avessero aperto <i>(that) they have opened</i>

se (io) lavassi il cane... = *if I washed the dog...*

nel caso (voi) prendeste l'autobus... = *in the case you (plural) took the bus...*

se (esse) aprissero la porta... = *if they (feminine) opened the door...*

Past subjunctive is only required when the other part of the sentence uses a conditional tense. The difference will be easy to understand focusing these examples (by now, disregard the conditional inflection):

se (tu) mi incontri, (io) ti inviterò a pranzo = *if you meet me, I will invite you to lunch*
(no subjunctive required: present indicative for "meet", future for "will invite")

se (tu) mi incontrassi, (io) ti inviterei a pranzo = *if you met me, I would invite you to lunch*
(past subjunctive required for "met", conditional required for "would invite")

(voi) volete che (io) rimanga = *you (plural) want me to stay* (literally: "you want that I stay")
(as explained in paragraph 9.1, present indicative for "want", present subjunctive for "stay")

(voi) vorreste che (io) rimanessi = *you would like me to stay* (literally: "you would like that I stayed")
(past subjunctive required for "would like", conditional required for "stay")

9.5

SUBJUNCTIVE PERFECT AND PLUPERFECT OF VERBS *ESSERE* AND *AVERE*

These are the tables of the same subjunctive tenses discussed in the previous two paragraphs.
Take your time to learn them, since they will be required for the two compound tenses which will be discussed in the following paragraph.
Besides being auxiliary verbs, though, they may be also used alone, according to the same rules explained in paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2.

~ ESSERE ~

CONGIUNTIVO PASSATO (perfect subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st	(che io) sia stato (che io) sia stata	<i>(that) I have been</i>	(che noi) siamo stati (che noi) siamo state	<i>(that) we have been</i>
2nd	(che tu) sia stato (che tu) sia stata	<i>(that) you have been (sing.)</i>	(che voi) siate stati (che voi) siate state	<i>(that) you have been (pl.)</i>
3rd	(che egli) sia stato (che ella) sia stata	<i>(that) he/she has been</i>	(che essi) siano stati (che esse) siano state	<i>(that) they have been</i>

CONGIUNTIVO TRAPASSATO (pluperfect subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st	(che io) fossi stato (che io) fossi stata	<i>(that) I had been</i>	(che noi) fossimo stati (che noi) fossimo state	<i>(that) we had been</i>
2nd	(che tu) fossi stato (che tu) fossi stata	<i>(that) you had been (sing.)</i>	(che voi) foste stati (che voi) foste state	<i>(that) you had been (pl.)</i>
3rd	(che egli) fosse stato (che ella) fosse stata	<i>(that) he/she had been</i>	(che essi) fossero stati (che esse) fossero state	<i>(that) they had been</i>

~ AVERE ~

CONGIUNTIVO PASSATO (perfect subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st	(che io) abbia avuto	<i>(that) I have been</i>	(che noi) abbiamo avuto	<i>(that) we have been</i>
2nd	(che tu) abbia avuto	<i>(that) you have been (s.)</i>	(che voi) abbiate avuto	<i>(that) you have been (p.)</i>
3rd	(che egli / ella) abbia avuto	<i>(that) he/she has been</i>	(che essi / esse) abbiano avuto	<i>(that) they have been</i>

CONGIUNTIVO TRAPASSATO
(pluperfect subjunctive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st	(che io) avessi avuto	<i>(that) I had been</i>	(che noi) avessimo avuto	<i>(that) we had been</i>
2nd	(che tu) avessi avuto	<i>(that) you had been (s.)</i>	(che voi) aveste avuto	<i>(that) you had been (p.)</i>
3rd	(che egli / ella) avesse avuto	<i>(that) he/she had been</i>	(che essi / esse) avessero avuto	<i>(that) they had been</i>

Subjunctive uses the same rules as indicative tenses:

- transitive verbs use auxiliary **avere**, most intransitive ones use **essere**;
- when the auxiliary verb is **essere**, past participles are gender- and number-sensitive.

EXAMPLES

..... verb **comprare** = *to buy* (transitive, using auxiliary **avere**)

non sappiamo chi abbia comprato il giornale = *we don't know who bought the newspaper* (literally: ...who has bought the newspaper)

non sapevamo chi avesse comprato il giornale = *we didn't know who had bought the newspaper*

se tu avessi comprato il giornale... = *if you had bought the newspaper...* (or *had you bought the newspaper...*)

..... verb **partire** = *to leave* (intransitive, using auxiliary **essere**)

credi che Paolo e Marco siano partiti? = *do you think that Paul and Mark have left?*

credevi che Paolo e Marco fossero partiti? = *did you think that Paul and Mark had left?*

se Paolo e Marco fossero partiti... = *if Paul and Mark had left...*

..... verb **ridere** = *to laugh* (intransitive, though using auxiliary **avere**)

pensa che abbiano riso = *he/she thinks that they laughed*

pensava che avessero riso = *he/she thought that they had laughed*

se avessero riso... = *if they had laughed...* (or *had they laughed...*)

10.1

DIMINUTIVE

Some suffixes can be used with nouns, to indicate that they are small, large or bad. They are all gender- and number-sensitive, so they have to match the noun's own gender and number. This page will discuss diminutive.

Some inflections indicate that the noun is generically small, in most cases referring to its actual size, but sometimes having a more metaphoric sense (i.e. "cute", "refined", etc).

The two most common diminutive suffixes are **-ino / -ina** and **-etto / -etta**.

uccello = *bird*

uccellino = *little bird*

uccelletto = *little bird*

strada = *road*

stradina = *small or narrow road*

stradetta = *small or narrow road*

ragazzi = *boys*

ragazzini = *small boys, children*

ragazzetti = *small boys, children*

palle = *balls*

palline = *small balls*

pallette = *small balls*

Some nouns, among which the above-mentioned examples, may use both inflections. Other nouns, though, usually follow only one of the two. The other form would either sound very unusual, or even wrong, because it may have a bad sound, or sometimes it may have a different meaning.

gatto = *cat*

gattino = *small cat, kitten*

(never "**gattetto**", which would sound horrible)

muro = *wall*

muretto = *small or low wall*

(the form "**murino**" is an adjective referring to mice!)

borsa = *bag*

borsetta = *small bag, lady's bag*

(the form "**borsina**" is very unusual)

pezzo = *piece*

pezzetto = *small piece*

("pezzino" is very unusual)

If you are in doubt, the inflection **...etto** is the most common of the two, and with few exceptions it may be used even in those cases where **...ino** is preferred.

There is also a third suffix for diminutive, **-ello / -ella**, used with a fewer number of words.

albero = *tree*

alberello = *small tree*

asino = *donkey*

asinello = *small, young donkey*

porzione (feminine) = *portion*

porzioncina = *small portion*

Usually, words which take **-ello** may not take **-ino** or **-etto** as an alternative.

When the noun's singular inflection is **...e** (which may be either masculine or feminine), the suffix behaves as if the noun ended with **...o** (for masculine) or **...a** (for feminine):

rete (feminine) = *net*

retina = *small or thin net*

dolore (masculine) = *pain*

doloretto = *slight pain*

lume (masculine) = *lamp*

lumetto = *small lamp*

chiave (feminine) = *key*

chiavetta = *small key*

It is very important to match the noun's gender, because in some cases the other gender has a completely different meaning:

casa (feminine) = *house*

casetta (or **casina**) = *little house*

...*BUT*

casino = *brothel* (slang)

So gender can really make a big difference!!

For this reason, in forming diminutives the original noun's gender should always remain unchanged:

pezzo (masculine) = *piece, fragment*

pezza (feminine) = *cloth, fabric, rag*

...therefore

pezzetto = *small piece*

pezzetta = *small piece of cloth*

For some nouns, diminutive forms are not made by simply adding the two suffixes, but require a lengthening of the noun's root (additional parts are shown in lighter blue).

cuore (masculine) = *heart*

cuoricino = *small heart*

(the form "**cuorino**" does not exist)

cane (masculine) = *dog*

cagnolino = *little dog*

(the form "**canino**" is the adjective referring to a dog, or the name of the canine tooth)

porzione (feminine) = *portion*

porzioncina = *small portion*

vento = *wind*

venticello = *slight wind, breeze*

There is no fixed rule for lengthening the root of the noun, when this is required, but in many cases (see previous examples) **-ic-** is added before the ordinary suffix.

Some nouns are actual diminutives, although they are considered as individual words because of their meaning, in which a different idea than that of "small size" may be expressed. In this case, their gender does not necessarily match.

gallo (masculine) = *rooster*
gallina (feminine) = *chicken* (i.e. "small rooster")

spazzola (feminine) = *brush*
spazzolino (masculine) = *tooth-brush* (i.e. "small brush")

pane = *bread*
panino = *sandwich* (i.e. "small bread")

carro (masculine) = *chariot*
carrello (masculine) = *trolley*
carretto (masculine) = *cart*

Students should be well aware of the fact that some nouns end with **...ino**, **...etto**, and similar inflections, without being diminutives at all. For many of these "false diminutive nouns", other words phonetically corresponding to their non-diminutive form may exist, but they often have a different gender, and their meaning is usually completely different:

pulce (feminine) = *flea*
pulcino (masculine) = *chick*

canto (masculine) = *song, singing*
cantina (feminine) = *cellar*

desto, desta = *awake* (adjective)
destino (masculine) = *destiny, fate*

casta (feminine) = *social rank*
castello (masculine) = *castle*

pasto (masculine) = *meal*
pastello (masculine) = *crayon*

For several words such as the ones above (especially with **-ello**) a non-diminutive form does not even exist:

pisello = *pea*
("piso" does not exist)

cancello = *gate*
("cancio" does not exist)

catino = *tub*
("cato" does not exist)

giardino = *garden*
("giardo" does not exist)

All these nouns can be misleading, so care should be taken not to misunderstand them. However, these words too may take a real diminutive suffix, thus appearing as "double diminutives":

cancello = *gate*
cancelletto = *small gate*

catino = *tub*
catinella (notice the change of gender) = *small tub*

gallina = *hen*
gallinella = *small hen*

Very few nouns allow a real "double diminutive":

pezzo = *piece*
pezzetto = *small piece*
pezzettino = *(very) small piece*

boccia = *flask, decanter*
bocchetta = *small bottle or flask*
bocchetta = *tiny bottle, vial*

There is another diminutive suffix, **-uccio / -uccia**, which is used with a limited number of nouns, because rather than "small" it usually carries a meaning of "humble, poor, cheap", especially when **-ino**, **-etto**, or **-ello** can be also used with the same word.

vestito = *dress*
vestituccio = *humble, cheap dress* in contrast with
vestitino = *small, cute dress*

cavallo = *horse*
cavalluccio = *toy horse, hobby-horse* in contrast with
cavallino = *young, cute horse*

bottega = *shop, workshop*
botteguccio = *humble, small shop*

This suffix does not often occur in spoken language now, but it may still be found in written texts.

For an even more limited number of words, a further diminutive suffix is **-uolo / -uola**, which has become rather obsolete, since in most cases the common ones already discussed may be used, and are now preferred in common speech:

chiesa = *church*
chiesuola = *small church* (obsolete, but sometimes found in written texts)
chiesetta = (same as above, currently used)

laccio = *boot-lace, bind*
lacciuolo = *small lace, or metaphorically a limitation* (obsolete)
laccetto = (same as above, currently used)

donna = *church*
donnicciuola = *trivial woman, or sissy* (referred to a male person)
donnetta = (same as above, now more common than the previous form)

synopsis of diminutive suffixes

masculine singular feminine singular masculine plural feminine plural

-ino **-ina** **-ini** **-ine**

-etto **-etta** **-etti** **-ette**

-ello **-ella** **-elli** **-elle**

less common suffixes

-uccio **-uccia** **-ucci** **-ucce**

-uolo **-uola** **-uoli** **-uole**

10.2

AUGMENTATIVE

Augmentative indicates that the noun is large, big, great, etc., more often in the sense of "large size", but sometimes with the meaning of "important" too.

There is only one augmentative inflection: **-one / -ona** (plurals **-oni / -one**).

Notice how the masculine singular and the feminine plural are the same (*-one*).

martello (*hammer*) ~ **martellone** (*big hammer*)

martelli (*hammers*) ~ **martelloni** (*big hammers*)

piede (*masculine, foot*) ~ **piedone** (*big foot*)

piedi (*feet*) ~ **piedoni** (*big feet*)

palazzo (*building*) ~ **palazzone** (*tall, large building*)

palazzi (*buildings*) ~ **palazzoni** (*tall, large buildings*)

ruota (*wheel*) ~ **ruotona** (*large wheel*)

ruote (*wheels*) ~ **ruotone** (*large wheels*)

chiave (*feminine, key*) ~ **chiavona** (*large key*)

chiavi (*keys*) ~ **chiavone** (*large keys*)

borsa (*bag, handbag*) ~ **borsona** (*large bag*)

borse (*bags, handbags*) ~ **borsoni** (*large bags*)

It is important to know the simple form of nouns (in particular whether they are masculine or feminine), otherwise it could be difficult to tell if a given augmentative is masculine singular or feminine plural.

For instance, **nasone** and **casone** sound similar, although the former is singular (from **naso**, *nose*), and the latter is plural (from **case**, *houses*).

Obviously, when augmentative is used within a sentence, the article and often the verb too will help to tell both gender and number:

il nasone = *the big book* (singular, masculine)

le casone = *the big houses* (plural, feminine)

However, since augmentative gives the noun a meaning of "big, large, huge", etc., especially in common speech the great majority of feminine nouns changes gender when this suffix is appended.

For instance:

la faccia = *the face* (feminine)

...*BUT*

il faccione = *the large face* (masculine)

la pistola = *the gun* (feminine)

...*BUT*

il pistolone = *the big gun* (masculine)

la stanza = *the room* (feminine)

...*BUT*

lo stanzone = *the big room* (masculine)

la pietra = *the stone* (feminine)

...*BUT*

il pietrone = *the big stone, the rock* (masculine)

This is only apparently confusing: in fact, the opportunity of turning almost every plural augmentative into masculine gender, helps to avoid any risk of doubt whether the noun is masculine singular or feminine plural.

The beginner student might think of this as:

masculine singular, -one	feminine singular, -ona
masculine plural, -oni	feminine plural, -one
used as the standard augmentative	only used in limited cases

In spoken language, feminine plural augmentative changes to masculine for a cultural reason, i.e. something big, huge, tall, etc. would sound "more masculine than feminine", especially when the large size gives the word a rougher, less delicate meaning.

However, feminine plural augmentative does exist. For this reason, some nouns may have both forms, although the feminine one is less used than the masculine.

la pietra = *the stone* (feminine)

la pietrona = *the big stone* (feminine)

il pietrone = *the big stone* (masculine, sounds rougher, heavier, etc.)

la finestra = *the window* (feminine)

la finestrona = *the big window* (feminine)

il finestrone = *the huge window* (masculine, sounds wider)

la donna = *the woman* (feminine)

la donnona = *the tall / fat lady* (feminine)

il donnone = *the mighty / fat lady* (masculine, sounds more stout and heavy)

la corda = *the string, the rope* (feminine)

la cordona = *the thick rope* (feminine)

il cordone = *the thick / braided rope* (masculine, sounds thicker)

la spada = *the sword* (feminine)

la spadona = *the big sword* (feminine)

lo spadone = *the big sword* (masculine, sounds longer and heavier)

Virtually, any feminine noun may be turned into masculine when using augmentative.

There are also several words which were born as augmentatives, but achieved their own individual meaning, such as:

la mela = *the apple* (feminine)

il melone = *the melon* (i.e. "big apple", masculine)

la porta = *the door of a room* (feminine)

il portone = *the entrance, the door of a building* (i.e. "large door", masculine)

la tromba = *the trumpet* (feminine)

il trombone = *the trombone* (i.e. "big trumpet", masculine)

la palla = *the ball* (feminine)

il pallone = *the balloon, or the foot-ball* (i.e. "big ball", masculine)

la copia = *the copy*

il copione = *the (printed) script of a film, a play, etc.*

Finally, there are several words which only resemble augmentatives, not having any relation with the noun they seem to derive from, or not having such form at all:

matto = *the madman*

mattone (masculine) = *the brick*

canto = *song, singing*

cantone (masculine) = *corner of a street*

pista = *the race track, or trail*

pistone (masculine) = *piston*

occasione (feminine) = *occasion, opportunity*

canzone (feminine) = *song*

pressione (feminine) = *pressure*

carbone (masculine) = *coal*

stazione (feminine) = *station*

situazione (feminine) = *situation*

These words may be regarded as "false augmentatives".

10.3

PEJORATIVE

Pejorative gives the noun a sense of "bad, nasty, ugly", etc.

There is only one pejorative inflection: **-accio / -accia** (plurals **-acci / -acce**).

tavolo (*table*) ~ **tavolaccio** (*old, broken table*)

errore (masculine, *mistake*) ~ **erroraccio** (*bad mistake*)

libri (*books*) ~ **libracci** (*cheap / evil books*)

vita (*life*) ~ **vitaccia** (*hard life*)

bicicletta (*bycicle*) ~ **biciclettaccia** (*cheap bycicle*)

scarpe (feminine, *shoes*) ~ **scarpacce** (*horrible / worn out shoes*)

roba (*stuff, things*) ~ **robaccia** (*trivia / nasty stuff*)

posti (*places*) ~ **postacci** (*bad places*)

momento (*moment*) ~ **momentaccio** (*bad moment*)

tempo (*weather*) ~ **tempaccio** (*bad weather*)

A fewer number of nouns may use pejorative than the ones which may use diminutive or augmentative.

Also in this case, beware of "false pejorative" words:

abbraccio = *hug*

impaccio = *difficulty, straits*

traccia = *trace, trail*

11.1

ADJECTIVES RELATED TO GEOGRAPHIC SITES

Adjectives expressing a relation with geographic sites such as towns, regions and countries use suffixes, very similar to the English ones, with only a few differences.

It is important to notice how in Italian all adjectives referring to countries do not use a capital (uppercase) letter, as they do in English.

Also notice that when names are made of two separate words (i.e. New Zealand, South Korea, etc.), the relevant Italian adjective often merges them into one word.

A common standard suffix is **-ano**, corresponding to the English suffix *-an*, used in many cases (though not so frequently as in English):

Italia (*Italy*) >> **italiano** (*Italian*)
Roma (*Rome*) >> **romano** (*roman*)
Venezia (*Venice*) >> **veneziano** (*venetian*)
Sicilia (*Sicily*) >> **siciliano** (*sicilian*)
America (*America*) >> **americano** (*American*)
Corea del Sud (*South Korea*) >> **sudcoreano** (*South Korean*)
...etc. etc.

In some cases, the suffix becomes **-tano** (a "t" is added), and the root of the word might slightly change too:

Napoli (*Naples*) >> **napoletano** (*neapolitan*)
Amalfi (*Amalfi*, small island near Naples) >> **amalfitano** (*from Amalfi*)

Another very common suffix is **-ese**, often matching the same English one (but not always):

Milano (*Milan*) >> **milanese** (*milanese*)
Rimini (*Rimini*) >> **riminese** (*from Rimini*)
Calabria (*Calabria region*) >> **calabrese** (*from Calabria*)
Francia (*France*) >> **francese** (*French*)
Malta (*Malta*) >> **maltese** (*Maltese*)
Islanda (*Iceland*) >> **islandese** (*Icelandic*)
Cina (*China*) >> **cinese** (*Chinese*)
Giappone (*Japan*) >> **giapponese** (*Japanese*)
Canada (*Canada*) >> **canadese** (*Canadian*)
...etc. etc.

In a few cases, an "n" is added to the suffix:

Parma (*Parma*, northern Italian city) >> **parmense** (*from Parma*)
Stati Uniti (*United States*) >> **statunitense** (*from the US*)
Nicaragua (*Nicaragua*) >> **nicaraguense** (*Nicaraguan*)
Panama (*Panama*) >> **panamense** (*Panamese*)
Costa Rica (*Costa Rica*) >> **costaricense** (*from Costa Rica*)

Some adjectives ending with **-ese** slightly change the noun's root before the suffix; this happens more often than with **-ano**:

Svezia (*Sweden*) >> **svedese** (*Swedish*)
Inghilterra (*England*) >> **inglese** (*English*)
Scozia (*Scotland*) >> **scozzese** (*Scottish*)
Portogallo (*Portugal*) >> **portoghese** (*Portuguese*)
Nuova Zelanda (*New Zealand*) >> **neozelandese** (*New Zealander*)
Londra (*London*) >> **londinese** (*Londoner*)

Another suffix which matches English *-an* is **-ino**:

Tunisia (*Tunisia*) >> **tunisino** (*Tunisian*)
Marocco (*Morocco*) >> **marocchino** (*Moroccan*)
Argentina (*Argentina*) >> **argentino** (*Argentinean*)
Parigi (*Paris*) >> **parigino** (*Parisian*)
Ginevra (*Geneve*) >> **ginevrino** (*from Geneve*)

A few adjectives use suffix **-eno**:

Cile (*Chile*) >> **cileno** (*Chilean*)
Armenia (*Armenia*) >> **armeno** (*Armenian*)
Iraq (*Iraq*) >> **iracheno** (*Iraqi*)

A very similar suffix is **-egno** (derived from the Spanish *-eño*), for two adjectives referring to Central American countries:

Ecuador (*Ecuador*) >> **ecuadoregno** (*Ecuadorean*)
El Salvador (*El Salvador*) >> **salvadoregno** (*Salvadorean*)

A less common suffix is **-ico**, in some cases matching the English suffix *-ic*:

Arabia (*Arabia*) >> **arabico**, but also **arabo** (*Arabic*)
Libia (*Lybia*) >> **libico** (*Lybian*)

Caucasia (*Caucasia*) >> **caucasico** (*caucasian*)

NOTE - **arabico** is used for geographic names which refer to Arabia as a land (i.e. **deserto arabico** = *Arabic desert*);

arabo instead refers to language and culture (i.e. **lingua araba** = *Arabic language*; **cultura araba** = *Arabic culture*; etc.)

A few changes may occur to the root of the noun when the adjective keeps the old form from Latin:

Gran Bretagna (*Great Britain*) >> **britannico** from Latin *Britannia*, (*British*)

A particular suffix is **-olo**, used in a few cases:

Spagna (*Spain*) >> **spagnolo** (*Spanish*)
Romagna (*Romagna region*) >> **romagnolo** (*from Romagna*)

Another particular suffix is **-iota**, used in a rather limited number of cases:

Cipro (*Cyprus*) >> **cipriota** (*from Cyprus*)
Kenya (*Kenya*) >> **keniota** (*Kenian*)

For a number of adjectives, the suffix is simply **-o**:

Russia (*Russia*) >> **russo** (*Russian*)
Grecia (*Greece*) >> **greco** (*Greek*)
Iugoslavia (*Yugoslavia*) >> **iugoslavo** (*Yugoslavian*)
Argentina (*Argentina*) >> **argentino** (*Argentinean*)
Turchia (*Turkey*) >> **turco** (*Turk*)
Repubblica Ceca (*Czech Republic*) >> **ceco** (*Czech*, not to be confused with **cieco** = *blind*)

Also in this case the root of the noun may change:

Croazia (*Croatia*) >> **croato** (*Croatian*)
Slovenia (*Slovenia*) >> **sloveno** (*Slovenian*)

For others, the suffix is lengthened in **-acco**:

Polonia (*Poland*) >> **polacco** (*Polish*)
Slovacchia (*Slovakia*) >> **slovacco** (*Slovak*)

And **-one** is also used in a few cases:

Estonia (*Poland*) >> **estone** (*Estonian*)
Lapponia (*Slovakia*) >> **lappone** (*Laplandic*)
Lettonia (*Latvia*) >> **lettone** (*Latvian*)

(for the pronunciation of these adjectives, see further down).

Finally, for some countries adjectives are specific, since they use a non-standard suffix:

Lazio (*Latium region*) >> **laziiale** (*from Latium*)
Belgio (*Belgium*) >> **belga** (*Belgian*)

A totally different adjective is used in the following case:

Germania (*Germany*) >> **tedesco** (*German*)

As for pronunciation, most adjectives carry stress on their antepenultimate syllable (i.e. on the first vowel of the suffix):

- (-ano) **italiàno**; **romàno**;
- (-ese) **francése**; **inglése**; (with acute accented "e")
- (-ense) **statunitèense** (notice how "e" turns to a grave accent)
- (-ino) **tunisino**; **marocchino**;
- (-eno) **cilèno**; **rumèno**;
- (-egno) **ecuadorègno**; **salvadorègno**;
- (-olo) **spagnòlo**; **romagnòlo**;
- (-acco) **polàcco**; **slovàcco**;

...*BUT*

- (-iota) these adjectives carry stress on vowel "o": **cipriòta**; **keniòta**; etc.;
- (-ico) these adjectives carry stress on the antepenultimate syllable: **libico**; **britannico**; etc.
- (-one) also these adjectives are stressed on the antepenultimate syllable: **lèttone**; **èstone**;
- (-o) these adjectives carry stress on the penultimate syllable (i.e. on the last vowel before the suffix): **rùsso**; **tùrco**; **grèco**; etc. etc.

Adjectives with non-standard prefixes do not follow a given rule; in most cases the stressed syllable is the penultimate: **laziàle**; **tedéscò**; **bèlga**; etc.

Summarizing suffixes and accents in a table, for easier learning:

(standard suffixes)

.....àno
.....ése
.....èense
.....ino
.....èno
.....ègno
.....òlo
.....àcco
.....-iòta
.....`ico

(non-standard suffixes)

.....`..

Obviously, as any other adjective, also these ones need to match both gender and number of the noun to which they are referred (see [paragraphs 2.1](#) to [2.3](#)). Adjectives whose singular form ends with **-e**, are both masculine and feminine; this is also true for the very few ones whose last vowel is **-a** in both genders.

sono romano (*I am roman, masculine*); **sono romana** (*I am roman, feminine*);

siamo romani (*we are roman, masculine*); **siamo romane** (*we are roman, feminine*)

sono francese (*I am French, both masculine and feminine*)

siamo francesi (*we are French, both masculine and feminine*)

sono statunitense (*I am from the US, both masculine and feminine*)

siamo statunitensi (*we are from the US, both masculine and feminine*)

sono tunisino (*I am Tunisian, masculine*); **sono tunisina** (*I am Tunisian, feminine*);

siamo tunisini (*we are Tunisian, masculine*); **siamo tunisine** (*we are Tunisian, feminine*)

sono armeno (*I am Armenian, masculine*); **sono armena** (*I am Armenian, feminine*);

siamo armeni (*we are Armenian, masculine*); **siamo armenese** (*we are Armenian, feminine*)

sono britannico (*I am British, masculine*); **sono britannica** (*I am British, feminine*);
siamo britannici (*we are British, masculine*); **siamo britanniche** (*we are British, feminine*)

sono cipriota (*I am from Cyprus, both masculine and feminine*);
siamo ciprioti (*we are from Cyprus, masculine*); **siamo cipriote** (*we are from Cyprus, feminine*)

sono croato (*I am Croatian, masculine*); **sono croata** (*I am Croatian, feminine*);
siamo croati (*we are Croatian, masculine*); **siamo croate** (*we are Croatian, feminine*)

sono belga (*I am Belgian, both masculine and feminine*);
siamo belgi (*we are Belgian, masculine*); **siamo belghe** (*we are Belgian, feminine*)

sono tedesco (*I am German, masculine*); **sono tedesca** (*I am German, feminine*);
siamo tedeschi (*we are German, masculine*); **siamo tedesche** (*we are German, feminine*)

For cities which keep their foreign names (Kiev, Tucson, Helsinki, etc.), the use of prepositions is usually preferred to a suffix. Simple prepositions **di** (*of, from*) and **da** (*from*) are used in these cases:

è di Phoenix (*he/she is from Phoenix*) or **viene da Phoenix** (*he/she comes from Phoenix*)

siamo di Valencia (*we are from Valencia*) or **veniamo da Valencia** (*we come from Valencia*)

However, with names of famous and larger cities (especially the ones whose name has an Italian version), an adjective is also commonly used:

sei di Londra (*you are from London*) or **sei londinese** (*you are a londoner*)

sei di Parigi (*you are from Paris*) or **sei parigino**

sei di Berlino (*you are from Berlin*) or **sei berinese**

When it comes to countries, a suffix may be used in all cases, but prepositions too may be often used, especially in case of uncertainty about which is the right adjective. In this case, though, a compound preposition is needed (see [paragraph 5.2](#)): their use with geographic names is discussed in [paragraph 11.3](#).

11.2

MORE ABOUT GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

It should be noticed that the Italian names of geographic regions/countries have a definite gender, and in most cases require a definite article, unlike English ones. Some are masculine, while some others are feminine, which of the two depending on the last vowel of the name.

Names ending with **...o** and **...i** are usually masculine:

Lazio (*Latium region*); **Belgio** (*Belgium*); **Marocco** (*Morocco*); **Regno Unito** (*United Kingdom*); etc.

Stati Uniti (*United States*); **Emirati Arabi Uniti** (*United Arab Emirates*); etc.

notice how only the noun's inflection has been highlighted in red (i.e. *States, Emirates*), not the adjective's, which simply matches the noun both for gender and number

Names ending with **...a** are usually feminine:

Alsazia (*Alsace region*); **Borgogna** (*Burgundy region*); **Italia** (*Italy*); **Francia** (*France*); **Spagna** (*Spain*); etc.

Names ending with **...e** can be either masculine or feminine, according to whether they are singular (masculine) or plural (feminine):

masculine (with very few exceptions)

Brasile (*Brazil*); **Piemonte** (*Piedmont region*); **Artide e Antartide** (*Arctica and Antarctica*); etc.

feminine

Filippine (*Philippines*); **Azzorre** (*Azores*); etc.

NOTE - plural geographic names ending with "e" usually refer to the noun **isole** = *islands*, simply omitted. For regions and countries whose names end with a consonant, because they keep their foreign name, a masculine gender is usually adopted, except for names referring to groups of islands (see note above):

masculine (singular)

Liechtenstein; Kansas; Yorkshire; Pakistan; Madagascar (single island, thus masculine); etc.

Therefore: **il Liechtenstein, il Kansas, lo Yorkshire**, etc.

feminine (plural)

Mauritius; Seichelles; Shetland; etc. (all names referring to **isole** = *islands*)

Therefore: **le Mauritius, le Seichelles**, etc.

In the same way, if a name refers to a natural feature, such as a desert, a river, an ocean, etc. it keeps the same feature's gender. The word referring to the feature itself, instead, in many cases may be omitted.

fiume (masculine) = *river*

il fiume Tevere; il Tevere = *the (river) Tiber*

il fiume Volga; il Volga = *the (river) Volga*

il fiume Isar; l'Isar = *the (river) Isar*

il fiume Tamigi; il Tamigi = *the (river) Thames*

For very few rivers whose name suggests a feminine gender (Italian ones, and no more than two or three famous non-Italian ones), an exception is made:

la Dora Baltea (feminine) = *the Dora Baltea*

...*BUT*

il fiume Dora Baltea = *the river Dora Baltea*

la Senna (feminine) = *the Seine*

...*BUT*

il fiume Senna = *the river Seine*

mare (masculine) = *sea*

NOTE - in given names, the word **mare** is phonetically shortened to **mar**; this is not a rule, but it is the most common form used, both in spoken and written language.

il mar Mediterraneo; il Mediterraneo = *the Mediterranean (Sea)*

il mar Ionio; il Mediterraneo = *the Ionian (Sea)*

il mar Baltico; il Baltico = *the Baltic (Sea)*

il mar Baltico; il Baltico = *the Baltic (Sea)*

When the adjective alone might be mistaken (*Red Sea, Dead Sea*), or in compound names (*Sea of Japan*, etc.) the word for *sea* is always required.

In compound names, **mare** is often used in full.

il mar Nero = *the Black Sea*

il mar Morto = *the Dead Sea*

il mar (or **mare**) **del Giappone** = *the Sea of Japan*

il mar (or **mare**) **dei Caraibi** = *the Caribbean Sea*

il mar (or **mare**) **del Nord** = *the North Sea*

oceano (masculine) = *ocean*

l'Oceano Atlantico; l'Atlantico = *the Atlantic (Ocean)*

l'Oceano Pacifico; il Pacifico = *the Pacific (Ocean)*

l'Oceano Indiano (only form used) = *the Indian Ocean*

monte (masculine) = *mountain, hill*

il Monte Bianco; il Bianco = *the Mont Blanc*

il Monte Everest; l'Everest = *Mount Everest, the Everest*

il Monte Olimpo; l'Olimpo = *Mount Olympus, the Olympus*
il Monte K2; il K2 = *the K2*

11.3

ARTICLES AND PREPOSITIONS WITH GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

CONTINENTS, COUNTRIES AND REGIONS

When speaking of a country, a region, a continent, etc., in Italian a definite article is usually required (while in English this does not happen). Names such as *France, China, India, Europe, America* etc. in Italian are referred to as "*the France*", "*the China*", "*the India*", "*the Europe*", "*the America*", etc.

The article is affected by the name's gender and number, according to the same rules followed by any other noun (see [paragraph 2.4](#)).

Continents, countries, states, regions, etc. are more often given a masculine gender, despite the names end with different vowels, or even with a consonant (original names).

il Messico = *Mexico*

il Vaticano = *the Vatican*

il Colorado

il Giappone = *Japan*

lo Zimbabwe

il Mississippi

il Malawi

il Laos

il Bahrain

l'Ecuador

l'Iraq

(plural nouns)

gli Stati Uniti = *the United States*

gli Emirati Arabi = *the Arab Emirates*

The names whose last vowel is **-a** are usually feminine.

l'Italia = *Italy*

la Corea = *Korea*

l'Argentina

la Bielorussia = *Belarus*

la Nuova Zelanda = *New Zealand*

l'Europa = *Europe*

l'Asia

l'Oceania

la Sardegna = *Sardinia*

la Virginia

(feminine plural nouns, always referred to groups of islands)

le Filippine = *the Philippines*

le Barbados = *Barbados (Islands)*

le Fiji = *Fiji (Islands)*

But when a name is the original one, it may sometimes be masculine, despite the final **-a**.

il Canada

lo Sri Lanka

il Nebraska

il Nevada

Few countries, among which very small ones, reject the article:

Taiwan

Hong Kong

Andorra

San Marino

Samoa

Singapore

They are almost treated as city names rather than country names, as shown in these examples:

vengono dalla Malesia = *they come from Malaysia*

...*BUT*

vengono da Singapore = *they come from Singapore*

il governo della Slovenia = *the government of Slovenia*

...*BUT*

il governo di San Marino = *the government of San Marino*

dalla Thailandia al Vietnam = *from Thailand to Vietnam*

...*BUT*

da Taiwan a Hong Kong = *from Taiwan to Hong Kong*

la capitale della Spagna = *Spain's capital*

...*BUT*

la capitale di Andorra = *Andorra's capital*

The names of countries, continents and regions always require prepositions to be compound (preposition + article). Only preposition **in**, as an exception, causes the article to be dropped.

il Piemonte = *Piedmont* (region)

with prepositions:

del Piemonte = *Piedmont's, of Piedmont*

al Piemonte = *to Piedmont*

dal Piemonte = *from Piedmont*

col Piemonte = *with Piedmont*

sul Piemonte = *about Piedmont, over Piedmont*

per il Piemonte = *for Piedmont*

tra il Piemonte = *between Piedmont*

fra il Piemonte = *between Piedmont*

...*BUT*

in Piemonte = *in Piedmont*

la Germania = *Germany* (country)

with prepositions:

della Germania = *Germany's, of Germany, German*

alla Germania = *to Germany*

dalla Germania = *from Germany*

con la Germania = *with Germany*

sulla Germania = *about Germany, over Germany*

per la Germania = *for Germany*

tra la Germania = *between Germany*

fra la Germania = *between Germany*

...*BUT*

in Germania = *in Germany*

In the same way:

dell'Asia = *of Asia*

...*BUT*

in Asia = *in Asia*

dall'Europa = *from Europe*

...*BUT*

in Europa = *in Europe*

fra la Borgogna e la Normandia = *between Burgundy and Normandy*

...*BUT*

in Borgogna e in Normandia = *in Burgundy and in Normandy*

The compound preposition **nel / nella** (i.e. **in** + article), though, may be used when the name is followed by a geographic adjective (i.e. *Western Samoa, Upper Volta, Northern Ireland*, etc.), and it is **always** required when the name is followed by an adjective expressing non-geographic qualities (*ancient Egypt, rainy Britain, small Andorra*, etc.).

in Germania = *in Germany*

nella Germania Occidentale or **in Germania Occidentale** = *in West Germany*

nella Germania del XV secolo = *in 15th century Germany*

in America = *in America*

nel Nordamerica or **in Nordamerica** = *in North America*

nel freddo Nordamerica = *in the cold North America*

in Oriente = *in the Orient, in the East*

nel Medio Oriente or **in Medio Oriente** = *in the Middle East*

nell'affascinante Oriente = *in the fascinating East*

in Africa = *in Africa*

nell'Africa Centrale or **in Africa Centrale** = *in Central Africa*

nell'Africa misteriosa = *in the mysterious Africa*

To express this in four general rules:

- simple preposition **in** can only be used for country names and continent names alone (i.e. without an adjective);
- if the country's name is plural (*United States, Philippines, etc.*), only a compound preposition (**nei, negli, nelle**) may be used;
- when the noun comes with an adjective, if the latter expresses a quality (*old Europe, sunny Spain, etc.*), only the compound preposition (**nel, nello, nella**) may be used;
- both simple and compound prepositions are allowed when the adjective may be considered as a part of the country's or continent's name (*Middle East, South Africa, North America, etc.*).

CITIES

City names reject articles, thus all prepositions used are simple ones.

Varsavia = *Warsaw*

with prepositions:

di Varsavia = *Warsaw's, of Warsaw, Warsaw*

a Varsavia = *to Warsaw*

da Varsavia = *from Warsaw*

con Varsavia = *with Warsaw*

su Varsavia = *about Warsaw, over Warsaw*

per Varsavia = *for Warsaw*

tra Varsavia = *between Warsaw*

fra Varsavia = *between Warsaw*

in Varsavia = *in Warsaw*

Only in the case an adjective is appended (*mediaeval Rome, gorgeous Paris, etc.*) a definite article is required, as if indicating "one among many cities" (prehistoric Rome, ancient Rome, mediaeval Rome, modern Rome, etc.).

In Italian, all city names are feminine (**città**, *city*, is feminine) and, obviously, singular.

la vecchia Varsavia = *(the) old Warsaw*

with prepositions:

della vecchia Varsavia = *old Warsaw's, of old Warsaw, old Warsaw*

alla vecchia Varsavia = *to old Warsaw*

dalla vecchia Varsavia = *from old Warsaw*

con la vecchia Varsavia = *with old Warsaw*

sulla vecchia Varsavia = *about old Warsaw, over (the) old Warsaw*

per la vecchia Varsavia = *for old Warsaw*

tra la vecchia Varsavia = *between old Warsaw*

fra la vecchia Varsavia = *between old Warsaw*

nella vecchia Varsavia = *in old Warsaw*

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PREPOSITION WITH GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

Italian and English use different prepositions with verbs indicating movement or position.

MOVEMENT

While English always uses *to* (*you go to Italy, he travels to Asia, he returns to Berlin, etc.*), Italian uses preposition **in** for continents and countries, and preposition **a** for cities. In both cases the simple form of the preposition is used.

NOTE - verb **andare** (*to go*) is irregular, and will be fully discussed in a future paragraph; for the sake of an easy comprehension, only one inflection (**vado** = *I go*) has been used in the following examples.

io vado in Asia, in Europa, in Oceania *I go to Asia, to Europa, to Oceania*

io vado in Spagna, in Danimarca, in Grecia *I go to Spain, to Denmark, to Greece*

...*BUT*

io vado a Firenze, a Londra, a Los Angeles *I go to Florence, to London, to Los Angeles*

POSITION

English uses *in* (*I stay in Italy, he was born in Asia, he works in Berlin, etc.*), whereas Italian uses the same prepositions **in** for continents and countries, and **a** for cities.

vivere = *to live*

lavorare = *to work*

dormire = *to sleep*

io vivo in Asia, in Europa, in Oceania *I live in Asia, in Europa, in Oceania*

lavoravano in Spagna, in Danimarca, in Grecia *they worked in Spain, in Denmark, in Greece*

...*BUT*

hai dormito a Firenze, a Londra, a Los Angeles *you slept in Florence, in London, in Los Angeles*

To memorize easily the correct use of these prepositions, try to think of them as "used for wide places" (continents, countries, **in**) and "for smaller places" (cities, **a**), both for movement and position.

12.1

COMPARATIVE

part I

A quality, expressed as an adjective, can be compared between two sides or terms (two nouns, two pronouns, a noun and a pronoun, etc.) by means of comparatives.

first term	adjective	second term
<i>that boy is</i>	<i>taller</i>	<i>than this girl</i>
<i>your suitcase was</i>	<i>as heavy</i>	<i>as mine</i>
<i>he is</i>	<i>less intelligent</i>	<i>than his brother</i>
<i>this car is</i>	<i>more expensive</i>	<i>than what you think</i>

When the quality of the first term compared is greater than the second, in Italian this is called **comparative of majority**.

To show this, English either adds suffix *...-er* to the adjective, or uses the adverb *more* in front of it. In Italian, only the latter pattern is used, by placing the adverb **più** (*more*) before the adjective, and preposition **di** for *than*.

It should be noticed that when nouns are involved in a comparison, they very often require an article. According to the rules concerning compound prepositions, explained in [paragraph 5.2](#), when the article is definite the preposition links to it and becomes compound, while indefinite articles do not link to the preposition.

il ghiaccio è più freddo dell'acqua = *ice is colder than water*
(notice the use of compound preposition)

un topo è più piccolo di un gatto = *a mouse is smaller than a cat*
(notice the use of simple preposition)

tu sei più giovane di me = *you are younger than me*

le Ferrari sono più; costose delle Ford = *Ferraris (Ferrari cars) are more expensive than Fords (Ford cars)*

l'attesa fu più lunga del previsto = *the wait was longer than what was expected*

il suo cuore era più duro della pietra (or **...di una pietra**) = *his heart was harder than stone*

l'aereo ha viaggiato più veloce del suono = *the plane (has) travelled faster than sound*

Only few nouns do not require an article with comparatives. In particular, the article is rejected by:

- names (names of persons, cities, etc.);
- personal pronouns;
- seasons of the year (see [paragraph 7.2](#)).

il mio amico è più magro di te = *my friend is thinner than you*

Roma è più grande di Napoli = *Rome is larger than Naples*

noi eravamo più bravi di loro = *we were (we used to be) more clever than them*

Elena sarà più svelta di Marco = *Helen will be faster ~ quicker than Mark*

febbraio è più corto di gennaio = *February is shorter than January*

As in English, if the second term has already been introduced by a previous sentence, it is possible to omit it.

questa automobile è **più grande della tua**, ma è anche **più vecchia (della tua)** = *this car is bigger than yours, but it is also older (than yours)*

erano sorelle, ma Giulia era molto **più alta (di sua sorella)** = *they were sisters, but Julie was much taller (than her sister)*

When the quality of the first term is lesser or smaller than the second one, in Italian it is called *comparative of minority*. It always uses adverb **meno** (*less*), as in English.

Articles and prepositions work in the same way as majority comparative.

la luna è **meno distante del sole** = *the moon is less distant than the sun*

la bicicletta era **meno veloce dell'autobus** = *the bicycle was less fast than the bus*

tu sei **meno alto di me** = *you are less tall than me*

alcuni gas sono **meno pesanti dell'aria** = *some gases are less heavy than air*

marzo è **meno freddo di febbraio** = *March is less cold than February*

Maria è stata **meno timida di suo fratello** = *Mary has been less shy than her brother*

Also in this case, if both terms have already been introduced before the comparative, the second one can be omitted.

giociamo tutti nella stessa squadra, ma io sono **meno bravo (degli altri)** = *we all play in the same team, but I am less clever (than the others).*

sono **meno veloci di noi**, perché sono **meno giovani (di noi)** = *they are less fast than us, because they are less young (than us)*

12.2

COMPARATIVE

part II

When the same quality level is expressed, in Italian this is called *comparative of equality*:

first term	adjective	second term
<i>that tree was</i>	<i>as tall</i>	<i>as a house</i>
<i>she is</i>	<i>as old</i>	<i>as his brother</i>
<i>your books are</i>	<i>as many</i>	<i>as mine</i>

To express this concept, English uses ... *as* (adjective) *as*

Italian uses the following form:

... **tanto** (adjective) **quanto** ...

in which **tanto...** means *as much...* and **quanto** means *as*.

tu sei **tanto veloce quanto Marco** = *you are as fast as Mark*

questa penna è **tanto nuova quanto quella** = *this pen is as new as that one*

erano **tanto bravi quanto voi** = *they were as clever as you*

However, in colloquial speech, this comparative often changes to:

... (adjective) **quanto** ... (i.e. **tanto** is omitted)

or

... (adjective) **tanto quanto** ... (i.e. **tanto** is shifted to the second term of comparison)

They both have the same meaning.

la loro casa è bella **quanto** la tua = *their house is as beautiful as yours*

Paolo è alto **tanto quanto** suo fratello = *Paul is as tall as his brother* (literally: *Paul is as much tall as his brother*)

il mio computer è nuovo **tanto quanto** il tuo = *my computer is as new as yours*

Although the previous form (**tanto ... quanto**) is more correct, in common speech these other forms are commonly used, which of the two depending on the sentence (there is no specific rule for this).

For instance:

la neve è **tanto** fredda **quanto** il ghiaccio = *snow is as cold as ice*

la neve è fredda **quanto** il ghiaccio

la neve è fredda **tanto quanto** il ghiaccio

are all possible, although the first one is stylistically the best.

There is also a further comparative form expressing similarity, which may be used in a limited number of cases:

... (adjective) **come** ...

In this case **come** acts exactly as **quanto** in previous expressions. This form gives the sentence a more emphatic meaning, as in sayings and idiomatic expressions, in which a person or an object are compared to something which traditionally represents the maximum grade of a given quality (either an actual quality, or only one believed to be so by common beliefs).

This is a selection of such expressions:

bianco come la neve = *as white as snow*

nero come il carbone = *as black as coal*

pesante come il piombo = *as heavy as lead*

leggero come una piuma = *as light as a feather*

duro come la pietra (or **...come la roccia**) = *as hard as stone* (or *...as rock*)

tenero come il burro = *as tender as butter*

lento come una lumaca (or **...come una tartaruga**) = *as slow as a snail* (or *...as a tortoise*)

veloce come una lepre (or **...come il vento**) = *as fast as a hare* (or *...as wind*)

furbo come una volpe = *as cunning as a fox*

stupido come una gallina = *as stupid as a hen*

testardo come un mulo = *as stubborn as a mule*

muto come un pesce = *as silent* (literally *dumb*) *as a fish*

Especially in spoken language, non-standard expressions in the form mentioned above may be created, according to the speaker's own personal experience.

For instance, a woman may tell a friend:

« **Il nostro nuovo capo è bello come un attore di Hollywood** » = « *Our new boss is as handsome as a Hollywood actor* »

Obviously, an abuse of such "personalized" comparatives should be avoided, for the sake of common understanding.

In a smaller number of cases, comparatives can also be used to express the level of two different qualities which refer to one same subject. In this case, not the two terms (nouns / pronouns) are compared, but the two qualities (adjectives).

le sue ricette sono **tanto** raffinate **quanto** gustose = *his/her recipes are as much refined as they are tasty*

è un artista **tanto** bravo **quanto** modesto = *he is a clever artist as much as he is modest*

If a comparative of majority is expressed (see [previous paragraph](#)), the second adjective is introduced by simple preposition **che** (not by preposition **di**, or any of its compounds).

quella bicicletta sembra **più** bella **che** robusta = *that bicycle seems more beautiful than sturdy*

la studentessa era **più** intelligente **che** diligente = *the (girl) student was more intelligent than hard-working*

TABLE OF COMPARATIVES

COMPARATIVE OF MAJORITY (A is greater than B)

comparing two nouns/pronouns	... più (adjective) di (adjective)- <i>er</i> / <i>more</i> (adjective) <i>than</i> ...
comparing two adjectives	... più (1st adjective) che (2nd adjective) ... <i>more</i> (1st adjective) <i>than</i> (2nd adjective)

COMPARATIVE OF MINORITY (A is lesser than B)

comparing two nouns/pronouns	... meno (adjective) di <i>less</i> (adjective) <i>than</i> ...
------------------------------	--

(the comparative of minority between adjectives is not commonly used)

COMPARATIVE OF EQUALITY (A is equals to B)

comparing two nouns/pronouns	... tanto (adjective) quanto <i>as</i> (adjective) <i>as</i> (adjective) come ... [1] ... <i>as</i> (adjective) <i>as</i> ...
comparing two adjectives	... tanto (1st adjective) quanto (2nd adjective) ... <i>as much</i> (1st adjective) <i>as</i> (2nd adjective)

[1] - only in a limited number of expressions and sayings

12.3

RELATIVE SUPERLATIVE

Superlative grades of adjectives express the maximum level of a quality. They either compare an individual subject to the group or category he belongs to (relative superlative), or they express a high quality level without making a comparison (absolute superlative).

Relative superlative corresponds to the English forms *the* (adjective)...*est* (i.e. *the highest, the fattest, the darkest*, etc.), and *the most*... (adjective) (*the most interesting, the most exciting*, etc.).

To obtain this in Italian, the adverb **più** is used; it is the same adverb used for comparative of majority (see [paragraph 12.1](#)), but by adding a definite article in front of **più** the maximum grade is expressed.

più nuovo di ... = *newer than* ... **il più nuovo (di ...)** = *the newest (of ...)*

Also the opposite, i.e. the minority relative superlative, can be regularly formed, by replacing **il più** with **il meno** (*the least*), whereas in English this pattern is not used as much as in Italian.

il meno giovane (di...) = *the least young (of...)*

In this case, probably *the eldest* would be preferred to *the least young*.

Both the adjective and the article have to match the subject's number (i.e. singular or plural), according to the general rules.

However, the article's and adjective's gender points to the group or category the subject belongs to (which is not always the same gender of the subject itself). The following sample sentences analyze in detail the choice of the article.

Marco è il più alto dei nostri amici = *Mark is the tallest of our friends*

The subject is **Marco** (singular, masculine); the group or category the subject belongs to is **amici** (plural, masculine).

Therefore, the article and adjective required are singular (as **Marco**) and masculine (as **amici**).

Among singular masculine articles, **il, lo, l'** (see [paragraph 2.4](#)), in this case the first of the three will be chosen because it matches phonetically the following word (**più**).

la balena è il più lungo dei mammiferi = *the whale is the longest among mammals*

Here the subject of the sentence is **balena** (singular, feminine), the category is **mammiferi** (masculine, plural).

The article and the adjective required are singular (as **balena**) and masculine (as **mammiferi**, despite the subject is feminine).

Try yourself this analysis with the following examples:

il cane è il più fedele degli animali = *the dog is the most faithful among animals*

il Monte Everest è la più alta delle montagne = *Mount Everest is the highest among (all) mountains*

era il più anziano dei miei insegnanti = *he was the oldest among my teachers*

la matematica è la più interessante delle materie scolastiche = *maths is the most interesting among school subjects*

By turning the sentence the other way round this match is easier to understand:

il più lungo dei mammiferi è la balena = *the longest among mammals is the whale*

In the aforesaid sentence, the article **il** and the adjective **lungo** are masculine, because evidently referred to **mammiferi** (masculine), but they are singular as the noun **balena**.

Here are further examples:

la pizza è il più famoso dei piatti italiani = *pizza is the most famous among Italian dishes*
(**pizza** feminine singular - **piatti** masculine plural)

Turning the sentence the other way round, we have:

il più famoso dei piatti italiani è la pizza = *the most famous among Italian dishes is pizza*
(**pizza** feminine singular - **piatti** masculine plural)

More examples:

il coraggio è la più importante delle virtù = *courage is the most important among virtues*
(**coraggio** masculine singular - **virtù** feminine plural: being a truncated word, singular and plural are identical)

i batteri sono le più minute delle specie viventi = *bacteria are the tiniest among living species*
(**batteri** masculine plural - **specie** feminine plural)

Note that the preposition **di** does not express a real comparison, as it does with comparative, but only the subject's belonging to a category or group (i.e. **di** = *of*), although in English **di** would be often translated as *among*.

As an alternative to preposition **di**, the group or category may be also introduced by the prepositions **tra** or **fra**, both meaning *among*. They are easier to use for who is not yet familiar with compound prepositions (see [paragraph 5.2](#)), since **fra** and **tra** never bind to the following article: they always remain simple prepositions followed by the article.

il whisky è la più forte delle bevande alcoliche = *whisky is the strongest among alcoholic drinks*

il whisky è la più forte fra le bevande alcoliche = *whisky is the strongest among alcoholic drinks*

Carlo era il più alto dei nostri amici = *Charles was the tallest among our friends*

Carlo era il più alto fra i nostri amici = *Charles was the tallest among our friends*

Roma era la più grande delle città antiche = *Rome was the largest among ancient cities*

Roma era la più grande fra le città antiche = *Rome was the largest among ancient cities*

When using **il meno** (minority relative superlative), **fra** or **tra** are preferred to **di**:

il topo è il meno grande dei mammiferi = *the mouse is the least large (= the smallest) among mammals*

il topo è il meno grande fra i mammiferi (preferable) = *the mouse is the least large (i.e. the smallest) among mammals*

la Moldavia è **la meno ricca delle** nazioni europee = *Moldavia is the least rich among the European countries*

la Moldavia è **la meno ricca fra** le nazioni europee (preferable) = *Moldavia is the least rich among the European countries*

Sentences that contain a relative superlative may be turned the other way round, i.e. opening the sentence with *among...* In this case, the use of **fra** (or **tra**) is preferred to **di**; alternatively, **tutti** or **tutte** (*all*) is added after **fra** (**tra**) or **di**.

il whisky è la più famosa tra le bevande alcoliche = *whisky is the most famous among alcoholic drinks*
fra le bevande alcoliche **la più famosa** è il whisky = *among alcoholic drinks, the most famous one is whisky*

fra le bevande alcoliche il whisky è **la più famosa** = *among alcoholic drinks, whisky is the most famous one*

fra tutte le bevande alcoliche il whisky è **la più famosa** = *among all alcoholic drinks, whisky is the most famous one*

fra tutte le bevande alcoliche **la più famosa** è il whisky = *among all alcoholic drinks, whisky is the most famous one*

di tutte le bevande alcoliche il whisky è **la più famosa** = (same as above)

di tutte le bevande alcoliche **la più famosa** è il whisky = (same as above)

Roma era **la più potente delle** città antiche = *Rome was the most powerful among the ancient cities*

fra le città antiche Roma era **la più potente** = *among the ancient cities, Rome was the most powerful one*

fra le città antiche **la più potente** era Roma = *among the ancient cities, the most powerful one was Rome*

fra tutte le città antiche Roma era **la più potente** = *among all the ancient cities, Rome was the most powerful one*

fra tutte le città antiche **la più potente** era Roma = *among all the ancient cities, the most powerful one was Rome*

di tutte le città antiche Roma era **la più potente** = (same as above)

di tutte le città antiche **la più potente** era Roma = (same as above)

The part of the sentence shifted to the bottom is the one that receives more emphasis.

In English too the sentence can be turned the other way round, but *one* has to be added, whereas in Italian no addition is required.

When the sentence starts with *among...*, in Italian the definite article may be replaced with the relevant demonstrative pronoun:

fra le bevande alcoliche il whisky è **la più famosa** = *among alcoholic drinks, whisky is the most famous one*

fra le bevande alcoliche il whisky è **quella più famosa** = (same as above)

fra tutti i nostri amici Carlo è **il più alto** = *among all our friends, Charles is the tallest*

fra i nostri amici Carlo è **quello più alto** = (same as above)

di tutti i fiori le rose sono **i più tradizionali** = *among all flowers, roses are the most traditional ones*

di tutti i fiori le rose sono **quelli più tradizionali** = (same as above)

In this case the demonstrative pronoun has the same function as the ones discussed at the end of [paragraph 5.5](#) (see DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVES USED AS PRONOUNS): it stands in front of an adjective without a noun, although in this case the grade of the adjective is relative superlative.

quella famosa ~ **quella più famosa** = *the famous one* ~ *the most famous one*

quello alto ~ **quello più alto** = *the tall one* ~ *the tallest one*

quelli tradizionali ~ **quelli più tradizionali** = *the traditional ones* ~ *the most traditional ones*

Also the definite article, when used instead of the demonstrative pronoun, acts in the same way.

la più famosa ~ **quella più famosa** = *the most famous one*

il più alto ~ **quello più alto** = *the tallest one*

i più tradizionali ~ **quelli più tradizionali** = *the most traditional ones*

Also note how in the third couple of sentences shown above, **le rose** (feminine) is followed by **i** or by **quelli** (both masculine), because referred to **fiori**, the masculine noun.

A slightly different way of expressing the same sentences without changing the meaning is:

the dog is the most faithful among animals

which can be turned into

the dog is the most faithful animal

In Italian, the position of the adjective can be either before or after the noun (see [paragraph 2.5](#)).

More often, sentences in which the adjective is part of a relative superlative follow a "noun - relative superlative" ordering. For instance:

il cane è l'animale più fedele = *the dog is the most faithful animal*

The ordering is **l'animale** (noun) **più fedele** (relative superlative).

Compared to the form previously discussed, the main change which takes place is the article: the phonetic match is now with the noun (**animale**), and no longer with **più**.

Gender and number, instead, remain unchanged.

Here are more samples of previous sentences turned into this form, plus a few new ones (always focus the article!):

la balena è il mammifero più lungo = *the whale is the longest mammal*

il coraggio è la virtù più importante = *courage is the most important virtue*

il cervello è l'organo umano più complesso = *the brain is the most complex human organ*

il whisky è la bevanda alcolica più forte = *whisky is the strongest alcoholic drink*

la pizza è il piatto italiano più famoso = *pizza is the most famous Italian dish*

The last three sentences also show how if the noun already has an adjective (i.e. **bevanda alcolica; piatto italiano**), the relative superlative comes after both of them (**bevanda alcolica più forte; piatto italiano più famoso**).

Although the "noun - relative superlative" is the most common case, there are sentences in which the "relative superlative - noun" is preferred. There is no specific rule for them, but they sound somewhat more emphatic, and often occurs in popular sayings, titles of books or films, etc. These are a few examples:

la più grande scoperta del secolo = *the greatest discovery of the century*

il più ricco abitante del quartiere = *the richest inhabitant of the district*

la più bella poesia del libro = *the most beautiful poem of the book*

However, the "alternative forms", less emphatic, would be perfectly accepted, although the article should be sometimes changed for a phonetic match with the noun:

la scoperta più grande del secolo = *the greatest discovery of the century*

l'abitante più ricco del quartiere = *the richest inhabitant of the district*

la poesia più bella del libro = *the most beautiful poem of the book*

12.4

ABSOLUTE SUPERLATIVE

The absolute superlative expresses the maximum grade of a quality, without any comparison.

English does not have an absolute superlative, so it is difficult to express its meaning exactly: in most cases it would be almost identical to *very* + adjective (i.e. *very nice, very tall, very old*, etc.), or even *extremely* + adjective.

But in Italian absolute superlatives express the quality in an even higher grade than by using adverb *very* or *extremely*.

Absolute superlatives are not really "emphatic" expressions, and their use in common speech, as well as in literature, is very common.

Absolute superlative is obtained by attaching to adjectives the suffix **-issimo**, which behaves as an ordinary adjective (i.e. **-issimo** is for masculine singular, **-issima** for feminine singular, **-issimi** for masculine plural

and **-issime** for feminine plural).

The accent (stress) is always carried by the first **i** of the suffix (**-issimo**, etc.).

la mia casa è molto nuova = *my house is very new*

la mia casa è nuovissima = *my house is very new*

questo racconto è molto bello = *this novel is very nice*

questo racconto è bellissimo = *this novel is really very nice*

ha due cani molto piccoli = *(he/she) has two very small dogs*

ha due cani piccolissimi = *he/she has two very small dogs*

sono molto stanche = *they (feminine) are very tired*

sono stanchissime = *they (feminine) are extremely tired*

So absolute superlative is quite easy to use. It should only be noticed that if an adjective has the **-e** inflection for both masculine and feminine singular and **-i** for masculine and feminine plural (**facile, facili; breve, brevi; utile, utili; importante, importanti**; etc., see also [paragraph 2.1](#)), in absolute superlative grade they are turned into the more common pattern (**-o** for masculine and **-a** for feminine).

un esempio molto facile = *a very easy example*

un esempio facilissimo = *a really easy example*

una spiegazione molto utile = *a very useful explanation*

una spiegazione utilissima = *a very useful explanation*

uomini molto importanti = *very important men*

uomini importantissimi = *very important men*

sono regole molto utili = *they are very useful rules*

sono regole utilissime = *they are extremely useful rules*

Only very few adjectives use a different suffix, **-errimo**.

Among the ones more commonly used are **misero** (*poor, miserable, wretched*), **integro** (*whole, integer, or upright, honest*), **aspro** (*sour, or harsh, rough, difficult*).

In linking this suffix to the adjective, not only the last vowel, but two or three letters of the root are dropped:

una vita miserrima = *a very miserable life*

un giudice integerrimo = *an absolutely incorruptible judge*

tre salite asprissime = *three extremely difficult ascents*

The **-errimo** superlative is indeed used in literature, but not very often in everyday's speech. With the three aforesaid adjectives, the use of an adverb is more commonly preferred: **molto aspro** (*very harsh*); **davvero misero** (*really miserable*); etc.

Obviously, the use of the suffix **-issimo** with these few adjectives is never allowed.

13.1

CONDITIONAL

BASIC CONCEPTS VERBS **AVERE** AND **ESSERE**

Conditional tenses require a knowledge of subjunctive ones, because in many cases they both occur in the same sentence.

If you are not confident with subjunctive yet, it would be better to rehearse the relevant pages ([paragraphs 9.1](#) through [9.5](#)).

In Italian, conditional has two tenses:

- **CONDIZIONALE PRESENTE** (present conditional)
- **CONDIZIONALE PASSATO** (past conditional)

The first one has specific inflections, while the second one is a compound tense made of present conditional + past participle of verb **avere** for transitive verbs, **essere** for intransitive ones.

Therefore, these two auxiliary verbs will be discussed first.

CONDIZIONALE PRESENTE

avere (to have)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	avrei <i>I would have</i>		avremmo <i>we would have</i>
2nd person	avresti <i>you would have (singular)</i>		avreste <i>you would have (plural)</i>
3rd person	avrebbe <i>he/she/it would have</i>		avrebbero <i>they would have</i>

essere (to be)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	sarei <i>I would be</i>		saremmo <i>we would be</i>
2nd person	saresti <i>you would be (singular)</i>		sareste <i>you would be (plural)</i>
3rd person	sarebbe <i>he/she/it would be</i>		sarebbero <i>they would be</i>

In all inflections, stress falls on **...re...** (**avrèi, avrèsti, avrébbe, sarèi, sarèsti**, etc.).

Curiously, the pronunciation of vowel "e" is grave for the inflection of the first singular person, i.e. it has an "open" sound (**avrèi; sarèi**), while in all other persons it is acute, i.e. "closed" sound (**sarèsti; avrèsti; sarébbe; avrébbe; sarémmo; avrémmo**; etc.).

However, **e** is never accented in normal spelling.

This topic may be completely disregarded by beginners.

Try to become confident with the inflections of these two verbs, since you will need them for the past conditional tense of all the others.

CONDIZIONALE PASSATO

avere

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	avrei avuto <i>I would have had</i>		avremmo avuto <i>we would have had</i>
2nd person	avresti avuto <i>you would have had (singular)</i>		avreste avuto <i>you would have had (plural)</i>
3rd person	avrebbe avuto <i>he/she/it would have had</i>		avrebbero avuto <i>they would have had</i>

essere

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	sarei stato / stata <i>I would have had</i>		saremmo stati / state <i>we would have had</i>
2nd person	saresti stato / stata <i>you would have had (sing.)</i>		sareste stati / state <i>you would have had (pl.)</i>
3rd person	sarebbe stato / stata <i>he / she would have had</i>		sarebbero stati / state <i>they would have had</i>

All accents fall again on **...re...**

When **essere** is used as an auxiliary verb, the following past participle is number- and gender-sensitive, requiring masculine or feminine according to the subject of the sentence. This has already been discussed with compound indicative tenses, and will be shown again in detail in the following paragraph.

13.2

CONDITIONAL

VERBS OF THE THREE CONJUGATIONS

The standard inflections of the present conditional tense are similar to the ones of irregular verbs **essere** and **avere**: the only difference is that they start with a vowel (-e... for the 1st and 2nd conjugation, -i... for the 3rd), which links to the verb's root.

CONDIZIONALE PRESENTE

1st conjugation - **domandare** (to ask for)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	domanderei	<i>I would ask</i>	domanderemmo <i>we would ask</i>
2nd person	domanderesti	<i>you would ask (singular)</i>	domandereste <i>you would ask (plural)</i>
3rd person	domanderebbe	<i>he/it (she) would ask</i>	domanderebbero <i>they would ask</i>

2nd conjugation - **perdere** (to lose)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	perderei	<i>I would lose</i>	perderemmo <i>we would lose</i>
2nd person	perderesti	<i>you would lose (singular)</i>	perdereste <i>you would lose (plural)</i>
3rd person	perderebbe	<i>he/it (she) would lose</i>	perderebbero <i>they would lose</i>

3rd conjugation - **capire** (to understand)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	capirei	<i>I would understand</i>	capiremmo <i>we would understand</i>
2nd person	capiresti	<i>you would understand (singular)</i>	capireste <i>you would understand (plural)</i>
3rd person	capirebbe	<i>he/she would understand</i>	capirebbero <i>they would understand</i>

In all inflections the stress is carried by the **...re...** syllable.

The past conditional tense will be illustrated with transitive verbs at first, and then with intransitive ones, to remark the difference of auxiliaries, and the consequence this brings on number- and gender-sensitivity.

CONDIZIONALE PASSATO

1st conjugation - **domandare** (to ask - transitive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	avrei domandato	<i>I would have asked</i>	avremmo domandato <i>we would have asked</i>
2nd person	avresti domandato	<i>you would have asked (s.)</i>	avreste domandato <i>you would have asked (pl.)</i>
3rd person	avrebbe domandato	<i>he/it (she) would have asked</i>	avrebbero domandato <i>they would have asked</i>

2nd conjugation - **perdere** (to lose - transitive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	avrei perso	<i>I would have lost</i>	avremmo perso <i>we would have lost</i>

2nd person	avresti perso	<i>you would have lost (s.)</i>	avreste perso	<i>you would have lost (pl.)</i>
3rd person	avrebbe perso	<i>he/it (she) would have lost</i>	avrebbero perso	<i>they would have lost</i>

NOTE: the past participle of verb **perdere** may be either **perso** or **perduto**: any of the two may be used.

3rd conjugation - **capire** (to understand - transitive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	avrei capito	<i>I would have understood</i>	avremmo capito	<i>we would have understood</i>
2nd person	avresti capito	<i>you would have understood (s.)</i>	avreste capito	<i>you would have understood (pl.)</i>
3rd person	avrebbe capito	<i>he/it (she) would have understood</i>	avrebbero capito	<i>they would have understood</i>

Notice how past participles (**domandato; perso; capito**) never change, being both number- and gender-insensitive.

Intransitive verbs have the same present conditionals as transitive ones, but their past conditional requires auxiliary verb **essere**. Therefore, past participles become number-sensitive and gender-sensitive, in the same way an adjective would be.

1st conjugation - **stare** (to stay, to remain - intransitive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	sarei stato / stata	<i>I would have stayed</i>	saremmo stati / state	<i>we would have stayed</i>
2nd person	saresti stato / stata	<i>you would have stayed (sing.)</i>	sareste stati / state	<i>you would have stayed (plur.)</i>
3rd person	sarebbe stato / stata	<i>he/she would have stayed</i>	sarebbero stati / state	<i>they would have stayed</i>

2nd conjugation - **cadere** (to fall - intransitive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	sarei caduto / caduta	<i>I would have fallen</i>	saremmo caduti / cadute	<i>we would have fallen</i>
2nd person	saresti caduto / caduta	<i>you would have fallen</i>	sareste caduti / cadute	<i>you would have fallen</i>
3rd person	sarebbe caduto / caduta	<i>he/she would have fallen</i>	sarebbero caduti / cadute	<i>they would have fallen</i>

3rd conjugation - **uscire** (to go out, to come out - intransitive)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	sarei uscito / uscita	<i>I would have gone out</i>	saremmo usciti / uscite	<i>we would have gone out</i>
2nd person	saresti uscito / uscita	<i>you would have gone out</i>	sareste usciti / uscite	<i>you would have gone out</i>
3rd person	sarebbe uscito / uscita	<i>he/she would have gone out</i>	sarebbero usciti / uscite	<i>they would have gone out</i>

13.3

CONDITIONAL

THE USE OF CONDITIONAL TENSES

Hypothetical sentences express something which "might happen" or "might have happened", usually stating a condition under which something may take place, and then expressing the action or the consequence (i.e. what would happen).

For instance: *if you had followed my advice, you would have arrived earlier.*

"To follow the advice" is the initial condition, "to arrive earlier" is the consequence. The first part (the condition statement) is a primary sentence, and in Italian it requires a subjunctive tense.

The second part (the consequence) is a subordinate sentence, and requires a conditional tense.

If I took a degree, I would earn more money

If I had taken a degree, I would have earned more money

If I took a degree and *If I had taken a degree* are primary sentences, stating the initial condition, and in Italian they require past subjunctive and pluperfect subjunctive, respectively.

I would earn more money and *I would have earned more money*, instead, are subordinate sentences, stating

the consequence, and in Italian require present conditional and past conditional, respectively.

In certain cases, these tenses have an opposite ordering:

If I were lucky, yesterday I would have won the lottery

If I had bought a car, now I could travel

In these cases, also the Italian tenses would have to be combined in the same reversed order: past subjunctive and past conditional (first sentence), pluperfect subjunctive and present conditional (second sentence).

However, the primary sentence *always* requires a subjunctive tense, and the secondary sentence *always* a conditional tense.

The Italian word for *if*, introducing most conditional sentences, is **se**.

Other possible expressions which conditional sentences start with are **qualora** and **nel caso che** (both meaning *in the case that*).

Some examples:

(**tornare** = to return and **cenare** = to have dinner)

se (io) tornassi tardi, cenerei al ristorante = *if I should return late, I would have dinner at the restaurant*

(**visitare** = to visit and **conoscere** = to know)

se (tu) avessi visitato Roma, ora conosceresti il Vaticano = *if you had visited Rome, now you would know the Vatican*

(**telefonare** = to phone and **perdere** = to lose)

se (noi) avessimo telefonato, non avremmo perso questo tempo = *if we had phoned, we wouldn't have wasted this time*

Notice how pronouns have been shown in a pale colour, to indicate that with subjunctive tenses sometimes they are used, both in spoken and in written language. This topic is also discussed further down in the page.

It is also possible to invert the position of the primary and subordinate sentences.

cenerei al ristorante se tornassi tardi = *I would have dinner at the restaurant if I returned late (...not if I returned at the usual time)*

conosceresti il Vaticano se (tu) avessi visitato Roma = *you would know the Vatican if you had visited Rome (...but you didn't)*

non avremmo perso questo tempo se avessimo telefonato = *we wouldn't have lost (wasted) this time if we had phoned (...but we didn't)*

So this form usually gives the primary sentence a slightly stronger emphasis, remarking the hypothetical condition more than the consequence.

In any of the two forms, it is very important to use the right subjunctive and conditional tenses, as a mismatch is commonly frowned upon, being the correct match a typical sign of good knowledge of the language.

If you are not confident yet with past and pluperfect subjunctive tenses, it would be better to rehearse them again in [paragraphs 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4](#).

Especially in spoken language, when subjunctive is followed by a conditional tense, personal pronouns **io** and **tu** (*I* and *you*) may be omitted. As mentioned in [paragraph 9.1](#), when subjunctive alone is used, it needs these personal pronouns, because the inflections of the 1st and 2nd singular persons are identical:

se io avessi molto denaro = *if I had a lot of money*

se tu avessi molto denaro = *if you had a lot of money*

But if a conditional tense follows the subjunctive, the right person can be understood without the need of a pronoun:

se (io) avessi molto denaro comprerei una moto = *if I had a lot of money, I would buy a motorbike*

se (tu) avessi molto denaro compreresti una moto = *if you had a lot of money, you would buy a motorbike*

In these cases, **io** and **tu** are often omitted, but this is left as a free choice, being such omission more colloquial.

In written language, instead, both pronouns are often used, especially if the language level is formal. Also other pronouns (3rd singular, and all plural ones) may be either used or omitted.

OTHER KINDS OF SENTENCES REQUIRING CONDITIONAL TENSES

Conditional tenses are also used in other sentences, such as:

I would have lunch with you, but I am late for the office.

We would have visited the place, but we would have stayed there only a short time.

This kind of sentence is completely different from the ones discussed so far.

Conjunction "but" simply links two short individual sentences, none of which is a consequence (i.e. they are both primary ones).

I would have lunch with you - I am late for work

We would have visited the place - We would have stayed there only a short time

The first part always requires a conditional tense, since it expresses something hypothetical (which might happen, or might have happened in the past).

The second part, instead, requires indicative, as in any simple sentence (first example), or another conditional tense (second example) when the following sentence too is hypothetical:

(conditional - indicative)

pranzerei con te, ma sono in ritardo per l'ufficio = *I would have lunch with you, but I am late for the office*

(conditional - conditional)

avremmo visitato il posto, ma saremmo rimasti là solo per poco tempo = *We would have visited the place, but we would have stayed there only for a short time*

The Italian words for conjunction *but* are **ma** and **però**. The former can be used in any case, so to avoid any doubt you might prefer to use **ma**.

It is a common mistake for poor Italian speakers and for children to use both conjunctions ("**ma però**"), but this is incorrect, and should always be avoided.

(conditional - indicative)

comprerei questa giacca, ma è stretta = *I would buy this jacket, but it is small*

(conditional - conditional)

comprerei questa giacca, ma vorrei una taglia più larga = *I would buy this jacket, but I would like a larger size*

avrebbe mangiato un gelato, però i negozi erano chiusi = *he/she would have eaten an ice-cream, but the shops were closed*

avrebbe mangiato un gelato, però avrebbe preferito un panino = *he/she would have eaten an ice-cream, but he/she would have preferred a sandwich*

sarebbe stata una bella festa, però il brutto tempo l'ha rovinata = *it would have been a nice party, but the bad weather has spoiled it*

sarebbe stata una bella festa, però gli ospiti sarebbero arrivati tardi in ogni caso = *it would have been a nice party, but the guests would have arrived late in any case*

saremmo venuti con Marco, ma era occupato = *we would have come with Mark, but he was busy*

saremmo venuti con Marco, ma saremmo tornati con Paolo = *we would have come with Mark, but we would have returned with Paul*

studierei il francese, ma la scuola di lingue aprirà fra un anno = *I would study French, but the language school will open in one year time*

studierei il francese, ma continuerei anche lo studio del tedesco = *I would study French, but I would also keep studying German*

se vendesse i terreni guadagnerebbe molto denaro, ma la villa perderebbe il suo valore = *if he sold the grounds he would earn a lot of money, but the villa would lose its value*

se avessero giocato bene avrebbero pareggiato l'incontro, ma persero nel finale = *if they had played well, they would have drawn the match, but they lost in the end*

The last two sentences show a synopsis of previous cases: a hypothetical sentence (primary and subordinate sentence), requiring subjunctive + conditional tenses, followed by a third sentence, requiring a conditional tense (first of the two samples) and an indicative tense (second one).

A third kind of sentence in which conditional tenses are used is to express wishes or expectations, such as:
I would like this house to be a castle

We would have liked her to become a professional

His boss would have liked him to stay

In Italian, this form is always turned into "*I would like **that** my house was a castle*", or "*we would have liked **that** she had become a professional*", etc.

In these sentences, *that* is always translated **che**.

The second part of the sentence, introduced by *that*, requires either a past subjunctive or a pluperfect subjunctive (if you don't feel confident with them, see again [paragraph 9.1](#)).

The verbs more often used for this kind of sentence are very few, mainly:

- **volere** (*to want*, but also *to wish*, *to like*), transitive;
- **piacere** (*to enjoy*, *to like*), though used in reflexive form (see [paragraph 8.3](#)): **piacermi**, **piacerti**, etc., which is intransitive, thus requiring auxiliary verb **essere** for compound tenses;
- **avere piacere** (*to have the pleasure* or *to be a pleasure*), transitive, used in a more limited number of cases, being a rather formal expressions).

These are samples showing the aforesaid forms with both a transitive and an intransitive verb, in present and past tenses.

Vorrei che voi mangiaste = *I would like you to eat*

Vorrei che voi veniste = *I would like you to come*

Avrei voluto che voi aveste mangiato = *I would have liked you to eat*

Avrei voluto che voi foste venuti / venute = *I would have liked you to come*

Mi piacerebbe che voi mangiaste = *I would like you to eat / it would be nice if you eat*

Mi piacerebbe che voi veniste = *I would like you to come / it would be nice if you came*

Mi sarebbe piaciuto che voi aveste mangiato = *I would have liked you to eat / it would have been nice if you had eaten*

Mi sarebbe piaciuto che voi foste venuti / venute = *I would have liked you to come / it would have been nice if you had come*

Avrei piacere che voi mangiaste = *I would be a pleasure for me if you eat*

Avrei piacere che voi veniste = *I would be a pleasure for me if you came*

Avrei avuto piacere che voi aveste mangiato = *it would have been a pleasure for me if you had eaten*

Avrei avuto piacere che voi foste venuti / venute = *it would have been a pleasure for me if you had come*

In spoken language, conditional tenses used alone may express an offer, or a wish, or a request for something in a more polite or formal way.

(**gradire** = *to enjoy food/drinks* and **preferire** = *to prefer*)

Gradisci un bicchiere di birra? = *Would you enjoy (like) a glass of beer?*

Gradiresti un bicchiere di birra? (more formal) = *Would you enjoy (like) a glass of beer?*

No grazie, preferisco un po' di whisky. = *No thanks, I prefer a little whisky.*

No grazie, preferirei un po' di whisky. = *No thanks, I'd prefer a little whisky.*

Voglio una camicia verde della mia taglia. = *I want a green shirt in my size.*

Vorrei una camicia verde della mia taglia. = *I would like a green shirt in my size.*

Questa va bene? = *Is this one OK?*

Questa andrebbe bene? = *Would this one be OK?*

In asking for something in a shop, a store, etc. the expression **vorrei...** (*I would like...*) is a standard which can be used with any kind of goods (food, clothes, etc.).

However, be aware that the verb **volere** means *to want*, and it is used for actual requests, while verb **piacere** (*to like*) gives the previous expression a different meaning, more or less as *I wish it was so*, or *I feel like having..., I would enjoy...*

In this case, **piacere** is used again in reflexive form (**piacermi, piacerti, piacergli**, ecc.).

vorrei un gelato = *I would like an ice-cream*

(said by the customer in asking for the ice-cream)

mi piacerebbe un gelato = *I would like an ice-cream = I feel like having an ice-cream*

(as a wish, a thought, a comment, etc.)

Also verb **andare** (*to go*), when used in reflexive form, has a similar meaning of *to feel like having...*, though this is rather colloquial.

When the verbs **piacere** and **andare** express wishes, personal pronouns have to be used to turn the verb into its reflexive form, as explained in [paragraph 8.3](#):

ti piacerebbe un panino? = *would you like (feel like having) an ice-cream?*

gli piacerebbe un panino? = *would he like an ice-cream?*

ti andrebbe un panino? = *would you like an ice-cream?* (colloquial)

vi andrebbe un panino? = *would you (plural) like an ice-cream?* (colloquial)

Also auxiliary verbs have to be chosen according to the verb used: transitive verbs (**volere, gradire**) require auxiliary **avere**, while intransitive verbs, as well as reflexive forms, require auxiliary **essere**.

avrebbe voluto un hamburger = *he would have liked a hamburger*

avrebbe gradito un hamburger = *he would have enjoyed a hamburger*

(with verbs in reflexive form)

gli sarebbe piaciuto un hamburger *he would have liked a hamburger*

gli sarebbe andato un hamburger *he would have enjoyed a hamburger* (more colloquial)

14.1

IMPERATIVE

THE INFLECTIONS

Imperative expresses a command (*sit down; come here; bring me the book; etc.*), but it can also express an invitation to do or to have something: *have some cake; take a seat; feel free to ask; etc.*

In Italian, a specific imperative inflection only exists for singular and plural 2nd persons.

1st and 3rd persons have no imperative inflection, so the present subjunctive tense also acts as imperative, when the latter tense is required, although with different shades of meaning. In particular, imperative would rarely be used for the 1st plural person (i.e. *may we do something*), and different expressions would probably be preferred.

Note that the use of conjunction **che** has to be used to express an imperative meaning of subjunctive tenses. Without mentioning **che**, the same inflection would sound more like an actual subjunctive.

IMPERATIVO

essere

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) sia	<i>may I be</i>	che (noi) siamo	<i>may we be</i>
2nd person	(tu) sii	<i>be! (singular)</i>	(voi) siate	<i>be! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) sia	<i>let (make) him/her be</i>	che (essi / esse) siano	<i>let (make) them be</i>

avere

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) abbia	<i>may I have</i>	che (noi) prendiamo	<i>may we have</i>
2nd person	(tu) abbi	<i>have! (singular)</i>	(voi) prendete	<i>have! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) abbia	<i>let (make) him/her have</i>	che (essi / esse) prendano	<i>let (make) them have</i>

Imperative has one simple tense (no past tenses, nor future tense, nor compound tenses); therefore, **avere** and **essere** are never required as auxiliaries, and their imperative inflections only have the actual meaning of *be!*, *have!*, etc..

1st conjugation - **pensare** (to think)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) pensi	<i>may I think</i>	che (noi) pensiamo	<i>may we think</i>
2nd person	(tu) pensa	<i>think! (singular)</i>	(voi) pensate	<i>think! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) pensi	<i>let (make) him/her think</i>	che (essi / esse) pensino	<i>let (make) them think</i>

2nd conjugation - **prendere** (to take)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) prenda	<i>may I take</i>	che (noi) prendiamo	<i>may we take</i>
2nd person	(tu) prendi	<i>take! (singular)</i>	(voi) prendete	<i>take! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) prenda	<i>let (make) him/her take</i>	che (essi / esse) prendano	<i>let (make) them take</i>

3rd conjugation - **sentire** (to feel)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) senta	<i>may I feel</i>	che (noi) sentiamo	<i>may we feel</i>
2nd person	(tu) senti	<i>feel! (singular)</i>	(voi) sentite	<i>feel! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) senta	<i>let (make) him/her feel</i>	che (essi / esse) sentano	<i>let (make) them feel</i>

In pronouncing imperative inflections, the accent (stress) is as follows:

(essere)	sii	siàte
(avere)	àbbi	abbiàte
(1st conjugation)	pènsa	pensàte
(2nd conjugation)	prèndi	prendéte
(3rd conjugation)	sènti	sentìte

Although it is not an important detail - beginners may completely disregard this topic - it is curious how the syllable carrying the stress in singular inflections is pronounced with a grave **e** sound (**pènsa**, **prèndi**, etc.), while in plural inflections, the accent shifts onto the next syllable and the same **e** becomes acute (**pénsàte**, **préndéte**, etc.).

This remark only concerns the spoken language, as in normal spelling no accent at all is used, except in very few cases (where imperative may be mistaken with some other tense).

14.2

IMPERATIVE

WITH PRONOUNS - NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE - GENERAL USE

IMPERATIVE WITH PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Due to the difference between the "real" imperative inflections (2nd persons) and all the others (subjunctive), when personal pronouns have to be used, they link as suffixes to the 2nd persons of imperative, while they come before the verb in all other persons of this tense.

Here are examples of pronouns used for reflexive forms:

1st conjugation - **mangiarsi** (to eat, to eat up, to have food)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) mi mangi	<i>may I eat</i>	che (noi) ci mangiamo	<i>may we eat</i>
2nd person	(tu) mangiati	<i>eat! (singular)</i>	(voi) mangiatevi	<i>eat! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) si mangi	<i>let (make) him/her eat</i>	che (essi / esse) si mangino	<i>let (make) them eat</i>

2nd conjugation - **prendersi** (to take, to choose, to have as a choice)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) mi prenda	<i>may I have</i>	che (noi) ci prendiamo	<i>may we have</i>
2nd person	(tu) prenditi	<i>have! (singular)</i>	(voi) prendetevi	<i>have! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) si prenda	<i>let (make) him/her have</i>	che (essi / esse) si prendano	<i>let (make) them have</i>

3rd conjugation - **vestirsi** (to get dressed, to dress up as a choice)

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	che (io) mi vesta	<i>may I dress up</i>	che (noi) ci vestiamo	<i>may we dress up</i>
2nd person	(tu) vestiti	<i>dress up! (singular)</i>	(voi) vestitevi	<i>dress up! (plural)</i>
3rd person	che (egli / ella) si vesta	<i>let (make) him/her dress up</i>	che (essi / esse) si vestano	<i>let (make) them dress up</i>

Take care in pronouncing the 2nd singular persons with the accent (or stress) on the first syllable, as explained above: **mangiati**, **vestiti**, etc.

In fact, changing the position of the stress gives different words: **mangiati** means *eaten* (past participle of verb **mangiare**, in plural form), while **vestiti** means either *dressed* (again, past participle of **vestire**, plural form), or *clothes*.

In written language, imperative inflections such as these ones are sometimes spelled with an accented vowel, not to be mistaken.

This other example, instead, shows personal pronouns used as an object of the verb:

2nd conjugation - **prendere** (*to catch me, or to take for me, to fetch me*)

	singular		plural
1st person	che (io) mi prenda	<i>may I catch myself</i> [1]	---
2nd person	(tu) prendimi	<i>catch me!</i> (singular)	(voi) prendetemi <i>catch me!</i> (plural)
3rd person	che (egli / ella) mi prenda	<i>let him/her catch me ...</i>	che (essi / esse) mi prendano <i>let them catch me ...</i>

[1] only theoretical; this inflection matches the "colloquial reflexive" form of the verb, *may I catch (myself)*, described in [paragraph 8.3](#)

Obviously, when a pronoun is used as an object, as in the example above, it does not change according to the person (1st, 2nd, 3rd), as it does, instead, for reflexive forms.

In other words, if a pronoun is used as an object, the action of the verb is always received by the same object, i.e. the pronoun, in this case **mi** (*you catch me, he catches me, etc.*).

Instead, in reflexive forms, the action expressed by the verb is received by the same subject who does it: for each person a different pronoun is required (i.e. *I help myself; you help yourself; he helps himself; etc.*).

NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE

It is formed by adding **non** (*not*) in front of the verb, as usual.

Only for the 2nd singular person a change occurs: imperative is replaced by infinitive.

mangiare = *to eat*

(tu) mangia! = *eat!*

(tu) non mangiare! = *don't eat!* (**non mangia!** means *he/she does not eat!*)

prendere = *to take*

(tu) prendi! = *take!*

(tu) non prendere! = *don't eat!*

pensare = *to think*

(tu) pensa! = *think!*

(tu) non pensare! = *don't think!*

All other persons form the negative imperative in the same way other tenses do, i.e. by simply adding **non**:

che (egli / ella) mangi! = *let (make) him / her eat!*

che (egli / ella) non mangi! = *let (make) him / her not eat!*

(voi) prendete! = *take!* (plural)

(voi) non prendete! = *don't take!* (plural)

che (essi / esse) dormano! = *let (make) them sleep!* (plural)

che (essi / esse) non dormano! = *let (make) them not sleep!* (plural)

When a personal pronoun is attached to the verb, **non** always comes before the pronoun:

(tu) non vestirti! = *don't dress yourself up!* (**vestirti** = **vestire** + **-ti**)

(tu) non ti vestire! (other form)

che (essi / esse) non si liberino! = *let (make) them not free themselves!*

(voi) non mangiatelo! = *don't eat it!* (**mangiatelo** = **mangiate** + **-lo**)

(voi) non lo mangiate! (other form)

As shown above, the 2nd singular and plural persons, "real" imperative inflections, allow a double form when used with pronouns:

- one with the pronoun added as a suffix to the verb (infinitive for the singular person, indicative for the plural person);
- one in which the pronoun is used before the verb (same tenses).

Note how in these cases it is useless to repeat the personal pronoun, placed in brackets in the previous forms, because it would be redundant.

non perderti! = *don't lose yourself!* (**perderti** = **perdere** + **-ti**)

non ti perdere! (other form)

non perdetelo = *don't lose it!* (**perderlo** = **perdere** + **-lo**)
non lo perdetevi!

non muoverti! = *don't move yourself!* (**muoverti** = **muovere** + **-ti**)
non ti muovere!

non muovetevi = *don't move yourselves!*
non vi muovete!

non sporcarmi! = *don't make me dirty!* (**sporcarci** = **sporcare** + **-mi**)
non mi sporcare!

non sporcatemi = *don't make me dirty!*
non mi sporcate!

Any of the two may be freely chosen, in spoken language as well as in written language: they are equivalent.

THE USE OF IMPERATIVE

Besides having the meaning of a command, also in Italian imperative may be used for inviting somebody to do something. In the latter case, English often softens the invitation with *please*. Although **prego** (*please*) can be used in Italian, as well, it is often omitted: what makes the expression sound as an offer, a more "pushy" request, or a command, is especially the voice's pitch and intonation.

Sometimes the same verb leaves no doubt about the imperative's meaning:

mettiti comodo! = *put yourself at ease!* (**mettere** = *to put*)

prenditi un'altra tazza di caffè! = *have another cup of coffee!*

assaggia questo vino! = *(have a) taste (of) this wine!*

rilassati! = *relax!* (literally: *relax yourself*)

Quite obviously, all the expressions above would never sound as an order or a command.

Other verbs, instead, allow a wider range of meanings: for example, let's consider the verb **entrare** = *to enter, go in(to), come in(to)*.

Saying **entra!** to somebody knocking at the door may have the meaning of *come in!*, but in a rather informal way: it would be used with a relative, or a friend, or a child. A more polite invitation to come in would be **avanti!**, literally: *(come) forward!*.

In fact, **entra!** might even be translated as *go inside!*, i.e. said by a teacher to a rascal pupil caught sneaking out of the classroom, or by a guard to a runaway convict in pushing him back again into his cell.

Therefore, according to a specific context, imperative may have different meanings.

In case an imperative might sound too harsh, **prego**, **per favore**, or **per piacere** (all mean *please*) can be used, more or less as in English:

prego, giratevi = *please, turn yourselves round* (**girare** = *to turn*; **girarsi** = *to turn oneself round*)

prendete altro vino, prego = *please, have some more wine*

scendete giù, per favore = *come down, please*

All of them can stand before or after the imperative, usually separated by a comma.

Another way of softening an invitation is to use **pure**.

Pure means *also, even*, but when it follows an imperative it gives it a meaning of *feel free of ...ing*:

mangiatelo pure = *feel free of eating it*

lasciate pure la valigia in camera = *feel free of leaving the suitcase in (your) room*

fare pure con comodo, c'è ancora tempo = *feel free of taking it easy, there is still time*

(**fare con comodo**, literally *to do with ease*, means *to take it easy, to take one's time in doing something*)

IMPERSONAL IMPERATIVE

When a command is given as a general condition (i.e. not addressing a given person but simply stating a rule, such as in public notices, or in a warning, etc.), two forms may occur: one using the present subjunctive tense, and one using the infinitive tense.

In the case the command is positive (not negative), both of them may be adopted, although the infinitive one is surely more common.

It is obtained by simply using this tense with a general meaning:

camminare a destra = *walk on the right* (also meaning **to walk on the right**)

spegnere il motore = *switch off the engine* (also meaning **to switch off the engine**)

rallentare = *slow down* (also meaning **to slow down**)

This is the form most commonly used in traffic signs, or more generally, in notices and warnings for the public.

Sometimes it is used with reflexive verbs, which need a pronoun:

reggersi al mancorrente = *hold yourself/ yourselves to the handrail* (also meaning **to hold oneself to the handrail**)

muoversi! = *move (yourself/ yourselves)!* (also meaning **to move oneself**)

tenersi dietro la riga gialla = *keep yourself/ yourselves behind the yellow line* (also meaning **to keep oneself...**)

Notice how in this case the reflexive pronoun **-si** (*oneself*) is used to address a command to everybody, i.e. it makes it "impersonal". See also [paragraph 8.3](#) for personal reflexive pronouns.

The other impersonal imperative form is a bit more complicated, but less used than the previous one, because it sounds rather formal (i.e. used in written documents, in vows, in official statements, etc.).

It requires either one or two pronouns.

Pronoun **si** (same as above) is always required, followed by present subjunctive, 3rd singular person. The same expressions shown above in this form would be:

si cammini a destra = *(let everybody) walk on the right*

si spenga il motore = *(let) the engine be switched off*

si rallenti = *(let everybody) slow down*

Although subjunctive is also used for 3rd person imperative (as shown in the [previous paragraph](#)), here the use of **si** makes once again the inflection sound "impersonal", i.e. referred to everybody.

In the case of a reflexive verb, a further pronoun is required before **si**: pronoun **ci**, usually meaning *us* (as an object), *to us, for us*, or, in non-imperative reflexive forms, meaning *ourselves* (as an object), *to ourselves, for ourselves*, etc. (see [paragraphs 8.1](#) through [8.3](#)).

Compare these expressions with the ones previously shown:

ci si regga al mancorrente = *(let everybody) hold (himself) to the handrail*

ci si muova! = *(let everybody) move (himself)!*

ci si tenga dietro la riga gialla = *(let everybody) keep (himself) behind the yellow line*

In this form, **ci** acts as the real reflexive pronoun, not **si** (in other words, we could say that **ci** has to be used in place of **si**, because the latter is already required for making the verb's inflection impersonal).

	synopsis table for impersonal imperative	
	<i>with ordinary verbs</i>	<i>with reflexive verbs</i>
infinitive form (more common) →	infinitive	infinitive + -si
subjunctive form (less common) →	si + present subjunctive (3rd sing.)	ci si + present subjunctive (3rd sing.)

The negative of all the forms shown above (negative impersonal imperative), is simply obtained by using **non** (*not*) in front of the verb:

camminare a destra = *walk on the right*

non camminare a destra = *don't walk on the right*

reggersi al mancorrente = *hold yourself/ yourselves to the handrail*

non reggersi al mancorrente = *don't hold yourself/yourselves to the handrail*

si cammini a destra = *(let everybody) walk on the right*

non si cammini a destra = *(let everybody) not walk on the right*

ci si regga al mancorrente = *(let everybody) hold (himself) to the handrail*

non ci si regga al mancorrente = *(let everybody) not hold (himself) to the handrail*

15.1

FORMAL LEVEL OF SPEECH

THE BASICS

Italian has two levels of speech: one is the simple level, which has been discussed so far, and one is the formal level.

The simple level is used with children, with one's relatives and with friends. It is also used among young people, as a standard.

The formal level is used with strangers or people with whom a more superficial relation exists (i.e. a friend's parents, a neighbor, the postman, etc.), especially if the person is clearly older than the speaker, unless any of them specifically ask to use a simple level of speech.

The use of the simple level where the formal one would be more appropriate is frowned upon as unpolite, except in the case of non-local natives, whose first language is not Italian, or uncultured people, whose poor knowledge of the language would account for this.

The invitation to use a simple level of speech, where the formal one would be required, is almost as saying "let's be friends". In fact, once the simple level of speech has been used with somebody, it may be used again in any further occasion of conversation. To swap back to a formal level, in most cases would mean that the relation, friendship, etc. has split.

The simple level of speech needs no further explanation: it's the "plain" form of Italian language, discussed so far in the previous pages.

The formal language only differs from the "plain" one when talking to somebody, i.e. when the speaker uses the 2nd persons (singular and plural).

Addressing the 2nd singular person, formal language requires the use of the 3rd singular feminine one, while addressing the 2nd plural person, the 3rd plural masculine should be used. This change involves the verb, but also the pronoun (if any).

tu sei (simple) • **lei è** (formal) = *you are*

tu hai (simple) • **lei ha** (formal) = *you have*

tu mangi (simple) • **lei mangia** (formal) = *you eat*

tu pensi (simple) • **lei pensa** (formal) = *you think*

tu leggi (simple) • **lei legge** (formal) = *you read*

tu perdi (simple) • **lei perde** (formal) = *you lose*

tu dormi (simple) • **lei dorme** (formal) = *you sleep*

tu capisci (simple) • **lei capisce** (formal) = *you understand*

When the 2nd plural person is addressed, the pronoun is always **loro**, not **essi**, (in simple level of speech, **loro** is only used as a direct object, see [paragraph 8.1](#)).

These samples show the same verbs as above, referred to a plural *you*.

voi siete (simple) • **loro sono** (formal) = *you are*

voi avete (simple) • **loro hanno** (formal) = *you have*

voi mangiate (simple) • **loro mangiano** (formal) = *you eat*

voi pensate (simple) • **loro pensano** (formal) = *you think*

voi leggete (simple) • **loro leggono** (formal) = *you read*

voi perdete (simple) • **loro perdono** (formal) = *you lose*

voi dormite (simple) • **loro dormono** (formal) = *you sleep*

voi capite (simple) • **loro capiscono** (formal) = *you understand*

As with other verbs already discussed, the personal pronoun is often omitted.

Generally speaking, the use of formal speech in 2nd singular person is very common, used in everyday's language, and should be practiced throughoutly.

The same formal speech in 2nd plural person, instead, is less frequent: it could almost be considered as

"very formal", thus it is often disregarded, without sounding unpolite. Actually, not many native speakers would ever use it at all, although it is advisable for the student at least to be aware that such a form exists for the 2nd plural person.

The use of **lei** for the 2nd singular person is a recent custom: originally, **ella** was used (i.e. the pronoun for feminine 3rd person, as a subject). In simple speech, **lei** should refer to the feminine 3rd person only as a direct object.

But in the past few decades, **ella** has become more and more unused, and it is rarely heard today: **lei** has taken its place also as a subject, in both simple and formal speech, although the former is the "true" correct form.

Although using a 3rd person for an actual 2nd person gives the sentence two possible meanings (see further examples), very rarely misunderstanding occurs in spoken language: when talking to somebody, the use of **lei** is obviously referred to the same person, not to somebody else, unless a third female person was involved by the topic or by the circumstance.

lei è molto gentile = *you are very kind* (it also means *she is very kind*)

ieri lei ha mangiato troppo = *yesterday you eat too much* (it also means *yesterday she eat...*)

gradirebbe un caffè? = *would you like a coffee?* (it also means *would she like...*)

prende l'autobus o il taxi? = *do you take the bus or a taxi?* (it also means *does she take...*)

And for plural persons (same sentences as above):

loro sono molto gentili (but **voi siete molto gentili** would be polite enough) = *you are very kind* (it also means *they are very kind*)

ieri loro hanno mangiato troppo (**ieri voi avete mangiato troppo**) = *yesterday you eat too much* (it also means *yesterday they eat...*)

gradirebbero un caffè? (**gradireste un caffè?**) = *would you like a coffee?* (it also means *would they like...*)

prendono l'autobus o il taxi? (**prendete l'autobus o il taxi?**) = *do you take the bus or a taxi?* (it also means *do they take...*)

FORMAL SPEECH WITH OTHER TENSES

There is no particular difference for the other many tenses: the formal inflections are always the 3rd singular person feminine gender, and the 3rd plural one.

lei viaggiò in treno = *you travelled by train* (literally *in train*)

avrà dormito a Firenze, suppongo = *you may have slept in Florence, I suppose*

se mangiasse meno pasta sarebbe più magro = *if you eat less pasta, you would be thinner*
(plural)

loro viaggiarono in treno (but **voi viaggiaste in treno** is polite enough) = *you travelled by train*

avranno dormito a Firenze, suppongo (but **avrete dormito...** is also polite) = *you may have slept in Florence, I suppose*

se mangiaste meno pasta sareste più magri = *if you eat less pasta, you would be thinner*

Be careful in using the imperative tense: since the 3rd person is required, there is no "real" imperative inflection, see [paragraph 14.1](#), but only a present subjunctive which acts as imperative.

legga qui per favore = *read here, please*

non prema quel pulsante! = *don't press that button!*

telefoni al vicepresidente = *phone the vice-president*

guardi questa foto, prego = *look at this photograph, please*

non chieda il motivo di ciò = *don't ask the reason for this*

prenda pure quanto desidera = *feel free of taking as much as you like*
(plural)

leggano qui per favore (but **leggete qui per favore** would be polite enough) = *read here, please*

non prema quel pulsante! (also **non premete...**) = *don't press that button!*

telefonino al vicepresidente (**telefonate...**) = *phone the vice-president*

guardino questa foto, prego (**guardate...**) = *look at this picture, please*

non chiedano il motivo di ciò (**non chiedete...**) = *don't ask the reason for this*

prendano pure quanto desiderano (**prendete pure quanto desiderate**) = *feel free of taking as much as you like*

15.2

FORMAL LEVEL OF SPEECH

PRONOUNS AND ADJECTIVES

Now that the basic concepts of formal speech have been introduced, let's see how other parts of the sentence behave.

PERSONAL PRONOUNS AS SUFFIXES

Also when they are attached to a verb as suffixes, i.e. when they are used as a direct object ([paragraph 8.1](#)), these pronouns are used in 3rd singular person feminine gender, and in 3rd plural person.

io sono qui per aiutarla = *I am here to help you* (it also means *I am here to help her*)

sicuramente la riconoscerò = *certainly, I will recognize you* (also *...I will recognize her*)

siamo lieti di vederla = *we are happy to see you* (also *we are happy to see her*)

io la penso spesso = *I often think of you* (also *I often think of her*)

manderò l'autista a prenderla = *I will send the chauffeur to pick you up* (also *...to pick her up*)

sappiamo dove trovarla = *we know where to find you* (also *we know where to find her*)

(plural)

volevamo salutarli = *we wanted to greet you*, also meaning *we wanted to greet them*

(**volevamo salutarvi** is polite enough)

li ringrazio molto = *I thank you very much*, also meaning *I thank them very much*

(**vi ringrazio molto** is polite enough)

averli qui è stato un piacere = *to have you here (as guests) has been a pleasure*, also meaning *to have them here...*

(**avervi qui...** is OK)

As explained above, the 3rd plural person is only used in very formal situations. In most other cases, the ordinary 2nd plural person would be used, still being polite, and much more common.

Apparently, these sentences may be translated in two different ways, but in a great majority of cases, the context in which they are used leaves little doubt about their meaning.

ORDINARY ADJECTIVES

The formal 3rd persons do not bring any particular change to ordinary adjectives, which therefore match the subject's own gender:

lei è simpatico = *you are pleasant* (referred to a man)

lei è simpatica = *you are pleasant* (referred to a woman, but also meaning *she is pleasant*)

lei è gentile = *you are kind* (referred to both genders, because the adjective ends with **-e**)

lei era bravo = *you were clever* (referred to a man, despite **lei**)

lei era brava = *you were clever* (referred to a woman, but also meaning *she was clever*)

lei sarà veloce = *you will be fast* (referred to both genders)

è pronto? = *are you ready?* (referred to a man)

è pronta? = *are you ready?* (referred to a woman, also meaning *is she ready?*)

Once again, these sentences are very rarely misunderstood, because they would be addressed to the person next to the speaker (not to a third person).

Furthermore, in the case they are referred to a man (masculine adjective), **lei** would obviously mean "formal you" in all cases, never *she*.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS AND ADJECTIVES

Personal pronouns and personal adjectives too are used in 3rd person when using a formal level of speech. Remember, though, that the gender of these pronouns has to be referred to the object possessed by the subject, not to the subject itself (see [paragraph 5.3](#)):

questo libro è suo = *this book is yours* (it also means *this book is his*)

questa penna è sua = *this pen is yours* (it also means *this pen is hers*)

questa è la sua casa = *this is your house* (it also means *this is her house*)

questo è il suo cappotto = *this is your coat* (it also means *this is his coat*)

il suo segretario la attende = *your secretary is waiting for you* (it also means *his secretary is waiting for him*)

la sua segretaria la attende = *your (female) secretary is waiting for you* (it also means *her secretary is waiting for her*)

16.1

INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS AND EXCLAMATIVE PRONOUNS (AND THEIR USE AS ADJECTIVES)

INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

The purpose of interrogative pronouns is to replace a noun in interrogative sentences. In Italian, the main ones are:

chi?
who?

che?
what?

quale?
which one?
quali?
which ones?

quanto?
how much?
quanti?
how many?

The second one, **che**, may also come in these other two forms:

che cosa?
what?

cosa?
what?

In fact, the literal meaning of **che cosa?** is *what thing?*, and especially in common speech it is often shortened in **cosa?**, with the same meaning of *what?*.

The use of these pronouns is not different from their English equivalents:

chi partirà con noi? = *who will leave with us?*

chi è rimasto nell'ufficio? = *who remained in the office?*

che avete udito? (**che cosa avete udito?** / **cosa avete udito?**) = *what did you hear?*

che indosseranno? (**che cosa indosseranno?** / **cosa indosseranno?**) = *what will they wear?*

quale porterai con te? = *which one will you take with you?*

quale avete scelto? = *which one did you choose?*

quanto mangerà? = *how much will he / she eat?*

quanto hanno vinto? = *how much did they win?*

In these cases they are typical pronouns, because the noun they refer to is not mentioned. For instance, *what did you hear?* likely refers to a noise, while *how much did they win?* likely refers to money, and so on.

Due to phonetic reasons, when **che cosa** and its short form **cosa** are followed by inflections of the verb **essere** whose first sound is that of a vowel, they make an elision:

che cosa è? = **che cos'è?** = *what is this?*

cosa erano diventati? = **cos'erano diventati?** = *what had they become?*

sai che cosa era? = **sai che cos'era?** = *do you know what it was?*

con cosa è tornato? = **con cos'e tornato?** = *what did he return with?*

This often happens with **avere**, as well; remember that the inflections beginning with a mute **h** are phonetically treated as if the word began with vowel **a**.

In modern Italian, this elision is often limited to the present indicative tense, either used alone or as an auxiliary verb in forming the passato prossimo tense with other verbs.

With all the other tenses of **avere**, instead, the elision is now less common:

che cosa ho per cena? = **che cos'ho per cena?** = *what do I have for dinner?*

cosa hai in tasca? = **cos'hai in tasca?** = *what do you have in (your) pocket?*

che cosa hanno ottenuto? = **che cos'hanno ottenuto?** = *what did they obtain?*

cosa avete comprato? = **cos'avete comprato?** = *what did you buy?*

cosa avevano ottenuto? (more often without the elision) = *what had they obtained?*

che cosa avranno trovato? (more often without the elision) = *what will they have found?*

This is not a strict rule, and not spelling the elision would not be considered a real mistake, although it is very common to use it.

In spoken language, instead, the elision is obviously not spelled, but in pronouncing the two vowels **a** (...**cosa a**...) they sound as one.

INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS USED AS ADJECTIVES

While **chi** can only be used as a pronoun (i.e. it cannot be followed by a noun), the others may also act as adjectives, when a noun is placed after them. Let's see an example with **che**:

che avete udito? = *what did you hear?*

che cosa avete udito? = (same)

cosa avete udito? = (same)

(**che**, **che cosa** and **cosa** are pronouns)

che rumore avete udito? = *what noise did you hear?*

(**che** is an adjective referring to **rumore**)

Only **che** may be used with either purposes. In fact, in **che cosa**, the first part **che** is already an adjective of **cosa** (*thing*), although the whole expression is used as a pronoun, so that no other noun may follow it. The same rule applies to **cosa** alone, since it is a short form of **che cosa**.

Also **quanto** and **quale** are often used as adjectives.

In this case, **quanto** / **quanti** may also take feminine inflections, **quanta** / **quante**, so to match the gender and number of the following noun.

Also **quale** may take feminine inflections, as well, but since adjectives ending with **-e** have identical inflections for masculine and feminine, the difference is somewhat disguised.

Furthermore, when used as an adjective, the English equivalent of **quale** is no longer *which one*, but *which...* (followed by the noun).

quale porterai con te? = *which one will you take with you?*

(**quale** is a pronoun)

quale libro porterai con te? = *which book will you take with you?*

(**quale** is an adjective referring to a masculine singular noun, **libro**)

quale maglietta porterai con te? = *which T-shirt will you take with you?*

(**quale** is an adjective referring to a feminine singular noun, **maglietta**)

quali libri porterai con te? = *which books will you take with you?*

(**quali** is an adjective referring to a masculine plural noun, **libri**)

quali magliette porterai con te? = *which books will you take with you?*

(**quali** is an adjective referring to a feminine plural noun, **magliette**)

quanto mangerà? = *how much will he / she eat?*

(**quanto** is a pronoun)

quanto pollo mangerà? = *how much chicken will he / she eat?*

(**quanto** is an adjective referring to a masculine singular noun, **pollo**)

quanta pasta mangerà? = *how much pasta will he / she eat?*

(**quanta** is an adjective referring to a feminine singular noun, **pasta**)

quanti gelati mangerà? = *how many gelati will he / she eat?*

(**quanti** is an adjective referring to a masculine plural noun, **gelati**)

quante olive mangerà? = *how many olives will he / she eat?*

(**quante** is an adjective referring to a feminine plural noun, **olive**)

EXCLAMATIVE PRONOUNS

They give a stronger emphasis to an exclamation, although their use is not always necessary.

For instance, looking at a nice picture our comment could be either *beautiful!* (simple exclamation) or *how beautiful!* (using *how* as an exclamative pronoun). These pronouns are the same ones used for interrogative sentences.

In Italian the following pronouns express an exclamation:

che...!
how...!

quanto...!
how...! how much...!
quanti...!
how many...!

Che is followed directly by an adjective, very often **bello** = *nice, lovely* (or sometimes *good*) and **brutto** = *ugly* (sometimes *bad*), and few other adjectives.

che bello! = *how nice!* (masculine singular)

che bella! = *how nice!* (feminine singular)

che belli! = *how nice!* (masculine plural)

che belle! = *how nice!* (feminine plural)

Instead **quanto** may be followed by a verb:

quanto ha mangiato! = *how much he ate!*

quanto dormono! = *how much they sleep!*

quanto guadagni! = *how much you earn!*

quanto riderò! = *how much I'll laugh!*

A verb that frequently follows **quanto** is **essere** (*to be*):

quanto era povero! = *how poor he was!*

quanto sono gentili! = *how kind they are!*

quanto sarà facile! = *how easy it will be!*

quanto è stata brava! = *how clever she has been!*

quanto fummo stupidi! = *how stupid we were!*

When the sentence contains an adverb, in a few cases the latter may be moved in front of the verb, but more often it stays at the bottom:

quanto mangiano poco! = *how little they eat!*

quanto poco mangiano! = (same as above)

quanto lavoravate duramente! = *how hard you worked!*

quanto è arrivato tardi! = *how late he arrived!*

quanto si muovono lentamente! = *how slowly they move!*

When **quanto** is used as a pronoun, as in the aforesaid examples, it is invariable (i.e. no feminine nor plural inflections are required).

Exclamative pronouns should be considered adjectives when a noun follows them. In this case the English equivalent of **che** is *what a...* Note how in English an indefinite article is needed for such singular forms (*what a lovely house!*), while in Italian it is never used:

che sbaglio! = *what a mistake!*

che casa! = *what a house!*

che colore! = *what a colour!*

che faccia! = *what a face!*

In Italian also the plural forms alone are used, which in English are not too common:

che sbagli! = *what mistakes!*

che case! = *what houses!*

che colori! = *what colours!*

che facce! = *what faces!*

The noun may be followed by a "real" adjective:

che sbaglio brutto! = *what a bad mistake!*

che colori vivaci! = *what bright colours!*

che case belle! = *what lovely houses!*

In [paragraph 2.5](#) we discussed how the Italian adjective may be freely shifted before the noun, to leave a greater emphasis on the last word of the sentence:

che sbaglio brutto! = *what a bad mistake!* (emphasis on **brutto**)

che brutto sbaglio! = *what a bad mistake!* (emphasis on **sbaglio**)

che case belle! = *what lovely houses!* (emphasis on **belle**)

che belle case! = *what lovely houses!* (emphasis on **case**)

Che may also be followed by a noun, but in English the latter would often be translated with an adjective:

che orrore! = *how horrible!* (literally: *what a horror!*)

che fame! = *how hungry (I am / you are / etc.)!* (literally: *what a hunger!*)

che noia! = *how boring!* (literally: *what a boredom!*)

che dolore! = *how painful!* (literally: *what a pain!*)

In these cases **che** would be an adjective in Italian and a pronoun in English, although the meaning of the exclamation is absolutely the same in both languages.

As seen in the aforesaid examples, also when **che** is followed by a noun, i.e. it is an adjective, it remains invariable, with no inflections.

Quanto, instead, used as an adjective has to match the gender and number of the following noun:

quanto vino! = *how much wine!*

quanta roba! = *how much stuff!*

quanti negozi! = *how many shops*

quante ingiustizie! = *how many wrongs!*

Also in this case a "real" adjective may follow or come before the noun:

quanto vino rosso! = *how much red wine!*

quanta bella roba! = *how much nice stuff!*

quanti negozi nuovi! = *how many new shops*

quante terribili ingiustizie! = *how many terrible wrongs!*

Note how both **quanto** and the real adjective match the noun's gender and number: **quanto-rosso; quanta-bella; quanti-nuovi; quante-terribili** (because **terribile**, singular form, ends with **-e**).

For phonetic reasons, when **quanto, quanta, quanti, quante** are followed by a noun that starts with the same last vowel of the adjective, the latter may be dropped and replaced by an apostrophe (i.e. an elision may occur), although in modern Italian this tends to happen more and more rarely. Only when the matching vowel is **a** it is still common to use an apostrophe, although this is not compulsory:

quanta acqua è rimasta? = **quant'acqua è rimasta?** = *how much water is left?*

quanta armonia in questo quadro! = **quant'armonia in questo quadro** = *how much harmony in this painting!*

16.2

RELATIVE PRONOUNS

part I

Relative pronouns are so called because they act as a reference, i.e. they relate two sentences (a primary and a subordinate one) by linking them in one single period. For instance, *the boy who came here is your brother* links together *the boy is your brother* (primary sentence) and *he came here* (subordinate sentence, because it connects to the former one by means of *who*).

In a relative clause different relations are possible between the primary sentence and the subordinate one. They may share either the subject, or the object, or other parts of the sentence.

This first paragraph will focus relative pronouns used as a subject and as an object, whose possible combinations are summarized in the following table:

	A			B		
<i>primary sentence</i>	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
	=			=		
<i>subordinate sentence</i>	subject	verb	object	subject	verb	object

	C			D		
<i>primary sentence</i>	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT
	-			-		
<i>subordinate sentence</i>	subject	verb	object	subject	verb	object

- **A** shows the case in which both sentences share the same noun as a subject:
Paul left for Paris + *he (Paul) bought a suitcase* = *Paul, who bought a suitcase, left for Paris*
- **B** shows the case in which the primary sentence's object is the subject of the subordinate sentence:
I miss Paul + *he (Paul) left for Paris* = *I miss Paul, who left for Paris*
- **C** shows the case in which the subject of the primary sentence becomes the object of the subordinate one:
Paul left for Paris + *you had met him (Paul)* = *Paul, whom you had met, left for Paris*
- **D** shows the case in which both sentences share the same direct object:
I miss Paul + *you had met him (Paul)* = *I miss Paul, whom you had met*

Each of these cases will be discussed throughoutly, referring to them with letters (**A,B,C,D**) as in the table above. Note that relative pronouns are referred to as a subject or as an object according to which is their position in the subordinate sentence (not in the primary one).

RELATIVE PRONOUNS AS A SUBJECT (cases A and B)

As already seen in the previous examples, they are pronouns that bind two sentences (a primary and a subordinate one) that share the same subject into one single period.

English pronouns used as a subject are *who* (whose use is normally limited to humans) and *that* (for a more general purpose).

Italian relative pronouns exist in two forms: a full length form, and a short one:

FULL FORM

masculine	feminine
il quale (singular)	la quale (singular)
i quali (plural)	le quali (plural)
<i>who / that</i>	<i>who / that</i>

SHORT FORM

che
who / that
 (masculine/feminine, singular/plural)

Full relative pronouns contain a definite article (**il, la, i, le**, see [paragraph 2.4](#)), which has to match in gender and number the noun it refers to. For instance:

l'attore, il quale ha ricevuto un premio, lavorerà nel prossimo film = *the actor, who received an award, will work in the next movie*

molte donne, le quali attendevano pazientemente, formavano una coda = *many women, who were patiently waiting, formed a queue*

Notice how **il quale** is masculine singular (referred to **attore**), while **le quali** is feminine plural (referred to **donne**).

In modern Italian, in both spoken and written language, all the aforesaid pronouns are often turned into the short pronoun **che** (number- and gender-insensitive):

l'attore che ha ricevuto un premio lavorerà nel prossimo film = *the actor who received an award will work in the next movie*

molte donne che attendevano pazientemente formavano una coda = *many women who were patiently waiting formed a queue*

Any of the two is correct, and the choice of preferring one or the other is mainly a matter of style (which a student may obviously disregard at this stage of learning).

However, a few further notes about this topic will be shortly discussed in THE USE OF COMMAS WITH RELATIVE PRONOUNS.

In modern Italian it has become a common use to change the long form into the short one in any case:

l'attore che ha ricevuto un premio lavorerà nel prossimo film

l'attore, che (= il quale) ha ricevuto un premio, lavorerà nel prossimo film

molte donne che attendevano pazientemente formavano una coda

molte donne, che (= le quali) attendevano pazientemente, formavano una coda

A stylistic reason to prefer **che** is to avoid repeating the same definite article, since the noun very often already has one:

il pittore che dipinse questo quadro è un artista famoso = *the painter who painted this picture is a famous artist*

il pittore il quale dipinse questo quadro è un artista famoso = (same as above)

The second sentence would not sound too nice, because of the double article **il**.

Instead:

Caravaggio, che dipinse questo quadro, è un artista famoso = *Caravaggio, who painted this picture, is a famous artist*

Caravaggio, il quale dipinse questo quadro, è un artista famoso = (same as above)

Here the second sentence is perfectly acceptable, and it even sounds better than the first one, although both of them are correct.

Students can do well enough by using **che** in all sentences that match case **A**.

Now let's see what happens in case **B** (i.e. when the primary sentence's object is the subject of the secondary sentence):

Marco ha spedito la lettera a Paolo, il quale la ricevette ieri = *Mark mailed the letter to Paul, who received it yesterday*

Marco ha spedito la lettera a Paolo, che la ricevette ieri = (same as above)

il ragazzo vide le rondini, le quali volavano basse = *the boy saw the swallows, which were flying low*

il ragazzo vide le rondini che volavano basse = (same as above)

Either a long or a short pronoun may be used, and both of them are correct.

THE USE OF COMMAS WITH RELATIVE PRONOUNS

In choosing a relative pronoun (either full form or short form), the student should notice that **che** very often provides two slightly different meanings.

For instance, focus the following sentences, already mentioned among the previous examples:

il pittore che dipinse questo quadro è un artista famoso = *the painter who painted this picture is a famous artist*

il ragazzo vide le rondini che volavano basse = *the boy saw the swallows that were flying low*

This seems to suggest that the painter whose picture we are looking at is famous (but other painters might not be famous), and that the boy saw the swallows that were flying low (but not those ones that were flying high).

In this case no comma should be placed before the relative pronoun.

Instead:

il pittore, il quale dipinse questo quadro, è un artista famoso = *the painter, who painted this picture, is a famous artist*

il pittore, che dipinse questo quadro, è un artista famoso = (same as above)

il ragazzo vide le rondini, le quali volavano basse = *the boy saw the swallows, which were flying low*

il ragazzo vide le rondini, che volavano basse = (same as above)

This seems to suggest that the artist, whom we were already speaking of, is famous: the fact that he is also the author of the painting is almost an extra piece of information. In the same way, the boy saw all the swallows, and the fact that they were flying low is an additional detail.

Here is another example:

l'attore che ha ricevuto un premio lavorerà nel prossimo film = *the actor who received an award will work in the next movie*

l'attore, il quale ha ricevuto un premio, lavorerà nel prossimo film = *the actor, who received an award, will work in the next movie*

molte donne che attendevano pazientemente formavano una coda = *many women who were patiently waiting formed a queue*

molte donne, le quali attendevano pazientemente, formavano una coda = *many women, who were patiently waiting, formed a queue*

Notice how using the short pronoun **che**, *the actor who received an award* and *the women who were waiting* are almost as a single block, i.e. these sentences describe what *the actor who received an award* will do, or what *the women who formed a queue* were doing. We may think that only the actor who received an award will work in the next movie (not those who have not been awarded), or that the many women who were patiently waiting lined up in a queue (but some others did not).

In the second example, the primary sentences (*the actor will work in the next movie*, and *many women formed a queue*) are almost detached from the subordinate sentences (*the actor received an award*, and *the women were patiently waiting*) by the use of a full relative pronoun (**il quale, le quali**), and the two commas make this division even more definite:

the actor will work in the next movie // he received an award;

many women formed a queue // they were patiently waiting.

So this informs us that the actor will work in the next movie anyway (the fact of winning an award is an additional piece of information), and that all the many women were queuing (the fact of patiently waiting is another extra piece of information).

To summarize this, we may say that a full pronoun (**il quale, la quale**, etc.) detaches the primary sentence from the subordinate one more than **che** does. But to obtain the same effect, the full form may still be replaced by the short one, provided that a comma is placed before the relative pronoun (in the written language); this also sounds more colloquial in the spoken language.

In some cases there is but one possible interpretation, either using the full form or the short one:

Marco ha spedito la lettera a Paolo, il quale la ricevette ieri = *Mark mailed the letter to Paul, who received it yesterday*

Marco ha spedito la lettera a Paolo che la ricevette ieri = (same as above)

In most cases, also the context of the sentence helps to make clear which is the actual meaning.

RELATIVE PRONOUNS AS AN OBJECT (cases C and D)

The following examples will focus again the difference between relative pronouns used as a subject and as an object:

the thief **who** broke in stole the jewels

the train reached the station **that** had two platforms

the thief **that** the police caught had stolen the jewels

the train reached the station **that** you had mentioned

Now let's split the primary and subordinate sentences into two separate periods; to do so is a very useful exercise for focusing which part is shared by both sentences:

A *the thief stole the jewels*
the thief broke in

B *the train reached the station*
the station had two platforms

C *the thief had stolen the jewels*
the police caught the thief

D *the train reached the station*
you had mentioned the station

Notice the relations between the primary sentence and the subordinate one, that always share one noun. By dividing a period containing a relative clause in its basic parts, it will be very easy for the student to tell whether the pronoun acts as a subject or as an object.

In the aforesaid examples, **C** and **D** are the sentences in which the pronoun acts as a direct object of the subordinate sentence.

In these cases, English uses either *whom* (for humans) or *that*, and often the pronoun may even be omitted. Italian, instead, always uses the pronoun **che**.

la chiave che il portiere custodisce apre la porta della mia casa = *the key that the warden keeps opens the door of my house*

l'amico che incontrerò oggi insegna matematica = *the friend (whom) I will meet today teaches maths*

i cespugli che ho potato crescono velocemente = *the bushes (that) I pruned grow fast*

The pronoun **che** has to be always used, because it cannot be omitted as in English.

Case **D** is when both the primary and the subordinate sentences share a common object.

ho comprato questo libro che tu hai già letto = *I bought this book that you have already read*

incontrammo la signora che tua madre aveva aiutato = *we met the lady (whom) your mother had helped*

ha ricevuto le lettere che gli hanno spedito = *he / she received the letters (that) they had sent to him / her*

Once again, **che** acts as a universal pronoun.

Briefly summarizing the four cases discussed so far, **che** is very handy in all cases: it is always used as an object, while as a subject it may replace the full forms (**il quale, la quale**, etc.), which are used more sparingly.

RELATIVE PRONOUNS REFERRED TO PERSONAL PRONOUNS

The last topic of this paragraph focuses a particular case.

As far as now, we discussed relative pronouns referred to nouns (i.e. *the boy who we met studies French*, or *we used the car that our friend gave us*, and so on.

There are sentences in which the relative pronoun refers to an indefinite person, expressed by a personal pronoun. For instance: *he who touches the fire will get burnt*, or *I will give this book to those whom I see first*.

In the first example, the subject of the primary sentence is the pronoun *he* (*he will get burnt*), though not referring to anybody in particular, because until the fact takes place we cannot tell who *he* is. In the second example the dative of the primary sentence is *to them* (*I will give the book to them*), whom we do not know. Another example is: *those who drink should not drive*. Once again, we don't know who *those* actually are. Quite obviously, similar sentences only refer to 3rd persons (either singular or plural); when a 1st or 2nd persons are involved, the subject is always definite and throughoutly defined.

For similar sentences, Italian does not use the ordinary personal pronouns discussed in [paragraph 4.1](#) and in [paragraph 8.1](#), i.e. **egli / lui, ella / lei**, etc., but the following three, which are specifically used for introducing a relative clause:

colui	colei	coloro
<i>he / him</i>	<i>she / her</i>	<i>they / them</i>

They are never used alone, because a relative pronoun always follows them, so they always form these compound expressions:

FULL FORM

masculine		feminine	
colui il quale	coloro i quali	colei la quale	coloro le quali
or	or	or	or
colui che	coloro che	colei che	coloro che
<i>he who</i>	<i>those who (masc.)</i>	<i>she who</i>	<i>those who (fem.)</i>

SHORT FORM

chi
(*he*) *who* / (*she*) *who* / (*those*) *who*
(masculine/feminine, singular/plural)

We may think of these almost as "double pronouns", since they contain both a personal pronoun and a relative pronoun (*he who*, *she who*, etc.). The personal pronoun may be either the subject or the object (or any other case) of the primary sentence, but it is always indefinite i.e. it refers to an unknown person:

chi beve alcol non può guidare = *who drinks alcohol cannot drive*

alternatively:

colui il quale beve alcol non può guidare = *he who drinks alcohol cannot drive*

colui che beve alcol non può guidare = (same as above)

colei la quale beve alcol non può guidare = *she who drinks alcohol cannot drive*

colei che beve alcol non può guidare = (same as above)

the individual sentences are:

qualcuno beve alcol (primary sentence) = *somebody drinks alcol*

egli / ella (qualcuno) non può guidare (secondary sentence) = *he / she (somebody) cannot drive*

ricompensai chi mi ha salvata = *I rewarded who saved me*

alternatively:

ricompensai colui il quale mi ha salvata = *I rewarded he who saved me*

ricompensai colui che mi ha salvata = (same as above)

ricompensai colei la quale mi ha salvata = *I rewarded she who saved me*

ricompensai colei che mi ha salvata = (same as above)

the individual sentences are:

ricompensai qualcuno (primary sentence) = *I rewarded somebody*

egli / ella (qualcuno) mi salvò (secondary sentence) = *he / she (somebody) saved me*

Notice how the long form (**colui il quale**, **colei la quale**, etc.) may be used also for the direct object, whereas relative pronouns referred to nouns only use long forms (**il quale**, **la quale**, ecc.) for the subject, and only the short form (**che**) in all other cases.

A few more examples (try splitting them into their primary and secondary sentences):

colui il quale ha detto queste cose è un bugiardo = *he who said these things is a liar*

colui che ha detto queste cose è un bugiardo = (same as above)

chi ha detto queste cose è un bugiardo = (*he / those*) *who said these things is a liar*
(**colui** and **chi** are the subject)

sceglieranno **colei la quale è vestita meglio** = *they will chose her whom is dressed better*

sceglieranno **colei che è vestita meglio** = (same as above)

sceglieranno **chi è vestita meglio** = *they will chose (her / those) whom is / are dressed better*
(**colei** and **chi** are the object)

coloro le quali hanno superato l'esame saranno assunte dalla compagnia = *those (fem.) who passed the exam will be taken in by the company*

coloro che hanno superato l'esame saranno assunte dalla compagnia = (same as above)

chi ha superato l'esame sarà assunta dalla compagnia = *(she / those) who passed the exam will be taken in by the company*

(**coloro** and **chi** are the subject)

premiai **coloro i quali** risposero correttamente = *I rewarded (those) whom answered correctly*

premiai **coloro che** risposero correttamente = (same as above)

premiai **chi** rispose correttamente = *I rewarded whom answered correctly*

(**coloro** and **chi** are the object)

mi ha indicato **colei la quale** sarà eletta presidentessa = *he indicated me her who will be elected president*

mi ha indicato **colei che** sarà eletta presidentessa = (same as above)

mi ha indicato **chi** sarà eletta presidentessa = *he indicated me whom will be elected (female) president*

(**colei** and **chi** are the object)

chiameremo **coloro le quali** hanno finito il lavoro = *we shall call those who finished the work*

chiameremo **coloro che** hanno finito il lavoro = (same as above)

chiameremo **chi** ha finito il lavoro = *we shall call whom finished the work*

(**coloro** and **chi** are the object)

Examining these examples, the first thing we notice is that the full relative pronoun contains more information about the subject or the object of the sentence. In fact, the short **chi** may refer either to one person (singular) or to more people (plural), although it is always dealt with as a singular pronoun, thus it requires singular inflections of the verb: in the third examples of both groups of sentences shown above, we find:

coloro le quali hanno superato l'esame saranno assunte

chi ha superato l'esame sarà assunta

chiameremo **coloro che hanno finito il lavoro**

chiameremo **chi ha finito il lavoro**

Therefore, **chi** always behaves as a singular pronoun, although it may refer to more than one person.

The short pronoun **chi** may also refer to masculine and to feminine alike. But the other parts of the sentence which are gender-sensitive (nouns, adjectives, past participles, etc.) make clear whether **chi** refers to masculine or to feminine:

chi ha esperienza sarà il nuovo direttore = *who is experienced will be the new director* (masculine)

chi ha lavorato sarà pagata = *who worked will be payed* (feminine)

The student should become familiar with these forms before turning the page, because in the following paragraphs they will be dealt with again, at a further stage.

16.3

RELATIVE PRONOUNS

part II

COMBINING PREPOSITIONS WITH RELATIVE PRONOUNS

When relative pronouns are not used as a subject or as a direct object they require a preposition, whose simple and compound forms have been discussed in [paragraphs 5.1](#) and [5.2](#).

When a preposition is needed, the full pronoun can no longer be replaced by **che**, but by **cui**, whose function is identical (i.e. it is number- and gender-insensitive).

Since **il quale**, **la quale**, etc. contain a definite article, most simple prepositions bind to the latter, thus forming the relevant compound prepositions that match the article's gender and number.

Using **cui**, instead, the simple preposition is required.

di + il quale = di + i quali =	masculine del quale dei quali di cui	di = of <i>whose</i>	di + la quale = di + le quali =	feminine della quale delle quali di cui
<hr/>				
a + il quale = a + i quali =	masculine al quale ai quali a cui	a = to <i>to whom</i> <i>to which</i>	a + la quale = a + le quali =	feminine alla quale alle quali a cui
<hr/>				
da + il quale = da + i quali =	masculine dal quale dai quali da cui	da = from <i>from whom</i> <i>from which</i>	da + la quale = da + le quali =	feminine dalla quale dalle quali da cui
<hr/>				
in + il quale = in + i quali =	masculine nel quale nei quali in cui	in = in <i>in whom</i> <i>in which</i>	in + la quale = in + le quali =	feminine nella quale nelle quali in cui
<hr/>				
con + il quale = con + i quali =	masculine col quale or con il quale coi quali or con i quali con cui	con = with <i>with whom</i> <i>with which</i>	con + la quale = con + le quali =	feminine colla quale or con la quale colle quali or con le quali con cui
<hr/>				
su + il quale = su + i quali =	masculine sul quale sui quali su cui	su = on, over <i>on whom</i> <i>on which</i>	su + la quale = su + le quali =	feminine sulla quale sulle quali su cui
<hr/>				
per + il quale =	masculine per il quale (pel quale is obsolete)	per = for	per + la quale =	feminine per la quale

per + i quali = **per i quali**
(pei quali is obsolete)
per cui

per + le quali = **per le quali**
per cui

for whom
for which

masculine
(no singular form)
fra / tra + i quali = **fra / tra i quali**
fra / tra cui

fra / tra
= among, between

feminine
(no singular form)
fra / tra + le quali = **fra / tra i quali**
fra / tra cui

among whom
between whom
among which
between which

These are some examples in which the aforesaid pronouns are used:

il libro del quale conosco l'autore è stato pubblicato recentemente = *the book whose author I know has been recently published*

il libro di cui conosco l'autore è stato pubblicato recentemente = (same as above)

le attrici alle quali daranno un premio sono sul palcoscenico = *the actresses whom a prize will be given to are on the stage*

le attrici a cui daranno un premio sono sul palcoscenico = (same as above)

la casa dalla quale proveniva il fumo era quella più bassa = *the house which the smoke came out from was the lowest one*

la casa da cui proveniva il fumo era quella più bassa = (same as above)

questa è una lista di alberghi nei quali abbiamo già dormito = *this is a list of hotels which we have already slept in*

questa è una lista di alberghi in cui abbiamo già dormito = (same as above)

gli amici coi quali siamo partiti sono tornati ieri = *the friends whom we left with returned yesterday*

gli amici con cui siamo partiti sono tornati ieri = (same as above)

la collina sulla quale salivamo era coperta di nebbia = *the hill which we were climbing on was covered with fog*

la collina su cui salivamo era coperta di nebbia = (same as above)

l'esposizione per la quale sono venuti aprirà domani = *the exhibition which they came for will open tomorrow*

l'esposizione per cui sono venuti aprirà domani = (same as above)

gli alberi fra i quali è sospesa l'amaca sono saldi = *the trees between which the hammock is suspended are steady*

gli alberi fra cui è sospesa l'amaca sono saldi = (same as above)

Using the full forms, note how the gender and number of the relative pronoun always matches the noun that provides a link between the primary and subordinate sentences:

il libro del quale conosco l'autore è stato pubblicato recentemente = *the book whose author I know has been recently published*

Dividing this period into its basic sentences:

il libro è stato pubblicato recentemente (primary sentence) = *the book has been recently published*

conosco l'autore del libro (subordinate sentence) = *I know the author of the book*

Since *the book* is the noun shared by the two sentences, the relative pronoun in genitive form (**del quale**) will refer to **il libro**, and will match its gender and number (masculine and singular).

Using the short form **cui**, instead, no specific match is needed.

Also note how in English the preposition often shifts to the bottom of the subordinate sentence (i.e. *the friends whom we left with...*), while in Italian it has to be placed before the relative pronoun (**gli amici coi quali siamo partiti**), in all cases.

At the end of the previous [paragraph 16.2](#) we mentioned the particular situation in which the relative pronoun refers to a personal pronoun (i.e. *he who...*, *she who...*, *those who...*), and how in Italian such pronouns are translated with **colui il quale** or **colui che**, **colei la quale** or **colei che**, and **coloro i quali / le quali** or **coloro che**.

When prepositions are added to these relative pronouns, as in the many cases discussed in this paragraph (i.e. *he whose...*, *he to whom...*, *he from whom...*, *he with whom...*, etc.), it is no longer possible to use short forms (neither **che** nor **cui**).

colui del quale = *he whose...* **coloro dei quali** = *those (masc.) whose...*
colei della quale = *she whose...* **coloro delle quali** = *those (fem.) whose...*

colui del quale *scriverò il nome è il vincitore* = *he whose name I shall write is the winner*

colui al quale = *he to whom...* **colei alla quale** = *she to whom...*
coloro ai quali = *those (masc.) to whom...* **coloro alle quali** = *those (fem.) to whom...*

coloro alle quali *manderemo una lettera sono ammesse alla sessione successiva* = *those (fem.) whom we will send a letter to are admitted to the next session*

colui dal quale = *he from whom...* **colei dalla quale** = *she from whom...*
coloro dai quali = *those (m.) from whom...* **coloro dalle quali** = *those (f.) from whom...*

colei dalla quale *ho ricevuto il regalo si chiama Stefania* = *she whom I received the gift from is called Stephanie*

colui nel quale = *he in whom...* **colei nella quale** = *she in whom...*
coloro nei quali = *those (masc.) in whom...* **coloro nelle quali** = *those (fem.) in whom...*

coloro nei quali *credo sono buoni amici* = *those whom I trust in are good friends*

colui col quale or
colui con il quale = *he with whom...* **colei colla quale** or
colei con la quale = *she with whom...*
coloro coi quali or
coloro con i quali = *those (m.) with whom...* **coloro colle quali** or
coloro con le quali = *those (f.) with whom...*

coloro con le quali *viaggiamo dividono con noi l'alloggio* = *those (fem.) whom we travel share the accomodation with us*

colui sul quale = *he on / upon whom...* **colei sulla quale** = *she on / upon whom...*
coloro sui quali = *those (masc.) on / upon whom...* **coloro sulle quali** = *those (fem.) on / upon whom...*

coloro sui quali *contavamo ci hanno traditi* = *those whom we relied upon betrayed us*

colui per il quale = *he for whom...* **coloro per i quali** = *those (masc.) for whom...*
colei per la quale = *she for whom...* **coloro per le quali** = *those (fem.) for whom...*

colei per la quale *era tornato lo aspettava* = *she whom he had returned for was waiting for him*

coloro fra / tra i quali = *those (m.) among whom...* **coloro fra / tra le quali** = *those (f.) among whom...*

coloro fra i quali divideremo le spese sono piuttosto soddisfatti = *those among whom we'll share the expenses are rather satisfied*

Using the full forms, always remember that the relative pronoun matches the personal pronoun's number and gender.

The same structure shown above is also used when the personal pronoun whom the relative pronoun refers to is the object of the primary sentence:

colui del quale ho scritto il nome è il vincitore (**colui** is the subject) = *he whose name I wrote is the winner*

prenderò colui del quale ho scritto il nome (**colui** is the object) = *I'll take him whose name I wrote*

The student should take care that while in English the preposition is often shifted at the bottom of the subordinate sentence, in Italian its position is always between the personal pronoun and the relative pronoun, i.e. the ordering is as follows:

personal pronoun + *preposition* + *relative pronoun*
(either subject or object) (introducing the subordinate sentence)

Shifting the preposition before the personal pronoun gives the sentence a different meaning, as will be discussed in the second part of [paragraph 16.4](#).

16.4

RELATIVE PRONOUNS

part III

THE USE OF *CHI*

At the end of [paragraph 16.2](#) we introduced the case of relative pronouns referring to a personal pronoun. For instance, *the boy who lives next door is my friend* clearly refers to a specific person (the boy). But *he who wins the lottery will become rich* refers to an indefinite person, because the winner is not known. A similar case is *he who reaches 100 points wins the game*, which could also be turned into *whoever reaches 100 points wins the game*.

In English *he who*, *she who*, *those who*, are often shortened simply into *who* (*he who wins the lottery* = *who wins the lottery*).

In Italian this situation requires specific personal pronouns (**colui**, **colei**, **coloro**), used only in the case of a relative clause, followed by the standard relative pronouns.

Also in this case a short form exists, **chi**, which corresponds to the shortened English *who* (= *he / she / those who*) when the personal pronoun is dropped.

FULL FORM

masculine		feminine	
colui il quale	coloro i quali	colei la quale	coloro le quali
or	or	or	or
colui che	coloro che	colei che	coloro che
<i>he who</i>	<i>those who (masc.)</i>	<i>she who</i>	<i>those who (fem.)</i>

SHORT FORM

chi
(he) who / (she) who / (those) who
(masculine/feminine, singular/plural)

We also mentioned that these expressions almost act as "double pronouns", since they contain both a personal and a relative pronoun (i.e. *he + who*, or *she + who*, etc.), and that the personal pronoun may be either the subject or the object of the primary sentence:

AS A SUBJECT

colui il quale / colei la quale vince questa gara parteciperà alla finale = (/) *who wins this match will take part to the final*

colui che / colei che vince questa gara parteciperà alla finale = (same as above)

chi vince questa gara parteciperà alla finale = *who wins this match will take part to the final*

colui il quale / colei la quale aveva il permesso entrava dall'ingresso principale = (/) *who had the permit entered from the main entrance*

colui che / colei che aveva il permesso entrava dall'ingresso principale = (same as above)

chi aveva il permesso entrava dall'ingresso principale = *who had the permit entered from the main entrance*

chi dorme non piglia pesci (proverb) = *who sleeps does not catch fish*

AS AN OBJECT

il vigile multa **colui il quale / colei la quale** è senza patente = *the traffic warden fines (he / she) who is without a licence*

il vigile multa **colui che / colei che** è senza patente = (same as above)

il vigile multa **chi** è senza patente = *the traffic warden fines who is without a licence*

l'insegnante aveva annotato **colui il quale / colei la quale** era stato / stata assente = *the teacher had noted down (he / she) who had been absent*

l'insegnante aveva annotato **colui che / colei che** era stato / stata assente = (same as above)

l'insegnante aveva annotato **chi** era stato assente = *the teacher had noted down who had been absent*

alla fine vedremo **chi** vince = *in the end we'll see who wins*

Especially in spoken language, the long forms are less frequently used than **chi**: they are more often found in solemn statements, in the text of laws, in some proverbs, and sometimes they are used to seek a stylish effect. In some other cases, as shown in the aforesaid examples, the use of a full form would not be correct, or it would sound very strange.

However, the student should note how full forms provide a greater amount of information.

For instance:

chi porta gli occhiali ha problemi di vista = *(he / she) who wears glasses has sight problems*

Now, by using the several full forms:

colui il quale porta gli occhiali ha problemi di vista = *he who wears glasses has sight problems*

colei la quale porta gli occhiali ha problemi di vista = *she who wears glasses has sight problems*

coloro i quali portano gli occhiali hanno problemi di vista = *those who wear glasses have sight problems*

coloro le quali portano gli occhiali hanno problemi di vista = (same as above, but feminine)

colui che porta gli occhiali ha problemi di vista = *he who wears glasses has sight problems*

colei che porta gli occhiali ha problemi di vista = *she who wears glasses has sight problems*

coloro che portano gli occhiali hanno problemi di vista = *those who wear glasses have sight problems*

coloro che portano gli occhiali hanno problemi di vista = (same as above, but feminine)

The use of full forms is somewhat more difficult, as it requires the correct use of the verb's inflections, i.e. singular or plural, and sometimes even the gender of past participles and adjectives has to be correctly matched.

Therefore, for who is learning the language it is important to know that these forms exist, but **chi** will surely be much easier to memorize, and more handy to use.

These "double pronouns" may also be used in all other cases (not only subject and object), in which case a preposition will be needed in front of the relative pronoun.

The following examples show one sentence for each preposition, with all the possible forms.

di chi = *whose*

sappiamo il nome **di chi** parteciperà allo spettacolo = *we know the name of whom will take part to the show*

sappiamo il nome **di colui il quale / di colei la quale** parteciperà allo spettacolo

sappiamo i nomi **di coloro i quali / di coloro le quali** parteciperanno allo spettacolo

sappiamo il nome **di colui che / di colei che** parteciperà allo spettacolo

sappiamo i nomi **di coloro che** parteciperanno allo spettacolo

a chi = *to whom*

danno un premio **a chi** colpisce il bersaglio = *they give a prize to whom hits the target*

danno un premio **a colui il quale / a colei la quale** colpisce il bersaglio

danno un premio **a coloro i quali / a coloro le quali** colpiscono il bersaglio

danno un premio **a colui che / a colei che** colpisce il bersaglio

danno un premio **a coloro che** colpiscono il bersaglio

da chi = *from whom*

comprammo la radio **da chi** ci ha venduto la televisione = *we bought the radio from whom had sold us the television set*

comprammo la radio **da colui il quale / da colei la quale** ci vendette la televisione

comprammo la radio **da coloro i quali / da coloro le quali** ci vendettero la televisione

comprammo la radio **da colui che / da colei che** ci vendette la televisione

comprammo la radio **da coloro che** ci vendettero la televisione

in chi = *in whom*

confido **in chi** mi è amico = *I have faith in whom is friendly to me*

confido **in colui il quale** mi è amico / **in colei la quale** mi è amica

confido **in coloro i quali** mi sono amici / **in coloro le quali** mi sono amiche

confido **in colui che** mi è amico / **in colei che** mi è amica

confido **in coloro che** mi sono amici / amiche

con chi = *with whom*

andremo **con chi** ha più amici = *we'll go with whom has more friends*

andremo **con colui il quale / con colei la quale** ha più amici

andremo **con coloro i quali / con coloro le quali** hanno più amici

andremo **con colui che / con colei che** ha più amici

andremo **con coloro che** hanno più amici

per chi = *for whom*

per chi è ricco spendere soldi è facile = *for he / she who is rich, to spend money is easy*

per colui il quale è ricco / **per colei la quale** è ricca spendere soldi è facile

per coloro i quali sono ricchi / **per coloro le quali** sono ricche spendere soldi è facile

per colui che è ricco / **per colei che** è ricca spendere soldi è facile

per coloro che sono ricchi / ricche spendere soldi è facile

su chi = *on whom*

non contare **su chi** non è affidabile = *don't count on whom is not reliable*

non contare **su colui il quale / su colei la quale** non è affidabile

non contare **su coloro i quali / su coloro le quali** non sono affidabili

non contare **su colui che / su colei che** non è affidabile

non contare **su coloro che** non sono affidabili

fra chi / tra chi = *among whom*

fecero un sondaggio **fra chi** aveva visto quel film = *they did a survey among whom had seen that movie*

fecero un sondaggio **fra coloro i quali / fra coloro le quali** avevano visto quel film

fecero un sondaggio **fra coloro che** avevano visto quel film

Note how in the last sentence only the plural forms are possible, since the prepositions **tra** and **fra** (*among, between*) cannot refer to a single person.

For the sake of a good knowledge of the relative clause, the student should focus well the difference between the forms discussed in this page and the ones dealt with in [paragraph 16.3](#)), which sometimes look very similar.

An example:

per chi fuma i sigari quelli cubani sono i migliori = *for whom smokes cigars, the Cuban ones are the best*

per colui il quale fuma i sigari... = *for he who smokes cigars...*

per colei la quale fuma i sigari... = *for she who smokes cigars...*

per colui che fuma i sigari... = *for he who smokes cigars...*

per colei che fuma i sigari... = *for she who smokes cigars...*

Now compare them with the following sentence:

colui per il quale ho comprato i sigari è un mio amico = *he whom I bought the cigars for is a friend of mine*

Apparently they have in common **colui**, **per**, and **il quale**.

But in this case **colui** is completely detached from **il quale** (it stands after the preposition **per**). Thus, this sentence belongs to the forms discussed in the previous paragraph: **colui** is the subject, and **per il quale** introduces the relative clause.

Another example:

a chi torna chiederò l'informazione = *to whom returns I will ask the information*

a colui il quale torna... = *to him who returns...*

a colei la quale torna... = *to her who returns...*

a colui che torna... = *to him who returns...*

a colei che torna... = *to her who returns...*

Now compare them with this sentence:

colei alla quale chiederò l'informazione conosce bene questo posto = *she whom I will ask the information to, knows this place well*

Also in this case we find **colei**, **a** and **la quale** (**alla quale** = **a** + **la quale**).

But **la quale** comes after the preposition **a**, so **colei** is the subject and **alla quale** introduces the relative clause.

16.5

RELATIVE PRONOUNS

part IV

THE USE OF *CIÒ CHE*

In the previous [paragraph 16.4](#) we discussed in depth the use of relative pronouns referring to a personal pronoun. Pronouns such as **colui**, **colei**, **coloro**, are only used with human beings. For inanimate objects, a parallel set of pronouns is used:

FULL FORM

masculine		feminine	
quello che	quelli che	quella che	quelle che
<i>what / the one (that)</i>	<i>the ones (that)</i>	<i>the one (that)</i>	<i>the ones (that)</i>

SHORT FORM

ciò che
what
(masculine, acting as neutre)

Ciò had already been mentioned in [paragraph 5.5](#), as a demonstrative pronoun.

All these forms work exactly as the ones described in the previous paragraph, although not in all cases a double version is possible (full form / short form):

AS A SUBJECT

quello che resta del palazzo è un cumulo di macerie = *what remains of the building is a heap of rubble*

ciò che resta del palazzo è un cumulo di macerie = (same as above)

quella che visiteremo domani è la città più grande del paese = *the one we'll visit tomorrow is the largest city of the country*

quello che li disturba è tutto questo rumore = *what disturbs them is all this noise*

ciò che li disturba è tutto questo rumore = (same as above)

quelle che assaggeremo dopo sono ricette regionali = *the ones we'll taste later on are regional recipes*

AS AN OBJECT

il testimone aveva descritto **quello che** era accaduto = *the witness had described what had happened*

il testimone aveva descritto **ciò che** era accaduto = (same as above)

sostituiranno **quelli che** sono danneggiati = *they will replace the ones that are damaged*

domani verificheremo **quello che** hanno fatto = *tomorrow we'll check out what they did*

domani verificheremo **ciò che** hanno fatto = (same as above)

sostituiranno **quella che** sono danneggiati = *we'll replace the ones that are damaged*

Although this is not a general rule, when the pronoun refers to a specific noun, i.e. when a noun can be actually used to replace the pronoun, in English *the one (that)...* or *the ones (that)...* would be used, and in Italian the best choice would be **quello che**, **quella che**, **quelli che** or **quelle che**, according to what the pronoun refers to.

For instance:

quella che visiteremo domani è la città più grande del paese = *the one we'll visit tomorrow is the largest city of the country*

(*the one* could be replaced with *the city*)

sostituiranno **quelli che** sono danneggiati = *they will replace the ones that are damaged*

(*the ones* refer to something which has been specifically mentioned in a previous sentence, such as *the cables*, or *the engines*, or *the lockers*, etc.)

Instead, when the pronoun refers to something more generic, which no specific noun can replace, the English form would be *what...*, while in Italian either **quello che** (always masculine singular) or **ciò che** may be used.

For instance:

quello che li disturba è tutto questo rumore = *what disturbs them is all this noise*

ciò che li disturba è tutto questo rumore = (same as above)

(*what* could only be replaced by something generic, such as *the problem that...*)

domani verificheremo **quello che** hanno fatto = *tomorrow we'll check out what they did*

domani verificheremo **ciò che** hanno fatto = (same as above)

(*what* is quite generic, for instance *the work that...*)

THE USE OF THESE PRONOUNS WITH PREPOSITIONS

Their use with prepositions is similar to the one described in [paragraph 16.4](#), so only a few sentences will be shown, as a further example.

non conoscono la provenienza **di quello che** vendono = *they do not know the origin of what they sell*

non conoscono la provenienza **di ciò che** vendono = (same as above)

presta attenzione **a quello che** dice l'insegnante = *pay attention to what the teacher says*

presta attenzione **a ciò che** dice l'insegnante = (same as above)

con quello che guadagno comprerò un'automobile = *with what I earn I will buy a car*

con ciò che guadagno comprerò un'automobile = (same as above)

basavano la loro teoria su quello che avevano appreso = *they based their theory on what they had learned*

basavano la loro teoria su ciò che avevano appreso = (same as above)

per quello che hanno commesso sono stati condannati = *for what they committed, they have been sentenced*

per ciò che hanno commesso sono stati condannati = (same as above)

17.1

THE USE OF CAPITAL (UPPERCASE) LETTERS

The Italian language uses capital letters more sparingly than the English one. These are the situations in which a capital letter is required:

- **PERSONAL NAMES**

Names and surnames are always spelled with a capital letter:

Paolo Bianchi

Stefania Marini

Tommaso Russo

- **GEOGRAPHIC NAMES**

Names of cities, countries, continents, rivers, mountains, seas, etc.

Parigi = *Paris*

Spagna = *Spain*

Europa = *Europe*

Danubio = *Danube*

Monte Bianco = *Mont Blanc*

Mar Tirreno = *Thyrrhenian Sea*

- **PEOPLE OF A NATION**

Nouns indicating people of a given nation or civilization (*the Germans, the Egyptians, the Aztecs, etc.*) require a capital letter.

Nouns indicating people of a city, a region, etc., as well as all adjectives, instead, are spelled with a small (lowercase) letter. Only people from a given continent are sometimes spelled with a capital letter, as those from a country.

i Russi = *the Russians* but **gli uomini russi** = *the Russian men*

i Greci = *the Greeks* but **le donne greche** = *the Greek women*

gli Etruschi = *the Etruscans* but **le tombe etrusche** = *the Etruscan tombs*

gli Statunitensi = *the US people* but **le città statunitensi** = *the US cities*

...AND

i londinesi = *Londoners*

i romani = *Romans*

gli asiatici or **gli Asiatici** = *Asians*

gli americani or **gli Americani** = *Americans*

In the same way, the names of languages never require capital letters:

il francese = *French (language)*

l'italiano = *Italian (language)*

il greco = *Greek (language)*

l'inglese = *English (language)*

lo spagnolo = *Spanish (language)*

- **INSTITUTIONS AND SIMILAR ESTABLISHMENTS**

In names of institutions, associations, etc. all nouns and adjectives require a capital letter, while prepositions do not.

Parlamento della Repubblica = *the Republic's Parliament*

Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione = *Ministry of Public Education*

Presidente del Consiglio = *President of the Cabinet, Prime Minister, Premier*

Comitato per la Tutela dell'Ambiente = *Committee for the Preservation of the Environment*

- **ADDRESSES**

Names of streets, squares, etc., require a capital letter, while the specification part (*street,*

square, lane, etc.) may be spelled either with a capital or with a small letter. Prepositions eventually used in the address name require a small letter.

via Torquato Tasso or **Via Torquato Tasso**

piazza Giuseppe Verdi or **Piazza Giuseppe Verdi**

via del Corso or **Via del Corso**

viale delle Milizie or **Viale delle Milizie**

piazza delle Belle Arti or **Piazza delle Belle Arti**

piazza dei Martiri di Belfiore or **Piazza dei Martiri di Belfiore**

- **TITLES OF BOOKS, PAINTINGS AND OTHER WORKS OF ART**

Usually these names only require a capital letter for the first word of the full name, while all the following ones have small letters. Such titles are usually spelled between quotation marks, or in italics.

"**Alla ricerca del tempo perduto**" = "*Remembrance of Thing Past*" [novel by Marcel Proust]

"**Il nome della rosa**" = "*The Name of The Rose*" [novel by Umberto Eco]

"**Il re e la regina**" = "*The King And The Queen*" [sculpture by Henry Moore]

"**Tre uomini in barca**" = "*Three Men In A Boat*" [novel by Jerome K. Jerome]

However, in titles capital letters are used for personal or geographic names, as in ordinary language:

"**La creazione di Adamo**" = "*Adam's Creation*" [fresco by Michelangelo Buonarroti]

"**I racconti di Canterbury**" = "*The Canterbury Tales*" [poem by Geoffrey Chaucer]

Capital letters are also used for books which are given special respect:

la Sacra Bibbia = *the Holy Bible*

il Corano = *the Coran*

In this case, notice how not the article (first word of the title) but the name itself is in capital letters, without quotation marks, i.e. they are not treated as titles, but as objects with a given name.

- **HONORIFIC TITLES**

In most cases honorific titles may be spelled either with a capital letter (more formal) or not, provided that the following name always begins with a capital letter.

(**sig.** = **signor** = *mr.; mister*)

sig. Mario Rossi or **Sig. Mario Rossi**

(**sig.ra** = **signora** = *mrs.; mistress*)

sig.ra Norma Merisi or **Sig.ra Norma Merisi**

(**dott.** = **dottor** [masculine] or **dottoressa** [feminine] = title for graduate person, doctor)
dott. Franco Bini or **Dott. Franco Bini**

(**prof.** = **professor** [masculine] or **professoressa** [feminine] = *prof.; professor*)
prof. Chiara Petri or **Prof. Chiara Petri**

(**rev.** = **reverendo** [masculine] or **reverenda** [feminine] = *rev.; reverend*)
rev. Giulio Monti or **Rev. Giulio Monti**

Capital letters are also sometimes used with an emphatic purpose, to indicate a high moral value of a given subject:

l'arte = *art*

l'Arte = *art in its best possible sense; the masterpieces; etc.*

la scienza = *science*

la Scienza = *the scientific world; the scientific progress; etc.*

l'uomo = *the man*

l'Uomo = *man; the human race; etc.*

17.2

COLOURS USED AS NOUNS AND AS ADJECTIVES

	ROSSO	MARRONE	TURCHESE
BIANCO	GIALLO	AMARANTO	CELESTE
GRIGIO	VERDE	ROSA	LILLA
NERO	BLU	ARANCIO	ARGENTO
	VIOLA	OCRA	ORO

The table above shows a list of the main colours which in Italian have a specific name. They are self-explaining, except the last two on the bottom of the right column, **argento** = *silver* and **oro** = *gold*. A few of them may be referred to with different names. For instance, **blu** (*blue*) is commonly used for deeper shades of blue, while **azzurro** is more often preferred for medium and light shades of the same colour. **Marrone** is the most common word for *brown*, although in some compound names (as will be said further on) **bruno** is sometimes used. Also **arancio** (*orange*) is often called **arancione**, same colour.

Many more shades can be described by using the two adjectives **chiaro** (*pale, light*) and **scuro** (*deep, dark*). A few examples:

VIOLA CHIARO	VIOLA	VIOLA SCURO
ARANCIO CHIARO	ARANCIO	ARANCIO SCURO
VERDE CHIARO	VERDE	VERDE SCURO

This scheme may be theoretically used for any colour, although when a pale or deep shade has its own specific name, the latter is preferred (i.e. *pink* rather than *pale red*; *ochre* or *tan* rather than *deep yellow*; etc.).

Many colours have a specific name taken from a fruit, an animal, a gem, or anything else in nature which may recall the particular shade. A few examples:

ROSSO ARAGOSTA <i>(lobster red)</i>	AZZURRO CIELO <i>(sky blue)</i>
ROSSO SANGUE <i>(blood red)</i>	BLU NOTTE <i>(night blue)</i>
VERDE PISELLO <i>(pea green)</i>	GIALLO LIMONE <i>(lemon yellow)</i>
VERDE MUSCHIO <i>(musk green)</i>	GRIGIO TOPO <i>(mouse grey)</i>
BRUNO MOGANO <i>(mahogany brown)</i>	GRIGIO PERLA <i>(pearl grey)</i>

For the most common ones, usually only the second part is used, i.e. **aragosta** (*lobster*) instead of **rosso aragosta** (*lobster red*), **crema** (*cream*) instead of **giallo crema** (*cream yellow*), and so on. But when the shade's name might be misunderstood, it is better to use **color** (*colour*) in front of it: **color aragosta**, **color limone**, **color mogano**, etc.

Color is the same word **colore**, shortened for phonetic reasons when it is followed by the name of a shade.

Very few foreign names are also used for colours, and two of them are rather common:

BEIGE

BORDEAUX

COLOURS USED AS NOUNS

When they are used as nouns, colours require a definite article of masculine gender, which phonetically matches their first letter. The article is needed since the name refers to the word **colore** (*colour*), masculine, usually omitted for the most common ones.

rosso = *red*

il rosso, il colore rosso = *red, the colour red*

verde = *green*

il verde, il colore verde = *green, the colour green*

azzurro = *blue*

l'azzurro, il colore azzurro = *blue, the colour blue*

viola = *violet / purple*

il viola, il colore viola = *violet / purple, the colour violet / purple*

ocra = *ochre*

l'ocra, il colore ocra = *ochre, the colour ochre*

Therefore, colours are always treated as masculine nouns, and the choice of the article is made according to their first letter.

In Italian, as well as in English, it is also possible to use plural forms, which indicate the different shades of a given colour, i.e. *the greens, the reds*, and so on.

But in doing so, these names behave according to the following rule (also valid for adjectives, as will be said further on):

- nouns whose ending is masculine (...**-o**; ...**-e**) form a normal masculine plural (...**-i** in both cases);
- nouns whose ending is feminine, or however different, do not change, using the same form for both singular and plural.

il rosso = *red, the colour red*

i rossi = *the reds (the shades of red)*

l'azzurro = *blue, the colour blue*

gli azzurri = *the blues (the shades of blue)*

il verde = *green, the colour green*

i verdi = *the greens (the shades of green)*

...**BUT**

il viola = *violet, the colour violet*

i viola = *the violets (the shades of violet)*

il rosa = *pink, the colour pink*

i rosa = *the pinks (the shades of pink)*

Whether the latter nouns are singular or plural can only be told by the article (not by the colour's ending).

COLOURS USED AS ADJECTIVES

Once again, when the colour's name has a masculine ending it behaves as a normal adjective, with regular masculine and feminine, singular and plural forms:

il vaso giallo = *the yellow vase*

i vasi gialli = *the yellow vases*

la tazza gialla = *the yellow cup*

le tazze gialle = *the yellow cups*

il vaso verde = *the green vase*

i vasi verdi = *the green vases*

la tazza verde = *the green cup*

le tazze verdi = *the green cups*

Instead, when the ending of the colour's name is not masculine (i.e. feminine, or foreign), the same form is used for both masculine and feminine, singular and plural.

il vaso viola = *the purple vase*

i vasi viola = *the purple vases*

la tazza viola = *the purple cup*

le tazze viola = *the purple cups*

il vaso beige = *the beige vase*

i vasi beige = *the beige vases*

la tazza beige = *the beige cup*

le tazze beige = *the beige cups*

17.3

DIVIDING WORDS INTO SYLLABLES

The correct division of Italian words into their relevant syllables is necessary when they have to be split by the right end of a line of text. In fact, a word cannot be freely split, having this to be done specifically between two syllables:

divisione (division)	divi- sione [correct]	divis- ione [wrong]	divisi- one [wrong]	divisio- ne [correct]
--------------------------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Phonetically speaking, the syllable is the smallest fraction of a word, pronounced as a single sound.

There are general rules according to which syllables are defined: the following table should be used as a reference or, even better, learned.

According to their sound, consonants are divided into the following categories:

	<i>consonants</i>	<i>English sound</i>	<i>category</i>	<i>sound emission</i>
	c · g · q	k · g · q	guttural	by applying the base of the tongue to the throat
GROUP	c · g (before e or i)	ch, j	palatal	by touching the palate with the tongue
A	t · d	t · d	dental	by applying the tip of the tongue to the front teeth
	p · b · f · v	p · b · f · v	labial	by using the lips
	s · z	s · tz · dz	sibilant	whose sound is similar to a hiss
GROUP	m · n	m · n	nasal	by letting air pass through the nasal cavities
B	l · r	l · r (rolled)	liquid	whose sound is somewhat fluid

The table shows them divided into two groups, **A** and **B**, since in forming syllables they often behave in different ways (see samples below).

- The most simple syllables are formed by one consonant followed by one vowel:

matita (*pencil*) **ma - ti - ta**
ruvido (*rough*) **ru - vi - do**
pagavo (*I payed*) **pa - ga - vo**
potare (*to prune*) **po - ta - re**
sapone (*soap*) **sa - po - ne**

However, any of the following situations overrides this rule.

- Any two consonants followed by a vowel belong to the same syllable:

treno (*train*) **tre - no**
scivolare (*to slide, to slip*) **sci - vo - la - re**
sovrano (*sovereign*) **so - vra - no**
ladro (*thief*) **la - dro**
chimica (*chemistry*) **chi - mi - ca**
segnare (*to sign, to mark*) **se - gna - re**

In these cases, the first consonant is always from group A (guttural, palatal, dental, labial), sometimes forming with the second consonant a special cluster, i.e. **-chi-**, **-che-**, **-gli-**, **-gni-**, etc., see [paragraph 1.2](#).

- Seldom, three consonants may occur before a vowel in one same syllable, provided that the first one is an s:

schivo (*shy, bashful*) **sch - i - vo**
scrivere (*to write*) **scri - ve - re**
strano (*strange*) **stra - no**
spremere (*to squeeze*) **spre - me - re**
fischi (*whistles*) **fi - schi**
stirare (*to iron, to flatten*) **sti - ra - re**

- Any double consonant must be split into two subsequent syllables:

gatto (*cat*) **gat - to**
mappa (*map*) **map - pa**
cappotto (*coat*) **cap - pot - to**
possessore (*owner*) **pos - ses - so - re**
grattare (*to scratch*) **grat - ta - re**
carrozza (*carriage, wagon*) **car - roz - za**

By the effects of this rule, syllables may end with any consonant.

- When a nasal or liquid consonant (**l, r, m, n**) is followed by any other consonant, they have to be split, i.e. as if they were double:

tenda (*curtain, tent*) **ten - da**
perla (*pearl*) **per - la**
rimbalzo (*rebound*) **rim - bal - zo**
cantante (*singer*) **can - tan - te**
trenta (*thirty*) **tren - ta**
polmone (*lung*) **pol - mo - ne**

Also in this case a syllable may end with a consonant (**l, r, m, n**).

Instead the reverse order may coexist in the same syllable; due to the sound, this mainly occurs with liquid consonants **r** and, seldom, **l**:

decreto (*decree, bill*) **de - cre - to**
padre (*father*) **pa - dre**
tigre (*tiger*) **ti - gre**
riflesso (*reflex*) **ri - fles - so**
vetrina (*shop-window*) **ve - tri - na**
ladro (*thief*) **la - dro**

- A vowel alone may form a syllable at the beginning of a word if followed by a consonant:

isola (*island*) **i - so - la**
animale (*animal*) **a - ni - ma - le**
odore (*smell*) **o - do - re**
umido (*damp, humid*) **u - mi - do**
aratro (*plough*) **a - ra - tro**
evolvere (*to evolve*) **e - vol - ve - re**

However, when the following consonant is either nasal or liquid and any further consonant comes after it, i.e. vowel + nasal or liquid consonant + any consonant (such as **alt...**, **enc...**, **imp...**, **ond...**, **urg...**, and so on), the first syllable binds to the vowel, to accomplish the previous rule:

intero (*whole*) **in - te - ro**
andare (*to go*) **an - da - re**
ultimo (*last*) **ul - ti - mo**
imparare (*to learn*) **im - pa - ra - re**
urgente (*urgent*) **ur - gen - te**
onda (*wave*) **on - da**

Also in the case of an opening vowel followed by any double consonant, the latter has to bind to the vowel; this is consistent with the aforesaid rule according to which all double consonants must be split:

anno (*year*) **an - no**
errore (*mistake*) **er - ro - re**
accludere (*to enclose*) **ac - clu - de - re**
eccesso (*excess*) **ec - ces - so**
appendere (*to hang*) **ap - pen - de - re**
osservato (*observed, looked at*) **os - ser - va - to**
illuminare (*to give light*) **il - lu - mi - na - re**

- Two subsequent vowels behave in different ways according to whether they form a diphthong, i.e. a single sound which contains two vowels.

Diphthongues are formed by the combination of different kinds of vowels:

- **i** and **u** are called "semivowels", because they have a weaker (shorter, less sharp) sound;
- **a**, **e** and **o** are called "strong vowels".

a diphthongue is formed by a semivowel and strong vowel, or vice-versa, or by two semivowels:

-ia- -ie- -io- -ua- -ue- -uo-
-ai- -ei- -oi- -au- -eu- -ou-
-iu- -ui-

Two strong vowels (**-ae- -ao- -ea- -eo- -oa- -oe-**) and all double vowels **do not** form a diphthong.

Diphthongues are never split, and belong to the same syllable:

buono (*good*) **buo - no**
viale (*avenue*) **via - le**
chiodo (*nail*) **chio - do**
Claudio (*Claude*) **Clau - dio**
quadro (*picture, painting*) **qua - dro**
schiaivo (*slave*) **schia - vo**

Other combinations have to be split; also in this case vowels alone may form an individual syllable, in any part of the word, to accomplish this rule:

idea (*idea*) **i - de - a**
reato (*offence*) **re - a - to**
paese (*country*) **pa - e - se**
Colosseo (*Colosseum*) **Co - los - se - o**
cooperativo (*cooperative*) **co - o - pe - ra - ti - vo**
linee (*lines*) **li - ne - e**

When a word begins with a diphthongue, its first syllable contains both vowels.

ieri (*yesterday*) **ie - ri**
uovo (*egg*) **uo - vo**
aumento (*increase*) **au - men - to**
Europa (*Europe*) **Eu - ro - pa**
Ionio (*Ionian*) [sea] **Io - nio**

Words with three or more syllables in a row are very scarce; these are two among the most common ones with such a feature:

aiuola (*flower bed*) has four vowels in a row, and its syllables are: **a - iuo - la**;
guaio (*mishap*) has four vowels in a row, and its syllables are: **gua - io**.

Also in these cases the aforesaid rules are applied, although they appear less evident.

In the first case, the break occurs between two strong vowels, while the remaining three, two weak ones and one strong, may stay together (**a - iuo**). The latter three form a triptongue, i.e. three vowels bound together,

quite a unique cluster in Italian words.

In the second case the break occurs between two diphthongues (**ua - io**).

To summarize the main rules for dividing a word into its syllables, remember that:

- all syllables must contain at least one vowel, which is their strong sound, while they do not necessarily need a consonant: syllables without vowels do not exist, while syllables without consonants do exist;
- all doubles, i.e. identical letters (either consonants or vowels), must be split;
- also nasal or liquid consonants (group **B**) may not be followed by one from group **A** (guttural, palatal, dental, labial), while the opposite may occur: **A+B** is possible, but not **B+A**;
- most syllables end with a vowel, but they may also end with a consonant (no more than one) by effect of the previous rules;
- two subsequent and different vowels do not split only if they form a diphthong, elseways they do;
- syllables may range in length from a minimum of one letter (a vowel) to a maximum of five letters (i.e. three consonants followed by a diphthongue).

There are many monosyllabic words, which cannot be split since they are made of only one syllable. The most common ones are:

- definite articles (**il, lo, la, i, gli, le**);
- simple prepositions (**di, a, da, in, con, su, per, tra, fra**);
- several conjunctions (**e, o, ma, sì, no**, etc.);
- most personal pronouns (**io, tu, te, ti, lui, lei, gli, le, noi, ci, voi, vi, si** etc.);
- many indicative pronouns (**quel, qui, qua, lì, là**);
- two numbers (**tre, sei**);
- some short words of daily use (**blu, più, già, giù**, etc.).

Also some short words whose origin is not Italian are monosyllabic: the last consonant (or consonants) they end with cannot be left without a final vowel, thus they cannot be separated from the rest of the word:

tram (*tramway*)

bar (*bar, cafe*)

sport (*sport*)

golf (*golf, or pullover*)

gong (*gong*)

smog (*smog*)

sprint (*sprint, stamina*)

18.1

THE GERUND TENSE

ALSO INTRODUCING THE VERB *STARE*

Gerund is the tense which expresses an action in progress (being, coming, seeing, etc.). The Italian gerund is very easy, modelled on the inflection **...endo**, except for verbs of the 1st conjugation, whose penultimate vowel is **a (...ando)**:

1st conj. mangiare (to eat)	mangiando (eating)
2nd conj. cadere (to fall)	cadendo (falling)
2nd conj. perdere (to lose)	perdendo (losing)
3rd conj. capire (to understand)	capendo (understanding)

When gerund is referred to a specific person it behaves as a compound verb, requiring an auxiliary verb. In English this verb is always *to be* (*I am staying, he was watching, etc.*), while Italian uses **stare**, a verb of the 1st conjugation.

Stare can be simply translated *to be*, though it has a specific meaning of *to be present, to exist* (either for a given condition or for a physical object).

Stare is used with the gerund tense of both transitive and intransitive verbs. It has a couple of slightly irregular present inflections (shown in red colour):

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) sto	<i>I am</i>	(noi) stiamo	<i>we are</i>
2nd person	(tu) stai	<i>you are (singular)</i>	(voi) state	<i>you are (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) sta	<i>he/she/it is</i>	(essi / esse) stanno	<i>they are</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) stavo	<i>I was</i>	(noi) stavamo	<i>we were</i>
2nd person	(tu) stavi	<i>you were (singular)</i>	(voi) stavate	<i>you were (plural)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) stava	<i>he/she/it was</i>	(essi / esse) stavano	<i>they were</i>

Since this verb will be now used only with gerund, it is enough to practice the aforesaid present and imperfect tenses; others will be discussed in a future paragraph.

As in English, the gerund's auxiliary verb may be take the present tense and the past tense (imperfect in Italian), thus obtaining a present gerund and a past gerund.

The following tables show both of them for the verb **pensare** (*to think*).

GERUNDIO PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) sto pensando	<i>I am thinking</i>	(noi) stiamo pensando	<i>we are thinking</i>
2nd person	(tu) stai pensando	<i>you are thinking (s.)</i>	(voi) state pensando	<i>you are thinking (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) sta pensando	<i>he/she is thinking</i>	(essi / esse) stanno pensando	<i>they are thinking</i>

GERUNDIO PASSATO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) stavo pensando	<i>I was thinking</i>	(noi) stavamo pensando	<i>we were thinking</i>
2nd person	(tu) stavi pensando	<i>you were thinking (s.)</i>	(voi) stavate pensando	<i>you were thinking (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) stava pensando	<i>he/she was thinking</i>	(essi / esse) stavano pensando	<i>they were thinking</i>

In Italian, gerund is used more sparingly than in English. It is required to express either the lapse of time during which an action is carried out, or by which means the other action occurs.

comprerò la cena tornando a casa = *I will buy the dinner (while) coming home*

ha guadagnato questo denaro vendendo libri = *he/she earned this money (by) selling books*

ha appreso questa notizia leggendo il giornale = *he learned about this news (by / while) reading the paper*

In most cases it is also possible to reverse the position of the gerund, to give the other action a stronger emphasis:

tornando a casa comprerò la cena = *(while) coming home I will buy the dinner*

vendendo libri ha guadagnato questo denaro = *(by) selling books he/she earned this money*

leggendo il giornale ha appreso questa notizia = *(by / while) reading the paper he learned about this news*

For simple actions in progress, such as *I am writing, he was sleeping*, etc., proper Italian would require a gerund, as well. In common speech, though, this is very often replaced by present indicative or by imperfect indicative:

sto mangiando (more colloquially: **mangio**) = *I am reading*

stavamo correndo (more colloquially: **correvamo**) = *we were running*

stanno studiando storia (more colloquially: **studiano storia**) = *they are studying history*

NOTE

In Italian, the gerund is never used to express the verb impersonally, as to describe an activity, as it is in English. For this purpose, in Italian either the infinitive tense or a specific noun referred to the verb are used:

leggere (or **la lettura**) è **una cosa positiva** = *reading is a positive thing*

odio guardare la televisione = *I hate watching the television*

fumare (or **il fumo**) è **una cattiva abitudine** = *smoking (or smoke) is a bad habit*

correre (or **la corsa**) è **uno sport molto comune** = *running is a very common sport*

dormire (or **il sonno**) è **la nostra attività preferita** = *sleeping is our favourite activity*

18.2

PRESENT PARTICIPLE AND PAST PARTICIPLE

PRESENT PARTICIPLE

The present participle is a tense which in Italian does not act as a verb, becoming either a noun or an adjective. It indicates who carries out the action expressed by the verb, either temporarily or continuously (i.e. as a job, or as a condition).

To obtain the present participle, the standard inflections **...ante** (1st conjugation) and **...ente** (2nd and 3rd conjugations) are applied to the root of the verb.

English has no matching tense, so that the Italian present participle may be translated in most cases either with a noun whose suffix is *...er* or with an adjective in the shape of a gerundive (*...ing*).

1st conjugation

lavare (to wash)

navigare (to sail)

camminare (to walk)

lavante (he who washes, washing, washer)

navigante (he who sails, sailing, sailer)

camminante (he who walks, walking, walker)

2nd conjugation

vedere (to see, to watch) **vedente** (he who sees, seeing)
perdere (to lose) **perdente** (he who loses, loser)
chiedere (to ask for) **chiedente** (he who asks for, asking, asker)

3rd conjugation

coprire (to cover) **coprente** (he who covers, covering)
capire (to understand) **capente** (he who understands, understanding)
morire (to die) **morente** (he who dies, dying)

A few verbs of the 3rd conjugation may use a double inflection, i.e. the ordinary one (...ente) and one with an **i** added (...iente).

For instance, **dormire** (to sleep) has both **dormente** and **dormiente**, while **nutrire** (to nourish) has **nutriente**, much more common than **nutrente** (regular participle). The same for **partorire** (to give birth, to deliver a baby), whose form **partoriente** is always preferred to the regular one.

The use of present participles in modern Italian is somewhat limited; many of the ones still found come from archaic verbs no longer used (i.e. they are no longer considered participles, but nouns or adjectives), or they are often irregular, or follow the archaic Latin verb, or come from a modified root of a normal verb, or are even based on verbs that do not exist.

il mittente della lettera = the sender of the letter (from the Latin verb *mittere* = to send)
l'acquirente = the buyer (from the verb **acquistare** = to buy, with an irregular present participle)
il brigante = the brigand, the bandit (from the almost obsolete verb **brigare** = to intrigue, to scheme for)
piccante = hot, spicy (from a theoretical verb **piccare**, which does not actually exist)
il garante del patto = the guarantor of the deal (from the verb **garantire** = to guarantee, with a contracted participle)
l'inserviente = the shop-boy, the assistant, the servant (from the verb **servire** = to serve, with an extra **i**, plus preposition **in**)

In everyday's speech not many present participles are used, but some of them are quite common:

una persona non udente = a non-hearing person, a deaf person (from **udire** = to hear)
l'acqua bollente = the boiling water (from **bollire** = to boil, to be boiling)
una cosa importante = an important thing (from **importare** = to matter, to be of importance)
il giocatore vincente = the winning player (from **vincere** = to win)
l'agente di polizia = the police officer, the policeman (from **agire** = to act, to take action)
il battente della porta = the door's knocker (from **battere** = to hit, to knock)
il sole nascente = the rising sun (from **nascere** = to be born, literally the sun being born)

The reason for which not many present participles are used is that for many activities a specific nouns exists to describe he or she who carries out the action, and they do not necessarily match the present participle of the verb.

For instance:

l'attaccante = the forward of a team (present participle of **attaccare** = to attack)

...BUT

il difensore = the defender (noun from **difendere** = to defend)

il cantante = the singer (present participle of **cantare** = to sing)

...BUT

l'attore = the actor (noun from **agire** = to act, take action)

il sorvegliante = the watchman, the caretaker (present participle of **sorvegliare** = to watch over)

...BUT

il custode = the caretaker, the guardian (noun from **custodire** = to keep, watch over)

When a present participle is used as a noun or as an adjective, sometimes its meaning changes from that of the original verb, or becomes metaphorical:

contante (p.participle of **contare** = to count) as a masculine noun means *cash money*;
sorgente (p.participle of **sorgere** = to rise) as a feminine noun means *spring, source* (of a river);
pulsante (p.participle of **pulsare** = to pulse, throb) as a masculine noun means *button* (to press);
corrente (p.participle of **correre** = to run) as a feminine noun means *draft, air current*;
passante (p.participle of **passare** = to pass) as a masculine noun means *loop* (of a belt).

scattante (p.participle of **scattare** = *to spring, to jump off a spring*) as an adjective means *fast, ready, full of vigour*.

In any case, when a participle is used as a noun or as an adjective, it will have singular and plural forms. Both masculine and feminine will be similar, because they are nouns and adjectives ending with **...e**, so their plurals will be **...i** for both genders.

lo spettatore pagante = *the paying spectator*

gli spettatori paganti = *the paying spectators*

la bagnante = *the (female) bather, the woman who bathes*

le bagnanti = *the (female) bathers, the women who bathe*

il cantante = *the (male) singer*

la cantante = *the (female) singer*

i cantanti = *the (male) singers*

le cantanti = *the (female) singers*

PAST PARTICIPLE

This tense has already been already dealt with in [paragraph 6.1](#) and particularly in [paragraph 6.3](#), because the past participle is needed to form all compound tenses.

Therefore, these concepts will be only summarized once again in this page.

The most common past participle inflections for the three conjugations are:

1st conjugation: **...ato**

2nd conjugation: **...uto**

2nd conjugation: **...ito**

parlare (*to talk, speak*) - **parlato** (*talked, spoken*)

volare (*to fly*) - **volato** (*flown*)

pensare (*to think*) - **pensato** (*thought*)

vendere (*to sell*) - **venduto** (*sold*)

cadere (*to fall*) - **caduto** (*fallen*)

sedere (*to sit down*) - **seduto** (*sit*)

capire (*to understand*) - **capito** (*understood*)

seguire (*to follow*) - **seguito** (*followed*)

partire (*to leave*) - **partito** (*left*)

The auxiliary verb **avere** (*to have*) forms a regular past participle, **avuto**.

The other auxiliary verb, **essere** (*to be*), does not have its own, and borrows it from the verb **stare**, recently discussed, whose meaning is similar: **stato**, which acts as the past participle of both verbs **stare** and **essere**.

Some verbs (in particular, belonging to the 2nd and 3rd conjugations) do not follow this scheme, since other past participle inflections do exist.

A sample of each is shown below, but for more examples see again [paragraph 6.3](#).

prendere (*to take*) - **preso** (*taken*)

mettere (*to put, to place*) - **messo** (*put, placed*)

spingere (*to push*) - **spinto** (*pushed*)

leggere (*to read*) - **letto** (*read*)

chiedere (*to ask*) - **chiesto** (*asked*)

aprire (*to open*) - **aperto** (*opened*)

VERBS WHOSE INFINITIVE IS CONTRACTED

This small group of verbs has a particular infinitive tense, which ends with a double **r** (i.e. ...-**rre**) instead of the usual one ...(vowel)-**re**.

They all come from Latin forms, whose inflection was regular (...**ere**), and whose penultimate and last syllables were contracted into a single one by doubling the last **r**.

These few main verbs form a number of compounds, which have the same inflections:

TRARRE = *to draw, take from*
(from Latin *traere*)

contrarre = *to contract*

destrarre = *to detract*

sottrarre = *to subtract*

PORRE = *to place, put*
(from Latin *ponere*)

esporre = *to expose, display*

imporre = *to impose*

deporre = *to let down, put down*

anteporre = *to place in front, give preference to*

posporre = *to postpone*

comporre = *to compose, form*

...DURRE [see NOTE below]
(from Latin *ducere* = *to conduct, lead*)

condurre = *to conduct, lead*

tradurre = *to translate and to transfer*

indurre = *to induce*

dedurre = *to deduct*

ridurre = *to reduce*

produrre = *to produce*

NOTE - **durre** does not exist alone, but only in its compounds

These verbs basically follow the 2nd conjugation (see [paragraph 4.6](#)); the Latin root is used for all tenses, and only the future indicative and present conditional tenses keep the double **r**, which is a contraction of the Latin ending ...*ere*

The following tables only show the simple tenses (compound tenses use the past participle, and do not have specific inflections). The few irregular inflections are marked in **red**.

TRARRE and its compounds
(Latin root: **tra-**)

INDICATIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) traggo	<i>I draw</i>	(noi) traiamo	<i>we draw</i>
2nd person	(tu) trai	<i>you draw (s.)</i>	(voi) traete	<i>you draw (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) trae	<i>he/she draws</i>	(essi / esse) traggono	<i>they draw</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(**traevo, traevi, traeva, traevamo, traevate, traevano**)

FUTURO

singular *plural*

1st person	(io) trarrò	<i>I shall draw</i>	(noi) trarremo	<i>we shall draw</i>
2nd person	(tu) trarrai	<i>you will draw (s.)</i>	(voi) trarrete	<i>you will draw (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) trarrà	<i>he/she will draw</i>	(essi / esse) trarranno	<i>they will draw</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) trassi	<i>I drew</i>	(noi) traemmo	<i>we drew</i>
2nd person	(tu) traesti	<i>you drew (s.)</i>	(voi) traeste	<i>you drew (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) trasse	<i>he/she drew</i>	(essi / esse) trassero	<i>they drew</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) tragga	<i>(that) I draw</i>	(che noi) traiamo	<i>(that) we draw</i>
2nd person	(che tu) tragga	<i>(that) you draw (s.)</i>	(che voi) traitate	<i>(that) you draw (p.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) tragga	<i>(that) he/she draws</i>	(che essi / esse) traggano	<i>(that) they draw</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) traessi	<i>(that) I drew</i>	(che noi) traessimo	<i>(that) we drew</i>
2nd person	(che tu) traessi	<i>(that) you drew (s.)</i>	(che voi) traeste	<i>(that) you drew (p.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) traesse	<i>(that) he/she drew</i>	(che essi / esse) traessero	<i>(that) they drew</i>

CONDITIONAL

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) trarrei	<i>I would draw</i>	(noi) trarremmo	<i>we would draw</i>
2nd person	(tu) trarresti	<i>you would draw (s.)</i>	(voi) trarreste	<i>you would draw (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) trarrebbe	<i>he/she would draw</i>	(essi / esse) trarrebbero	<i>they would draw</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) trai	<i>(you) draw (singular)</i>
(voi) traete	<i>(you) draw (plural)</i>

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE	PASSATO
traente <i>drawer, drawing</i>	tratto <i>drawn</i>

GERUND

traendo *drawing*

PORRE and its compounds
(Latin root: **pon-**)

INDICATIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) pongo	<i>I place</i>	(noi) poniamo	<i>we place</i>
2nd person	(tu) poni	<i>you place (s.)</i>	(voi) ponete	<i>you place (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) pone	<i>he/she places</i>	(essi / esse) pongono	<i>they place</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(ponevo, ponevi, poneva, ponevamo, ponevate, ponevano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) porrò	<i>I shall place</i>	(noi) porremo	<i>we shall place</i>
2nd person	(tu) porrai	<i>you will place (s.)</i>	(voi) porrete	<i>you will place (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) porrà	<i>he/she will place</i>	(essi / esse) porranno	<i>they will place</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

all inflections are regular
(posi, ponesti, pose, ponemmo, poneste, posero)

SUBJUNCTIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) ponga	<i>(that) I place</i>	(che noi) poniamo	<i>(that) we place</i>
2nd person	(che tu) ponga	<i>(that) you place (s.)</i>	(che voi) poniate	<i>(that) you place (p.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) ponga	<i>(that) he/she places</i>	(che essi / esse) pongano	<i>(that) they place</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(che io / tu ponessi, che ponesse, che ponessimo, che poneste, che ponessero)

CONDITIONAL

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) porrei	<i>I would place</i>	(noi) porremmo	<i>we would place</i>
2nd person	(tu) porresti	<i>you would place (s.)</i>	(voi) porreste	<i>you would place (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) porrebbe	<i>he/she would place</i>	(essi / esse) porrebbero	<i>they would place</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) poni	<i>(you) place (singular)</i>
(voi) ponete	<i>(you) place (plural)</i>

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE

ponente (never used;
actual meaning: *the west*) *placer, placing*

PASSATO

posto *placed*

GERUND

ponendo *placing*

CONDURRE and other compounds of **-durre**
(Latin root: ...**duc-**)

INDICATIVE

PRESENTE

all inflections are regular
(**conduco, conduci, conduce, conduciamo, conducete, conducono**)

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(**conducevo, conducevi, conduceva, conducevamo, conducevate, conducevano**)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) condurrò	<i>I shall conduct</i>	(noi) condurremo	<i>we shall conduct</i>
2nd person	(tu) condurrai	<i>you will conduct (s.)</i>	(voi) condurrete	<i>you will conduct (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) condurrà	<i>he/she will conduct</i>	(essi / esse) condurranno	<i>they will conduct</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) condussi	<i>I placed</i>	(noi) conducemmo	<i>we conducted</i>
2nd person	(tu) conducesti	<i>you conducted (s.)</i>	(voi) conduceste	<i>you conducted (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) condusse	<i>he/she conducted</i>	(essi / esse) condussero	<i>they conducted</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE

PRESENTE

all inflections are regular
(**che io / tu / egli / ella conduca, che conduciamo, che conduciate, che conducano**)

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(**che io / tu conducessi, che conducesse, che conducessimo, che conduceste, che conducessero**)

CONDITIONAL

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) condurrei	<i>I would conduct</i>	(noi) condurremmo	<i>we would conduct</i>
2nd person	(tu) condurresti	<i>you would conduct (s.)</i>	(voi) condurreste	<i>you would conduct (p.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) condurrebbe	<i>he/she would conduct</i>	(essi / esse) condurrebbero	<i>they would conduct</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) **conduci** (you) *conduct* (singular)
(voi) **conducete** (you) *conduct* (plural)

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE **PASSATO**
conducente *conductor, driver (of a bus, train, etc.)* **condotto** *conducted*

GERUND

conducendo *conducting*

18.4

OTHER IMPORTANT IRREGULAR VERBS

The verbs dealt with in this page are very commonly used.

The irregular inflections only concern some persons and some tenses, which are marked in red. The irregularities may consist of a change of vowel, or the use of accented vowels in place of simple ones, or the same root may be different.

Therefore, before memorizing these verbs be sure you are confident with the ordinary conjugations, described in chapter 4.

In some cases two different inflections are possible: in this case they are shown in square brackets.

All regular tenses are simply mentioned in a row.

Irregular verbs are indeed difficult to memorize, but some of the changes found in their roots are repeated: for instance, the same changes found in the 1st singular person are also found in the 3rd plural one, and all the ones found in the present indicative also belong to present subjunctive, and the future indicative tense has similar changes to the present conditional. Keeping in mind these relations, it should be slightly easier to memorize them.

This page shows the following verbs (click on each of them to reach the relevant table):

<u>ANDARE</u> = TO GO	<u>FARE</u> = TO DO
<u>BERE</u> = TO DRINK	<u>POTERE</u> = TO BE ABLE TO, CAN
<u>DARE</u> = TO GIVE	<u>SAPERE</u> = TO KNOW
<u>DIRE</u> = TO SAY, TO TELL	<u>VENIRE</u> = TO COME
<u>DOVERE</u> = TO HAVE TO, MUST	<u>VOLERE</u> = TO WANT

ANDARE

(to go)

This verb is only strongly irregular in its present tenses (indicative and subjunctive), while the others are not too far from the standard conjugation.

INDICATIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) vado	<i>I go</i>	(noi) andiamo	<i>we go</i>
2nd person	(tu) vai	<i>you go (sing.)</i>	(voi) andate	<i>you go (pl.)</i>

3rd person (egli / ella) **va** he/she goes (essi / esse) **vanno** they go

[see the **NOTE** at the bottom of the section for the verb **andare**]

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular

(**andavo, andavi, andava, andavamo, andavate, andavano**)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) andrò	<i>I shall go</i>	(noi) andremo	<i>we shall go</i>
2nd person	(tu) andrai	<i>you will go (sing.)</i>	(voi) andrete	<i>you will go (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) andrà	<i>he/she will go</i>	(essi / esse) andranno	<i>they will go</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

all inflections are regular

(**andai, andasti, andò, andammo, andaste, andarono**)

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) vada	<i>(that) I go</i>	(che noi) andiamo	<i>(that) we go</i>
2nd person	(che tu) vada	<i>(that) you go (sing.)</i>	(che voi) andiate	<i>(that) you go (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) vada	<i>(that) he/she goes</i>	(che essi / esse) vadano	<i>(that) they go</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular

(**che io / tu andassi, che andasse, che andassimo, che andaste, che andassero**)

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) andrei	<i>I would go</i>	(noi) andremmo	<i>we would go</i>
2nd person	(tu) andresti	<i>you would go (sing.)</i>	(voi) andreste	<i>you would go (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) andrebbe	<i>he/she would go</i>	(essi / esse) andrebbero	<i>they would go</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) và	<i>(you) go (sing.)</i>
(voi) andate	<i>(you) go (pl.)</i>

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE

andante (rarely used) *goer, going*

PASSATO

andato *gone*

GERUND

andando *going*

NOTE

The second singular person of the indicative present tense (**và** = *he / she goes*) should use an accented vowel, but it has become a common custom to spell it **va**, without an accent, also to distinguish this tense from the imperative one, **và** = *go!*, when the subject (shown in light grey colour in the following example) is not clearly mentioned.

egli / ella va via = *he / she goes away*

tu v`a via = *go away*

In the spoken language, both the context of the sentence and the voice pitch help to understand which of the two meanings is the right one:

è tardi, ora egli / ella va via = *it is late, now he / she goes (is going) away*

questo è un cortile privato, v`a via! = *this is a private yard, go away!*

BERE

(*to drink*)

This verb is not really irregular; due to the Latin verb it comes from (*bevere*), traces of the old root remained in most tenses, except the infinitive. Therefore, many of the irregular inflections are regular if referred to the latter form: try to think of the root as **bev...** and follow the usual 2nd conjugation. Only the future and the present conditional tenses contract the **..ver..** cluster into a double **r**, which is a true irregularity (i.e. as the verbs discussed in the previous page).

INDICATIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) bevo	<i>I drink</i>	(noi) beviamo	<i>we drink</i>
2nd person	(tu) bevi	<i>you drink (sing.)</i>	(voi) bevete	<i>you drink (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) beve	<i>he/she drinks</i>	(essi / esse) bevono	<i>they drink</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) bevevo	<i>I drank</i>	(noi) beviamo	<i>we drank</i>
2nd person	(tu) bevevi	<i>you drank (sing.)</i>	(voi) bevete	<i>you drank (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) beveva	<i>he/she drank</i>	(essi / esse) bevavano	<i>they drank</i>

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) berrò	<i>I shall drink</i>	(noi) berremo	<i>we shall drink</i>
2nd person	(tu) berrai	<i>you will drink (sing.)</i>	(voi) berrete	<i>you will drink (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) berrà	<i>he/she will drink</i>	(essi / esse) berranno	<i>they will drink</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) bevvi	<i>I drank</i>	(noi) bevemmo	<i>we drank</i>
2nd person	(tu) bevesti	<i>you gave (sing.)</i>	(voi) beveste	<i>you drank (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) bevve	<i>he/she gave</i>	(essi / esse) bevvero	<i>they drank</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) beva	<i>(that) I drink</i>	(che noi) beviamo	<i>(that) we drink</i>

2nd person **(che tu) beva** (that) you drink (sing.) **(che voi) beviate** (that) you drink (pl.)
 3rd person **(che egli / ella) beva** (that) he/she drinks **(che essi / esse) bevano** (that) they drink

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(che io) bevessi (that) I drank		(che noi) bevessimo (that) we drank
2nd person	(che tu) bevessi (that) you drank (sing.)		(che voi) beveste (that) you drank (pl.)
3rd person	(che egli / ella) bevessa (that) he/she drank		(che essi / esse) bevessero (that) they drank

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) berrei I would drink		(noi) berremmo we would drink
2nd person	(tu) berresti you would drink (sing.)		(voi) berreste you would drink (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / ella) berrebbe he/she would drink		(essi / esse) berrebbero they would drink

IMPERATIVE

(tu) bevi (you) drink (sing.)
(voi) bevete (you) drink (pl.)

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE		PASSATO
bevete drinking		bevuto drunk

GERUND

bevendo drinking

DARE

(to give)

This verb appears very irregular, but comparing its inflections with the regular ones of the 1st conjugation many of them turn out to have a simple change of vowel.

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) do I give		(noi) diamo we give
2nd person	(tu) dai you give (sing.)		(voi) date you give (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / essa) dà he/she gives		(essi / esse) danno they give

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(dovevo, dovevi, doveva, dovevamo, dovevate, dovevano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>
1st person	(io) darò [detti] I shall give		(noi) daremo we shall give
2nd person	(tu) darai you will give (sing.)		(voi) darete you will give (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / essa) darà he/she will give		(essi / esse) daranno they will give

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) diedi [detti]	<i>I gave</i>	(noi) demmo	<i>we gave</i>
2nd person	(tu) dasti	<i>you gave (sing.)</i>	(voi) deste	<i>you gave (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / essa) diede [dette]	<i>he/she gave</i>	(essi / esse) diedero [dettero]	<i>they gave</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) dia	<i>(that) I give</i>	(che noi) diamo	<i>(that) we give</i>
2nd person	(che tu) dia	<i>(that) you give (sing.)</i>	(che voi) diate	<i>(that) you give (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) dia	<i>(that) he/she gives</i>	(che essi / esse) diano	<i>(that) they give</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) dessi	<i>(that) I gave</i>	(che noi) dessimo	<i>(that) we gave</i>
2nd person	(che tu) dessi	<i>(that) you gave (sing.)</i>	(che voi) deste	<i>(that) you gave (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) desse	<i>(that) he/she gives</i>	(che essi / esse) dessero	<i>(that) they gave</i>

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) darei	<i>I would give</i>	(noi) daremmo	<i>we would give</i>
2nd person	(tu) daresti	<i>you would give (sing.)</i>	(voi) daresti	<i>you would give (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) darebbe	<i>he/she would give</i>	(essi / esse) darebbero	<i>they would give</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) dà [dai]	<i>(you) give (sing.)</i>
(voi) date	<i>(you) give (pl.)</i>

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE	PASSATO
dante (rarely used) <i>giver, giving</i>	dato <i>given</i>

GERUND

dando *giving*

DIRE

(to say, to tell)

This is a verb of the 3rd conjugation born as a contraction of the Latin equivalent *dicere*. As for **bere**, previously discussed, also in this case many of the irregular inflections are regular ones of the 2nd conjugation which survived the verb's change (i.e. try thinking of the root as **dic...** instead of **d...**, and most irregular inflections turn out regular).

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) dico	<i>I say</i>	(noi) diciamo	<i>we say</i>
2nd person	(tu) dici	<i>you say (sing.)</i>	(voi) dite	<i>you say (pl.)</i>

3rd person (egli / ella) **dice** *he/she says* (essi / esse) **dicono** *they say*

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) dicevo	<i>I said</i>	(noi) dicevamo	<i>we said</i>
2nd person	(tu) dicevi	<i>you said (sing.)</i>	(voi) dicevate	<i>you said (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) diceva	<i>he/she said</i>	(essi / esse) dicevano	<i>they said</i>

FUTURO

all inflections are regular
(dirò, dirai, dirà, diremo, direte, diranno)

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) dissi	<i>I said</i>	(noi) dicemmo	<i>we said</i>
2nd person	(tu) dicesti	<i>you said (sing.)</i>	(voi) diceste	<i>you said (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) disse	<i>he/she said</i>	(essi / esse) dissero	<i>they said</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) dica	<i>(that) I say</i>	(che noi) dicessi	<i>(that) we say</i>
2nd person	(che tu) dica	<i>(that) you say (sing.)</i>	(che voi) diceste	<i>(that) you say (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) dica	<i>(that) he/she says</i>	(che essi / esse) dicano	<i>(that) they say</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) dicessi	<i>(that) I said</i>	(che noi) dicessimo	<i>(that) we said</i>
2nd person	(che tu) dicessi	<i>(that) you said (sing.)</i>	(che voi) diceste	<i>(that) you said (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) dicesse	<i>(that) he/she said</i>	(che essi / esse) dicessero	<i>(that) they said</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) dì	<i>(you) say (sing.)</i>
(voi) dite	<i>(you) say (pl.)</i>

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE

dicente (rarely used) *sayer, saying*

PASSATO

detto *said*

GERUND

dicendo *saying*

DOVERE

(to have to, must)

This is another verb with a few Latin reminiscences.
In particular, the letter **v** often turns into a double **b**, sometimes with a change of vowel too.

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) debbo [devo]	<i>I have to</i>	(noi) dobbiamo	<i>we have to</i>
2nd person	(tu) devi	<i>you have to (sing.)</i>	(noi) dovete	<i>you have to (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) deve	<i>he/she has to</i>	(essi / esse) debbono [devono]	<i>they have to</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(dovevo, dovevi, doveva, dovevamo, dovevate, dovevano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) dovrò	<i>I shall have to</i>	(noi) dovremo	<i>we shall have to</i>
2nd person	(tu) dovrai	<i>you will have to (sing.)</i>	(voi) dovrete	<i>you will have to (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) dovrà	<i>he/she will have to</i>	(essi / esse) dovranno	<i>they will have to</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) dovetti	<i>I had to</i>	(noi) dovemmo	<i>we had to</i>
2nd person	(tu) dovesti	<i>You had to (sing.)</i>	(voi) doveste	<i>you had to (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) dovette	<i>he/she had to</i>	(essi / esse) dovettero	<i>they had to</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) debba [deva]	<i>(that) I have to</i>	(che noi) dobbiamo	<i>(that) we have to</i>
2nd person	(che tu) debba [deva]	<i>(that) you have to (sing.)</i>	(che voi) dobbiate	<i>(that) you have to (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) debba [deva]	<i>(that) he/she has to</i>	(che essi / esse) debbano	<i>(that) they have to</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(che io / tu dovessi, che dovesse, che dovessimo, che doveste, che dovessero)

IMPERATIVE

(not used)

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE	PASSATO
dovente (never used) <i>doer, doing</i>	dovuto <i>had to, due</i>

GERUND

dovendo *having to*

FARE

(to do)

This verb comes from Latin *facere*, and some irregularities are explained by the old root (**fac...**). The future and conditional tenses, instead, are basically regular, but the inflections start with vowel **..a..** instead of the usual **..e..**.

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) faccio	<i>I do</i>	(noi) facciamo	<i>we do</i>
2nd person	(tu) fai	<i>you do (sing.)</i>	(voi) fate	<i>you do (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) fa	<i>he/she does</i>	(essi / esse) fanno	<i>they do</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) facevo	<i>I did</i>	(noi) facevamo	<i>we did</i>
2nd person	(tu) facevi	<i>you did (sing.)</i>	(voi) facevate	<i>you did (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) faceva	<i>he/she did</i>	(essi / essa) facevano	<i>they did</i>

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) farò	<i>I shall do</i>	(noi) faremo	<i>we shall do</i>
2nd person	(tu) farai	<i>you will do (sing.)</i>	(voi) farete	<i>you will do (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) farà	<i>he/she will do</i>	(essi / esse) faranno	<i>they will do</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) feci	<i>I did</i>	(noi) facemmo	<i>we did</i>
2nd person	(tu) facesti	<i>you did (sing.)</i>	(voi) faceste	<i>you did (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) fece	<i>he/she did</i>	(essi / esse) fecero	<i>they did</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) faccia	<i>(that) I do</i>	(che) facciamo	<i>(that) we do</i>
2nd person	(che tu) faccia	<i>(that) you do (sing.)</i>	(che) facciate	<i>(that) you do (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) faccia	<i>(that) he/she does</i>	(che) facciano	<i>(that) they do</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) facessi	<i>(that) I did</i>	(che noi) facessimo	<i>(that) we did</i>
2nd person	(che tu) facessi	<i>(that) you did (sing.)</i>	(che voi) faceste	<i>(that) you did (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) facesse	<i>(that) he/she did</i>	(che essi / esse) facessero	<i>(that) they did</i>

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) farei	<i>I would do</i>	(noi) faremmo	<i>we would do</i>
2nd person	(tu) faresti	<i>you would do (sing.)</i>	(voi) fareste	<i>you would do (pl.)</i>

3rd person (egli / ella) **farebbe** *he/she would do* (essi / esse) **farebbero** *they would do*

IMPERATIVE

(tu) **fà** [fai] (you) *do* (sing.)
(voi) **fate** (you) *do* (pl.)

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE **facente** *doer, doing* **PASSATO** **fatto** *done*

GERUND

facendo *doing*

POTERE

(to be able to, can)

The syllable **..te..** is often modified in different ways, sometimes contracted into a double **s**, sometimes by dropping the vowel **e**.

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) posso	<i>I can</i>	(noi) possiamo	<i>we can</i>
2nd person	(tu) puoi	<i>you can</i> (sing.)	(voi) potete	<i>you can</i> (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / ella) può	<i>he/she can</i>	(essi / esse) possono	<i>they can</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(potevo, potevi, poteva, potevamo, potevate, potevano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) potrò	<i>I shall will be able to</i>	(noi) potremo	<i>we will be able to</i>
2nd person	(tu) potrai	<i>you will will be able to</i> (sing.)	(voi) potrete	<i>you will be able to</i> (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / ella) potrà	<i>he/she will will be able to</i>	(essi / esse) potranno	<i>they will be able to</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) potei	<i>I could</i>	(noi) potemmo	<i>we could</i>
2nd person	(tu) potesti	<i>you could</i> (sing.)	(voi) poteste	<i>you could</i> (pl.)
3rd person	(egli / ella) potè	<i>he/she could</i>	(essi / esse) poterono	<i>they could</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) possa	<i>(that) I can</i>	(che noi) possiamo	<i>(that) we can</i>
2nd person	(che tu) possa	<i>(that) you can</i> (sing.)	(che voi) possiate	<i>(that) you can</i> (pl.)

3rd person (che egli / ella) **possa** (that) he/she can (che essi / esse) **possano** (that) they can

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular

(che io / tu) **potessi, che potesse, che potessimo, che poteste, che potessero**

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) potrei	<i>I could</i>	(noi) potremmo	<i>we could</i>
2nd person	(tu) potresti	<i>you could (sing.)</i>	(voi) potreste	<i>you could (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) potrebbe	<i>he/she could</i>	(essi / esse) potrebbero	<i>they could</i>

IMPERATIVE

(not used)

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE

potente (never used;
actual meaning: *powerful, mighty*) *able to*

PASSATO

potuto *been able to*

GERUND

potendo *being able to*

SAPERE

(to know)

Sapere has quite a few irregularities in the present indicative tense and, unlike other verbs, they do not match the ones found in the present subjunctive. In several inflections the syllable **..pe..** is contracted into a double **p**.

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) so	<i>I know</i>	(noi) sappiamo	<i>we know</i>
2nd person	(tu) sai	<i>you know (sing.)</i>	(voi) sapete	<i>you know (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) sa	<i>he/she knows</i>	(essi / esse) sanno	<i>they know</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular

(sapevo, sapevi, sapeva, sapevamo, sapevate, sapevano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) saprò	<i>I shall know</i>	(noi) sapremo	<i>we shall know</i>
2nd person	(tu) saprai	<i>you will know (sing.)</i>	(voi) saprete	<i>you will know (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) saprà	<i>he/she will know</i>	(essi / esse) saranno	<i>they will know</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) seppi	<i>I knew</i>	(noi) sapemmo	<i>we knew</i>
2nd person	(tu) sapesti	<i>you knew (sing.)</i>	(voi) sapeste	<i>you knew (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) seppe	<i>he/she knew</i>	(essi / esse) seppero	<i>they knew</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) sappia	<i>(that) I know</i>	(che noi) sappiamo	<i>(that) we know</i>
2nd person	(che tu) sappia	<i>(that) you know (sing.)</i>	(che voi) sappiate	<i>(that) you know (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) sappia	<i>(that) he/she knows</i>	(che essi / esse) sappiano	<i>(that) they know</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(che io / tu **sapessi**, che **sapesse**, che **sapessimo**, che **sapeste**, che **sapessero**)

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) saprei	<i>I would know</i>	(noi) sapremmo	<i>we would know</i>
2nd person	(tu) sapresti	<i>you would know (sing.)</i>	(voi) sapreste	<i>you would know (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) saprebbe	<i>he/she would know</i>	(essi / esse) saprebbero	<i>they would know</i>

IMPERATIVE

(not used)

PARTICIPLES

	PRESENTE		PASSATO
sapiente	<i>knower</i>		saputo <i>known</i>
(never used as a participle)	(actual meaning: <i>wise man</i>)		

GERUND

sapendo *knowing*

VENIRE

(to do)

This verb features a strongly irregular present tense, in which **..n..** sometimes turns into cluster **..ng..**, and **..e..** sometimes turns into diphthong **..ie..**

In some tenses, the syllable **..ni..** is contracted into a double **n**, or into a double **r**.

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) vengo	<i>I come</i>	(noi) veniamo	<i>we come</i>
2nd person	(tu) vieni	<i>you come (sing.)</i>	(voi) venite	<i>you come (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) viene	<i>he/she comes</i>	(essi / esse) vengono	<i>they come</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(venivo, venivi, veniva, venivamo, venivate, venivano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) verrò	<i>I shall come</i>	(noi) verremo	<i>we shall come</i>
2nd person	(tu) verrai	<i>you will come (sing.)</i>	(voi) verrete	<i>you will come (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) verrà	<i>he/she will come</i>	(essi / esse) verranno	<i>they will come</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) venni	<i>I came</i>	(noi) venimmo	<i>we came</i>
2nd person	(tu) venisti	<i>you came (sing.)</i>	(voi) veniste	<i>you came (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) venne	<i>he/she came</i>	(essi / esse) vennero	<i>they came</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) venga	<i>(that) I come</i>	(che noi) veniamo	<i>(that) we come</i>
2nd person	(che tu) venga	<i>(that) you come (sing.)</i>	(che voi) veniate	<i>(that) you come (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) venga	<i>(that) he/she comes</i>	(che essi / esse) vengano	<i>(that) they come</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(che io / tu venissi, che venisse, che venissimo, che veniste, che venissero)

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) verrei	<i>I would come</i>	(noi) verremmo	<i>we would come</i>
2nd person	(tu) verresti	<i>you would come (sing.)</i>	(voi) verreste	<i>you would come (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) verrebbe	<i>he/she would come</i>	(essi / esse) verrebbero	<i>they would come</i>

IMPERATIVE

(tu) vieni	<i>(you) come (sing.)</i>
(voi) venite	<i>(you) come (pl.)</i>

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE		PASSATO	
venente (never used)	<i>coming, coming</i>	venuto	<i>come</i>

GERUND

venendo *coming*

VOLERE

(to want)

This verb has some similarities with the present verb, **venire**: a very irregular present tense, in which some inflections curiously change the standard root's **I** into cluster **gli**, while others change the vowel **o** into diphthong **uo**.

Also in this case some tenses have a double **l** or a double **r**, as a contact of the central syllable, ...**le**...

INDICATIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) voglio	<i>I want</i>	(noi) vogliamo	<i>we want</i>
2nd person	(tu) vuoi	<i>you want (sing.)</i>	(voi) volete	<i>you want (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) vuole	<i>he/she wants</i>	(essi / esse) vogliono	<i>they want</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(volevo, volevi, voleva, volevamo, volevate, volevano)

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) vorrò	<i>I shall want</i>	(noi) vorremo	<i>we shall want</i>
2nd person	(tu) vorrai	<i>you will want (sing.)</i>	(voi) vorrete	<i>you will want (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) vorrà	<i>he/she will want</i>	(essi / esse) vorranno	<i>they will want</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) vollì	<i>I came</i>	(noi) volemmo	<i>we came</i>
2nd person	(tu) volesti	<i>you came (sing.)</i>	(voi) voleste	<i>you came (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli / ella) volle	<i>he/she came</i>	(essi / esse) vollero	<i>they came</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che io) voglia	<i>(that) I want</i>	(che noi) vogliamo	<i>(that) we want</i>
2nd person	(che tu) voglia	<i>(that) you want (sing.)</i>	(che voi) vogliate	<i>(that) you want (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(che egli / ella) voglia	<i>(that) he/she wants</i>	(che essi / esse) vogliono	<i>(that) they want</i>

IMPERFETTO

all inflections are regular
(che io / tu volessi, che volesse, che volessimo, che voleste, che volessero)

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(io) vorrei	<i>I would want</i>	(noi) vorremmo	<i>we would want</i>
2nd person	(tu) vorresti	<i>you would want (sing.)</i>	(voi) vorreste	<i>you would want (pl.)</i>
3rd person	(egli) vorrebbe	<i>he/she would want</i>	(essi / esse) vorrebbero	<i>they would want</i>

IMPERATIVE

(not used)

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE

volente (rarely used) *wanter, wanting*

PASSATO

voluto *wanted*

GERUND

volendo *wanting*

19.1

PASSIVE

Passive describes an action as seen from the side of whom receives it: i.e. *I buy an apple*, thus *the apple is bought by me*; if *the bird eats a worm*, obviously *the worm is eaten by the bird*; and so on. The single parts which form the active sentence are reversed in the passive form: in particular, the object of the former sentence becomes the subject of the latter.

In Italian passive is obtained exactly as in English: the verb of the active sentence is turned into *to be* (with the same tense) + the verb's past participle:

active sentence: **il bambino lancia la palla** = *the child throws the ball*

passive sentence: **la palla è lanciata dal bambino** = *the ball is thrown by the child*

The verb of the aforesaid active sentence is **lancia** (3rd singular person from the present tense of **lanciare**, *to throw*), so the passive form requires **è** (3rd singular person from the present tense of **essere**, *to be*), and **lanciato** (past participle of **lanciare**, i.e. *thrown*).

This is a full sample table of passive tenses of the same verb.

NOTE

To reduce the bulk of the page's layout, the personal pronouns that in other tables have been shown in brackets, **(io)**, **(tu)**, **(egli / ella)**, etc., have been omitted.

INDICATIVE

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	sono lanciato/a <i>I am thrown</i>	siamo lanciati/e <i>we are thrown</i>
2nd person	sei lanciato/a <i>you are thrown (singular)</i>	siete lanciati/e <i>you are thrown (plural)</i>
3rd person	è lanciato/a <i>he/she is thrown</i>	sono lanciati/e <i>they are thrown</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	ero lanciato/a <i>I was thrown</i>	eravamo lanciati/e <i>we were thrown</i>
2nd person	eri lanciato/a <i>you were thrown (s.)</i>	eravate lanciati/e <i>you were thrown (p.)</i>
3rd person	era lanciato/a <i>he/she was thrown</i>	erano lanciati/e <i>they were thrown</i>

FUTURO

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	sarò lanciato/a <i>I shall be thrown</i>	saremo lanciati/e <i>we shall be thrown</i>
2nd person	sarai lanciato/a <i>you will be thrown (s.)</i>	sarete lanciati/e <i>you will be thrown (p.)</i>
3rd person	sarà lanciato/a <i>he/she/it will be thrown</i>	saranno lanciati/e <i>they will be thrown</i>

PASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	fui lanciato/a <i>I was thrown</i>	fummo lanciati/e <i>we were thrown</i>
2nd person	fosti lanciato/a <i>you were thrown (s.)</i>	foste lanciati/e <i>you were thrown (p.)</i>
3rd person	fu lanciato/a <i>he/she/it was thrown</i>	furono lanciati/e <i>they were thrown</i>

PASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	sono stato/a lanciato/a <i>I have been thrown</i>	siamo stati/e lanciati/e <i>we have been thrown</i>
2nd person	sei stato/a lanciato/a <i>you have been thrown (s.)</i>	siete stati/e lanciati/e <i>you have been thrown (p.)</i>
3rd person	è stato/a lanciato/a <i>he/she has been thrown</i>	sono stati/e lanciati/e <i>they have been thrown</i>

TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	ero stato/a lanciato/a <i>I had been thrown</i>	eravamo stati/e lanciati/e <i>we had been thrown</i>
2nd person	eri stato/a lanciato/a <i>you had been thrown (s.)</i>	eravate stati/e lanciati/e <i>you had been thrown (p.)</i>
3rd person	era stato/a lanciato/a <i>he/she had been thrown</i>	erano stati/e lanciati/e <i>they had been thrown</i>

TRAPASSATO REMOTO

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1st person	fui stato/a lanciato/a <i>I had been thrown</i>	fummo stati/e lanciati/e <i>we had been thrown</i>

2nd person **fosti stato/a lanciato/a** *you had been thrown* (s.) **foste stati/e lanciati/e** *you had been thrown* (p.)
 3rd person **fu stato/a lanciato/a** *he/she/it had been thrown* **furono stati/e lanciati/e** *they had been thrown*

FUTURO ANTERIORE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	sarò stato/a lanciato/a	<i>I'll have been thrown</i>	saremo stati/e lanciati/e	<i>we'll have been thrown</i>
2nd person	sarai stato/a lanciato/a	<i>you'll have been thrown</i> (s.)	sarete stati/e lanciati/e	<i>you'll have been thrown</i> (p.)
3rd person	sarà stato/a lanciato/a	<i>he/she/it will have been thrown</i>	saranno stati/e lanciati/e	<i>they'll have been thrown</i>

SUBJUNCTIVE TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che) io sia lanciato/a	<i>(that) I am thrown</i>	(che) siamo lanciati/e	<i>(that) we are thrown</i>
2nd person	(che) tu sia lanciato/a	<i>(that) you are thrown</i> (s.)	(che) siate lanciati/e	<i>(that) you are thrown</i> (p.)
3rd person	(che) egli/ella sia lanciato/a	<i>(that) he/she/it is thrown</i>	(che) siano lanciati/e	<i>(that) they are thrown</i>

IMPERFETTO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	(che) io fossi lanciato/a	<i>(that) I was thrown</i>	(che) fossimo lanciati/e	<i>(that) we were thrown</i>
2nd person	(che) tu fossi lanciato/a	<i>(that) you were thrown</i> (s.)	(che) foste lanciati/e	<i>(that) you were thrown</i> (p.)
3rd person	(che) fosse lanciato/a	<i>(that) he/she/it was thrown</i>	(che) fossero lanciati/e	<i>(that) they were thrown</i>

CONDITIONAL TENSES

PRESENTE

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	sarei lanciato/a	<i>I would be thrown</i>	saremmo lanciati/e	<i>we would be thrown</i>
2nd person	saresti lanciato/a	<i>you would be thrown</i> (s.)	sareste lanciati/e	<i>you would be thrown</i> (p.)
3rd person	sarebbe lanciato/a	<i>he/she would be thrown</i>	sarebbero lanciati/e	<i>they would be thrown</i>

PASSATO

	<i>singular</i>		<i>plural</i>	
1st person	sarei stato/a lanciato/a	<i>I would have been thrown</i>	saremmo stati/e lanciati/e	<i>we would have been thrown</i>
2nd person	saresti stato/a lanciato/a	<i>you would have been thrown</i> (s.)	sareste stati/e lanciati/e	<i>you would have been thrown</i> (p.)
3rd person	sarebbe stato/a lanciato/a	<i>he/she would have been thrown</i>	sarebbero stati/e lanciati/e	<i>they would have been thrown</i>

GERUND

essendo lanciato/a/i/e *being thrown*

PARTICIPLES

PRESENTE

(none)

PASSATO

stato/a/i/e lanciato/a/i/e *been thrown*

In forming passive, by adding the auxiliary verb **essere** (*to be*), the subject no longer carries out the action, but receives it. Who instead carries out the action, specified in English by preposition *by*, in Italian is introduced by preposition **da**, which according to the following noun has to be used either in its simple form or compound form (i.e. either alone, or bound to a definite article, see [paragraph 5.2](#)):

il ragazzo lava il cane = *the boy washes the dog*
il cane è lavato dal ragazzo = *the dog is washed by the boy*

essi leggono il libro = *they read the book*
il libro è letto da loro = *the book is read by them*

scriverò un articolo = *I'll write an article*
l'articolo sarà scritto da me = *the article will be written by me*

l'uomo raccolse il sasso = *the man picked up the stone*
il sasso fu raccolto dall'uomo = *the stone was picked up by the man*

Passive does not have specific inflections, because only the past participle of the main verb is used: to obtain the passive form of a verb all you need to do is to add its past participle to the several tenses of the auxiliary verb, **essere**. Therefore, it is very important to be confident with the latter (see paragraphs [4.3](#), [6.1](#), [9.3](#), [9.5](#) and [13.1](#)).

It has been previously said that Italian past participles are case- and gender-sensitive, which means that they behave exactly as adjectives, and have to be matched with the subject of the sentence. Focus the following examples:

il ragazzo lava il cane = *the boy washes the dog*
il cane è lavato dal ragazzo = *the dog is washed by the boy*

la ragazza lava il cane = *the girl washes the dog*
il cane è lavato dalla ragazza = *the dog is washed by the girl*

il ragazzo lava i cani = *the boy washes the dogs*
i cani sono lavati dal ragazzo = *the dogs are washed by the boy*

la ragazza lava i cani = *the girl washes the dogs*
i cani sono lavati dalla ragazza = *the dogs are washed by the girl*

lo scrittore usa la penna = *the writer uses the pen*
la penna è usata dallo scrittore = *the pen is used the writer*

la scrittrice usa la penna = *the (woman) writer uses the pen*
la penna è usata dalla scrittrice = *the pen is used the (woman) writer*

lo scrittore usa le penne = *the writer uses the pens*
le penne sono usate dallo scrittore = *the pens are used by the writer*

la scrittrice usa le penne = *the (woman) writer uses the pens*
le penne sono usate dalla scrittrice = *the pens are used by the (woman) writer*
Note how only the subject affects the verb's inflection, while the object does not.

Obviously, only transitive verbs may have a passive form. Intransitive ones, such as *to sleep*, *to laugh*, *to die*, *to sit*, *to come*, etc. never have a direct object, so the latter cannot become the subject of the passive sentence. Transitive verbs, instead, can always be turned into passive forms.

Passive looks very similar to the same verb's active compound tenses, except that the auxiliary verb used is no longer **avere** (*to have*) but **essere** (*to be*).

The following table is an example comparing the 1st singular person of the verb **guardare** (*to watch*) in different tenses, both active and passive; in particular, focus the central column:

<i>active - simple tenses</i>	<i>active - compound tenses</i>
guardo = <i>I watch</i>	ho guardato = <i>I have watched</i>
guardavo = <i>I watched</i>	avevo guardato = <i>I had watched</i>
guardai = <i>I watched</i>	ebbi guardato = <i>I had watched</i>

guarderò = *I'll watch* **avrò guardato** = *I'll have watched*

passive - simple tenses

sono guardato = *I am watched*

ero guardato = *I was watched*

fui guardato = *I was watched*

sarò guardato = *I'll be watched*

passive - compound tenses

sono stato guardato = *I have been watched*

ero stato guardato = *I had been watched*

fui stato guardato = *I had been watched*

sarò stato guardato = *I'll have been watched*

The compound tenses of an intransitive verb are even more similar to passive, because they both take **essere**. However, they can be told by the meaning of the verb.

For instance, comparing the passive form of **amare** (*to love*, transitive) with **andare** (*to go*, intransitive), you will notice that the auxiliary verb is identical, although the meaning leaves little doubt whether the form is active or passive:

transitive verb in passive form - simple tenses

sono amato = *I am loved*

ero amato = *I was loved*

fui amato = *I was loved*

sarò amato = *I'll be loved*

intransitive verb - simple tenses

sono andato = *I went / I have gone*

ero andato = *I had gone*

fui andato = *I had gone*

sarò andato = *I'll have gone*

As a general rule, when **essere** is followed by a past participle (**guardato**, **andato**, **amato**, etc.), only if the latter verb is transitive, thus it may have a direct object, it is a passive form (**sono guardato**, **sono amato**, etc.), otherwise it is an active form (**sono andato**). Further examples are:

è venduto = *it is sold* is passive (**vendere** = *to sell* is a transitive verb)

le piante erano morte = *the plants had died* is active (**morire** = *to die* is intransitive)

fummo visti = *we were seen* is passive (**vedere** = *to see* is transitive)

sono venuti = *they have come* is active (**venire** = *to come* is intransitive)

sono riconosciuti = *they are recognized* is passive (**riconoscere** = *to recognize* is transitive)

Remember though, that a few verbs are transitive in English and intransitive in Italian, and vice-versa, and this affects the aforesaid rule:

sono pagati (*they are payed for*) is passive, because **pagare** (*to pay for*) is transitive

eravamo entrati (*we had entered*) is active, because **entrare** (*to enter*) is intransitive

It should be noticed that both in English and in Italian some past participles used with the verb *to be*, i.e. **essere**, may act as adjectives. This occurs especially when the present and simple past tenses are used (i.e. with Italian *presente* and *imperfetto* tenses).

For instance, *this paper is **crumpled***, or *the chicken was **cooked***, or *that banknote is **torn***.

Crumpled, *cooked* and *torn* might be either considered past participles or adjectives.

In such cases, to stress the fact that the sentence describes an action, and not a condition, (i.e. that the paper is *being crumpled* by somebody, and is not crumpled as a condition, or that the chicken was actually *being cooked*, etc.), Italian may choose a different auxiliary verb to form passive: **venire** (see the previous [paragraph 18.4](#)), whose actual meaning is *to come*, in place of auxiliary **essere**:

la luce è spenta = *the light is off*, or *the light is turned off* (either as a condition or as an action)

la luce viene spenta = *the light is (being) turned off* (i.e. by somebody, more specifically)

la parete era dipinta = *the wall was painted* (either as a condition or as an action)

la parete **veniva** dipinta = *the wall was (being) painted* (only as an action)

il libro è pubblicato = *the book is published* (either as a condition or as an action)

il libro **viene** pubblicato = *the book is (being) published* (only as an action)

il pallone era riempito col gas = *the balloon was filled with gas* (either a condition or an action)

il pallone **veniva** riempito col gas = *the balloon was (being) filled with gas*

Venire somewhat emphasizes that the subject of the sentence receives or has received the action expressed by the verb. Instead **essere** is less emphatic, and what follows may be translated either as a past participle (i.e. a passive form), or as an adjective.

However, in most cases **venire** may be chosen also when the use of **essere** would never cause any doubt:

il biologo fu premiato per la sua scoperta = *the biologist was awarded for his discovery*

il biologo **venne** premiato per la sua scoperta (same as above)

l'erba sarà tagliata domani = *the grass will be cut tomorrow*

l'erba **verrà** tagliata domani (same as above)

eravamo aiutati dagli amici = *we were helped by friends*

venivamo aiutati dagli amici (same as above)

The use of **venire** as an auxiliary verb for passive, though, is limited to simple tenses, while compound tenses always require **essere**:

la casa fu costruita nel 1931 = *the house was built in 1931*

la casa **venne** costruita nel 1931 (same as above)

...*BUT*

la casa **è stata costruita** lo scorso mese (only possible form) = *the house was built last month*

il biglietto sarà timbrato alla stazione = *the ticket will be stamped at the station*

il biglietto **verrà** timbrato alla stazione (same as above)

...*BUT*

il biglietto **sarà stato timbrato** alla stazione (only possible form) = *the ticket might have been stamped at the station*

egli era curato nel vicino ospedale = *he was cured in the nearby hospital*

egli **veniva** curato nel vicino ospedale (same as above)

...*BUT*

egli **era stato curato** nel vicino ospedale (only possible form) = *he had been cured in the nearby hospital*

19.2

TO BE HUNGRY, THIRSTY, HOT, COLD, SLEEPY

These expressions, which describe a condition based on physical sensations, in English require the verb *to be* followed by the relevant adjective (i.e. *I am hungry, you were thirsty, etc.*).

Instead, in Italian they require the verb *to have* (**avere**), followed by the relevant noun that describes the sensation: i.e. *to be hungry* turns into *to have hunger*; *to be thirsty* into *to have thirst*, and so on:

avere fame = *to be hungry* (literally: *to have hunger*)

avere sete = *to be thirsty* (literally: *to have thirst*)

avere caldo = *to be hot* (literally: *to have heat*)

avere freddo = *to be cold* (literally: *to have cold*)

avere sonno = *to be sleepy* (literally: *to have sleep*)

In a similar way,

avere ragione = *to be right* (literally: *to have right*)

avere torto = *to be wrong* (literally: *to have wrong*)

Any tense of the verb **avere** can be used with these expressions, therefore:

egli avrà fame = *he will be hungry* (*he will have hunger*)

io ho avuto sonno = *I felt sleepy* (*I have had sleep*)

noi avemmo sete = *we felt thirsty* (*we had thirst*)

voi avevate ragione = *you were right* (*you had right*)

and so on.

While *to be right* and *to be wrong* are always translated with the verb **avere**, *to be hot* and *to be cold* may also take the verb *to feel* (i.e. *I feel hot*, *you felt cold*, etc.).

In Italian this is obtained by using the verb **sentire** (*to feel*), followed by the noun:

avere caldo, sentire caldo = *to be hot, to feel hot* (literally: *to feel heat*)

avere freddo, sentire freddo = *to be cold, to feel cold* (literally: *to feel cold*)

The verb **sentire** is never used with *hungry*, *thirsty* or *sleepy*.

The Italian adjectives **affamato** (*hungry*), **assetato** (*thirsty*), **accaldato** (*hot*), **raffreddato** or **infreddolito** (*cold*), and **assonnato** (*sleepy*) may also be used, though more sparingly than in English. In Italian they almost describe a condition, more than a personal feeling.

Compare the following examples:

essi mangiano un panino perché hanno fame = *they eat a sandwich because they are hungry*

affamati dopo il lungo viaggio, essi si fermarono per un pasto = *hungry after the long journey, they stopped for a meal*

io avevo sonno e andai a letto presto = *I was sleepy and I went to bed early*

egli sembrava assonnato perché non aveva dormito = *he seemed sleepy because he had not slept*

io avevo caldo (or **sentivo caldo**) **con la giacca, così l'ho tolta** = *I was hot / felt hot with the jacket, so I took it off*

io sono accaldato, e sto sudando = *I am (feeling) hot, and I'm sweating*

In most cases both forms would be correct:

essi mangiano perché hanno fame = *they eat a sandwich because they are hungry*

essi mangiano perché sono affamati = (same as above)

essi dormono perché hanno sonno = *they are sleeping because because they are sleepy*

essi dormono perché sono assonnati = (same as above)

However, especially in common speech, the first of the two forms is the one used more often.

There is also a difference in meaning when using **raffreddato** or **infreddolito**:

raffreddato = *cooled, cooled up*

questo è un motore raffreddato ad acqua = *this is a water-cooled engine*

raffreddato = *running a cold*

noi eravamo raffreddati e starnutivamo = *we were running a cold and we sneezed*

infreddolito = *feeling cold*

ella era infreddolita, e indossò un cappotto = *she was feeling cold, and she put on a coat*

Although in the previous examples **raffreddato** has been used as an adjective, it is the past participle of the verb **raffreddare**, *to cool, cool up*. Its reflexive form **raffreddarsi**, when referred to living creatures has a common meaning of *to catch a cold* (although the proper way of saying this is **prendere un raffreddore**). Since they are very common verbs, it is useful to focus well their different use (and meaning):

io raffreddo quest'acqua per ottenere ghiaccio = *I cool this water to obtain ice*

aprendo la finestra l'aria si raffredda = *by opening the window the air cools up*

vieni dentro, o ti raffredderai (colloquial) = *come inside, or you will catch a cold (= you will turn cold)*

vieni dentro, o prenderai un raffreddore (proper form) = (same as above)

There is also a similar verb, **freddarsi**, whose official meaning is *to become (too) cold*, sometime used in common speech to replace the aforesaid **raffreddarsi**.

Its positive (non-reflexive) form too exists, **freddare**, always referred to living creatures, with an idiomatic meaning of *to shoot someone dead* (a rather modern use of this verb):

il caffè si è freddato, non berlo = *the coffee has turned cold, don't drink it*

quando ho fatto la doccia l'acqua si era freddata = *when I took a shower the water had become cold*

vieni a mangiare o la minestra si fredda = *come to eat, or the soup will grow cold*

egli / ella mirò bene, e freddò il nemico al primo colpo = *he/she aimed well, and killed the enemy with the first shot*

As a general rule, **freddarsi** is preferred to **raffreddarsi** when a somewhat negative shade of meaning is required, e.g. *to become excessively cold*, or *to become cold (while it shouldn't have)*, such as speaking of food, hot drinks, water for a shower or a bath, the air in a heated room, etc.

19.3

THE POSTPONED SUBJECT

As far as now, in all the sample sentences shown, the subject stood before the verb, and the object followed it (as it always happens in English, as well).

	il ragazzo	apre	la porta
(transitive verb)	subject	verb	object
	<i>the boy</i>	<i>opens</i>	<i>the door</i>

	l'ospite	era partito
(intransitive verb)	subject	verb
	<i>the guest</i>	<i>had left</i>

The early stages of this course, for instance [paragraph 2.5](#) about the position of adjectives, mentioned how in Italian the last part of the sentence often carries the emphasis of the concept expressed:

abitavano in una grande casa = *they lived in a large house*
(this tells us where they lived)

abitavano in una casa grande = *they lived in a large house*
(this tells us how was the house they lived in)

When a sentence has no object (a situation that typically occurs with intransitive verbs, but sometimes with transitive ones too), in Italian it is common to shift the subject at the bottom, i.e. after the verb.

A few examples:

oggi il tuo amico verrà e pranzerà qui = *today your friend will come and will have lunch here*
could be turned into

oggi verrà il tuo amico e pranzerà qui = (same as above)

fai presto, il treno è arrivato! = *be quick, the train has arrived!*
could be turned into

fai presto, è arrivato il treno! = (same as above)

una persona era uscita = *one person had come out*

could be turned into

era uscita una persona = (same as above)

There is no special reason for postponing a subject, except to place a little more emphasis on the last word. For instance, in the first sentence the usual form puts the emphasis on the fact that *your friend will come*, while with a postponed subject it means *your friend will come*.

It is not a strong emphasis, i.e. the second form would not mean *your friend is coming, not mine, but we are having for lunch your friend*, as if the subject (*your friend*) had not yet been introduced in the conversation. The usual form, instead, would sound like *today your friend* (who has likely been mentioned already) *will come, and have lunch here*.

In the same way, the second example puts a little stress on *the train*, rather than on the fact that it has arrived, while the third example tells us that a person (not two or more, not a dog, but a single individual) had come out, while the usual form would slightly emphasize the coming out of the person, i.e. his action.

Focusing the inflections of the verbs, in the aforesaid samples we see that:

verrà matches **il tuo amico**;

è arrivato matches **il treno**;

era uscita matches **una persona**.

Therefore, the postponed subject could rarely be mistaken with an object, because the inflection of the verb always matches the subject, not the object. This is also clear enough from the meaning of the verb and from the general context of the speech:

adesso salirà Paolo = *now Paul will go up / climb* (i.e. it is Paul's turn to go up)

adesso salirà le scale = *now he / she will climb the steps*

In the first example, the action of climbing is quite evidently carried out by Paul, because Paul cannot "be climbed": despite the noun follows the verb, the person is clearly the subject of the sentence.

In the second example, instead, the stairs are climbed (i.e. they do not climb themselves), so they are the object.

Furthermore, **salirà**, inflection of the 3rd singular person, does not match **scale**, a plural noun, but either Paul (in the first sentence) or somebody else not mentioned (in the second).

But even if the match had been possible, the meaning of the verb would have been enough to tell the subject from the object.

in questo ristorante mangia spesso il mio collega = *my colleague often eats in this restaurant*

in questo ristorante mangia spesso il pesce = *in this restaurant he / she often eats fish*

In this case **mangia** could match both **collega** and **pesce**, but it is obvious that the colleague does the action of eating, i.e. he or she is the subject, while the fish is eaten, thus acts as an object.

However, there are a few cases in which the meaning might be doubted. Compare these two sentences:

Franco aveva chiamato = *Frank had called*

aveva chiamato Franco = *Frank had called*, but also *he / she had called Frank*

In the second example both meanings are possible. In these cases the context or the rest of the sentence will provide more clues; for instance:

aveva chiamato Franco, ma tu non eri in casa = *Frank had called, but you were not at home*

aveva chiamato Franco prima di chiamare Elena = *he / she had called Frank before calling Helen*

The main condition for postponing a subject is that the sentence must **NOT** have an object. In fact, this form is used more often with intransitive verbs (which never have a direct object), and less often with transitive ones, as well, if the direct object is missing:

lo straniero era arrivato = *the stranger had arrived*, almost meaning *he had finally made it there*

era arrivato lo straniero = (same as above), almost answering the question: *who had arrived?*

l'albero è caduto = *the tree fell down*, almost meaning *it did not stand the wind*

è caduto l'albero = (same as above), almost answering the question: *what happened?*

presto l'inverno finirà = *winter will soon be over*, almost meaning *it will not last long*

presto finirà l'inverno = (same as above), almost meaning *...and spring will begin*

presto lo studente finirà i suoi compiti = *the student will soon finish his homework*
(only possible form, due to the object)

il campione ha vinto = *the champion won*, almost meaning *he did not lose*
ha vinto il campione = (same as above), almost answering the question: *who won the match?*

il campione ha vinto la sfida = *the champion won the challenge*
(only possible form, due to the object)

When the verb used in the sentence is **essere** (*to be*), there is no real object, because the verb describes a condition, not an action, therefore the subject may be freely postponed. This occurs very frequently in questions.

questa bicicletta è bella = *this bicycle is nice*
è bella questa bicicletta = (same as above)

il cappotto era vecchio? = *was the coat old?*
era vecchio il cappotto? = *was the coat old?*

il tempo è buono? = *is the weather fine?*
è buono il tempo? = *is the weather fine?*

non è tutto oro ciò che riluce (proverb) = *not all things that shine are gold*
(the other way is possible, but being a proverb it is only used in this form)

When a subject is postponed, the sentence must end there, i.e. either a full stop must close the period, or a further sentence should be introduced by means of a comma and/or a conjunction (e.g. *and, or, so, thus*, etc.).

In the following examples the spot where the sentence breaks is shown in yellow, and what breaks it is shown in red.

presto finirà l'inverno || **e il tempo migliorerà** = *winter will soon be over and the weather will improve*
ha vinto il campione , || **quindi la folla ora esulta** = *the champion won, therefore the crowd now rejoices*
è caduto l'albero || **perché il vento era forte** = *the tree fell because the wind was strong*
è arrivato il treno ; || **prendi i bagagli** = *the train has arrived; take the luggage*

In order to postpone the subject, other parts of the same sentence may sometimes be moved from their original position; compare the following examples:

un cane entrò nella stanza = *a dog came into the room* (the action is slightly emphasized)

↓

nella stanza entrò un cane = (same as above, though now the dog is more emphasized)
entrò nella stanza un cane = (same, but less common than the previous one)

l'insegnante tornò a scuola = *the teacher returned to school* (slight emphasis on the action)

↓

a scuola tornò l'insegnante = (same as above, though now the teacher is more emphasized)
tornò a scuola l'insegnante = (same, but less common than the previous one)

uno specialista verrà dall'estero = *a specialist will come from abroad* (emphasis on *from abroad*)

↓

verrà uno specialista dall'estero = (same; both *the specialist* and *from abroad* are emphasized)
dall'estero verrà uno specialista = (same; now *the specialist* is more emphasized)

Since this particular form does not follow a standard rule, and not all parts of the sentence may be shifted in a similar way, there is no need for the student to memorize every possible disposition, and leave it with its "classic" arrangement (subject + verb + etc. etc.).

In particular, the adverbs are usually left in their original position, i.e. next to the verb, because when an adverb is used it often carries the emphasis:

il campione ha vinto = *the champion won*
ha vinto il campione = *the champion won*
il campione ha vinto facilmente = *the champion won easily*

l'albero era caduto = *the tree had fallen down*
era caduto l'albero = *the tree had fallen down*
l'albero era caduto spesso = *the tree had often fallen down*

lo straniero arrivò = *the stranger arrived*

era arrivato lo straniero = *the stranger arrived*

lo straniero arrivò tardi = *the stranger arrived late*

However, also when an adverb is present, the Italian language allows forms similar to the ones discussed so far:

ha vinto facilmente il campione... = *the champion won easily...*

era caduto spesso l'albero... = *the tree had often fallen...*

arrivò tardi lo straniero... = *the stranger arrived late...*

This special form helps to keep the emphasis strong enough on both parts of the sentence, i.e. the adverb and the subject. It is used when another sentence follows in the same period, to obtain a particular lingering effect:

ha vinto facilmente il campione, e la folla lo esalta = *the champion won easily*

era caduto spesso l'albero, ed era diventato storto = *the tree had often fallen down, and it had become crooked*

arrivò tardi lo straniero, e trovò la porta chiusa = *the stranger arrived late, and found the door closed*

The subject is also postponed so that, after having read the sentence, the reader's attention will somewhat linger on *the champion, the tree* or *the stranger*, because the following sentence may likely continue to concern or to describe the same subject.

Instead the standard arrangement (subject + verb) does not give the sentence any particular shade nor emphasis, i.e. it simply describes what happens to the subject.

19.4

DOUBLE NEGATIVE

In English there are expressions which have a double form according to whether they are used alone or with a negative conjunction. For instance, the two sentences *there was nothing* and *there wasn't anything* have the same meaning, although two different adverbs, *nothing* and *anything*, have to be used. The same pattern occurs for *nobody* ~ *anybody*, *never* ~ *ever*, *nowhere* ~ *anywhere* and so on.

Instead in Italian the equivalent adverbs have only one form, which is the negative one (i.e. they match *nothing, nobody, nowhere*, etc.).

There is only one exception; for the sake of an easier comprehension, this topic will be discussed in the following paragraph 19.5.

Provided that in Italian negative sentences always contain the conjunction **non** (*not*), the use of the aforesaid pronouns or adverbs turns the sentence two times negative, almost as "*I can't see nothing*"; "*she won't never come*"; "*we didn't do this neither*"; and so on.

In Italian this is the only possible (and correct) way of using negative pronouns and adverbs.

nessuno (indefinite pronoun) = *nobody, no one, none*

niente (indefinite pronoun) = *nothing*

nulla (indefinite pronoun) = *nothing*

mai (adverb) = *never*

nemmeno (adverb) = *not even, neither*

neanche (adverb) = *not even, neither*

neppure (adverb) = *not even, neither*

Note how the aforesaid words are compounds (except **mai** and **nulla**), and begin with the prefix **ne-** (from the Latin *ne* = *not*), although the final word contains some further alteration:

ne + uno (*one*) >> **nessuno** (*nobody, no one, none*)

ne + ente (archaic for *entity, thing*) >> **niente** (*nothing*)

ne + meno (*less*) >> **nemmeno** (*not even, neither*)

ne + anche (*also, even*) >> **neanche** (*not even, neither*)

ne + pure (*also, even*) >> **neppure** (*not even, neither*)

Instead *nowhere* has no Italian equivalent, so the expression **da nessuna parte** (literally: *in no place*) is used.

In fact, **nessuno** and its feminine **nessuna** may be also used with any noun, as an adjective, with the meaning of *no...*

Note that since **nessuno** is a compound of **uno**, before masculine nouns it drops its final **o**, except when the following noun begins with **z** or with **s** + consonant (e.g. **sc...**, **sp...**, **st...**, etc.). For this phonetic rule refer to the indefinite article **uno**, [paragraph 2.4](#)).

nessun amico = no friend

nessun timore = no fear

nessun rimorso = no regret

...**BUT**

nessuno scambio = no exchange

nessuno strumento = no instrument

nessuno zio = no uncle

Instead **nessuna** may undergo an elision and take an apostrophe (**nessun'**) when the following noun begins with the vowel "a". This change is not compulsory, and with other vowels it is usually avoided:

nessuna casa = no house

nessuna idea = no idea

nessuna emergenza = no emergency

...**BUT**

nessun'arma or **nessuna arma** = no weapon

nessun'assenza or **nessuna assenza** = no absence

nessun'attrice or **nessuna attrice** = no actress

The use of **nessun** and **nessuna** will be discussed again, further on, in this same paragraph.

Meanwhile, these are some examples of double negative sentences:

in quel cassetto (egli / ella) non trovò niente = in that drawer he / she didn't find anything

da lontano (essi) non vedranno nulla = from afar they won't see anything

(essi) non hanno letto nessun libro = they haven't read any book

quella persona non conosce nessuno = that person doesn't know anybody

il lunedì (io) non mangio mai a casa = on Mondays I never eat at home

(io) non lo guarderò nemmeno = I won't even look at him / it

perché (tu) non vedrai neppure questo film? = why won't you watch this movie either?

(egli / ella) non conosceva neppure l'indirizzo = he / she didn't even know the address

(noi) non vogliamo nemmeno quello = we don't want that (one) either

Examining these sentences, a first consideration is that the basic structure of double negative expressions is:

(subject) + **non** + (verb) + negative pronoun or negative adverb.

e.g. **quella persona** (subject) + **non** + **conosce** (verb) **nessuno** (negative pronoun).

Notice how the negative pronouns and adverbs are simply added after the verb; in fact, by dropping them or by replacing them with a definite noun (shown in green in the following samples), the aforesaid sentences turn out "ordinary" negatives:

in quel cassetto (egli / ella) non trovò la penna = in that drawer he / she didn't find *the pen*

da lontano (essi) non vedranno i dettagli = from afar they won't see *the details*

(essi) non hanno letto questo libro = they did not read *this book*

quella persona non conosce tuo fratello = that person does not know *your brother*

When the verb uses a compound tense (passato prossimo, trapassato prossimo, futuro anteriore, etc.), the negative pronouns **nessuno**, **niente** and **nulla** follow the standard pattern shown above:

(subject) + **non** + (verb) + negative adverb or negative pronoun

e.g. **essi non hanno letto nessun libro**.

Instead the negative adverbs **mai**, **nemmeno**, **neanche** and **neppure** may either follow the standard sequence, as above, or they may be inserted between the two parts of the compound tense, i.e. the auxiliary verb and the primary verb:

(subject) + **non** + (auxiliary verb) + negative adverb + (past participle of the primary verb)

e.g. **essi non hanno letto mai questo libro**; alternatively: **essi non hanno mai letto questo libro**.

A few more examples should make this concept clear enough:

il libro non era appartenuto a nessuno (only possible form) = *the book had not belonged to anybody*
in quel cassetto non ha trovato niente (only possible form) = *in that drawer he / she didn't find anything*
da lontano non avranno visto niente (only possible form) = *from afar they won't have seen anything*

non ho mangiato mai a casa = *I never ate at home*
non ho mai mangiato a casa = (same as above)

non avevo guardato nemmeno la TV = *I hadn't even watched the TV, but also I hadn't watched the TV either*
non avevo nemmeno guardato la TV = (same as above)

non aveva visto nemmeno un film = *he / she hadn't even seen a movie, but also he / she hadn't seen a movie either*
non aveva nemmeno visto un film = (same as above)

non avrà letto neppure l'indirizzo = *he / she might have not even read the address, but also he / she might have not read the address either*
non avrà neppure letto l'indirizzo = (same as above)

non abbiamo voluto neppure quello = *we didn't even want that (one), but also we didn't want that (one) either*
non abbiamo neppure voluto quello = (same as above)

When the alternative form is possible, in most cases to use one or the other is a free choice, although the first of the two would give the negative adverb a slightly more emphatic meaning, especially in spoken language (i.e. the voice pitch would slightly raise in pronouncing the adverb), while the second form is less strong, somewhat more stylish, and would be preferred in writing.

A second consideration about the previous examples is that **neppure**, **neanche** and **neppure** have the same meaning. It would sometimes be more stylish to choose a specific one according to the sentence, but in common speech, or for a student's purpose, any of the three may be freely used.

non conosceva neppure l'indirizzo = *he / she didn't even know the address*
non conosceva neanche l'indirizzo = (same as above)
non conosceva nemmeno l'indirizzo = (same as above)

But these adverbs do translate two different English expressions: *not even* and *neither*.

non conosceva neppure l'indirizzo = *he / she didn't even know the address*
non conosceva neanche l'indirizzo = *he / she didn't know the address either*

In most cases, which of the two is the actual meaning is made clear by the context of the sentence, since *neither* can only be possible if a first object has already been mentioned (i.e. *he didn't know my house - he didn't know my address either*).

The form we discussed so far may have both meanings (see once again the previous examples), and is stylistically correct.

However, in Italian it is still possible to distinguish more clearly the two meanings by using different arrangements of the words. In spoken language, especially in central and southern Italy, to strengthen the meaning of *not even* it is a common custom to drop the negative conjunction **non** by replacing it with the negative adverb or pronoun, moved to the front, and to leave the verb at the bottom of the sentence:

non conosceva neppure l'indirizzo = *he / she didn't even know the address*
but this may also be translated as: *she didn't know the address either*
neppure l'indirizzo conosceva (very colloquial) = *he / she didn't even know the address*

il treno non ferma neanche a Firenze = *the train doesn't even stop in Florence*
but this may also be translated as: *the train doesn't stop in Florence either*
il treno neanche a Firenze ferma (very colloquial) = *the train doesn't even stop in Florence*

quella scuola non chiude nemmeno d'estate = *that school doesn't even close in summer*
but this may also be translated as: *that school doesn't close in summer either*
quella scuola nemmeno d'estate chiude (very colloquial) = *that school doesn't even close in summer*

This colloquial form is no longer a double negative, having lost **non**. But remember: although it is commonly heard, according to the official Italian grammar this form is not correct.

When the object of the sentence is a personal pronoun, the two different meanings *not even* and *neither* are more clearly understood.

At first, let's see a couple of typical sentences that contain a pronoun as a direct object:

non li incontrerò (standard form) = *I won't meet them*

non incontrerò loro (emphatic form) = *I won't meet **them*** (i.e. I will meet somebody else)

il giudice non lo ha condannato (standard form) = *the judge did not sentence him*

il giudice non ha condannato lui (emphatic form) = *the judge did not sentence **him*** (i.e. the judge sentenced somebody else)

As explained in [paragraph 8.1](#), forcing the pronoun at the bottom of the sentence gives the latter a stronger emphasis (in the aforesaid example, the pronouns *them* and *him* are emphasized).

The same form used with **neanche**, **nemmeno** or **neppure** gives them a clear meaning of *neither*.

Instead, the standard form used so far (i.e. **non** + pronoun + verb + negative adverb) would only have the meaning of *not even*.

Furthermore, in the case of a pronoun used as direct object, the colloquial form explained above is considered correct (i.e. with the adverb moved in front, to replace **non**), and may be used as an alternative and somewhat stronger expression:

non ti guarderò neppure = *I will not even look at you*

neppure ti guarderò = (same as above, but stronger)

non guarderò neppure te (emphasized form) = *I will not look at you either*

purtroppo non lo vidi nemmeno = *unfortunately I didn't even see him*

purtroppo nemmeno lo vidi = (same as above, but stronger)

purtroppo non vidi nemmeno lui = *unfortunately I didn't see him either*

l'anno scorso non le abbiamo neanche invitate = *last year we haven't even invited them*

l'anno scorso neanche le abbiamo invitate = (same as above, but stronger)

l'anno scorso non abbiamo invitato neanche loro = *last year we haven't invited them either*

Among the the indefinite pronouns discussed so far, **niente**, **nulla** and **nessuno** somewhat differ from ordinary ones, such as personal pronouns, relative pronouns, etc.

First of all, they do not have a plural form, due to their respective meaning; this also happens in English.

Niente and **nulla** are both dealt with as masculine singular words.

Also **nessuno** is a masculine singular pronoun; however, as already mentioned at the [beginning of this paragraph](#), when it is followed by a noun it turns into an adjective, whose English equivalent would be *no...*(noun):

(as a pronoun) **nessuno ha detto questo** = *nobody said this*

(as an adjective) **nessun uomo pesa oltre 300 chili** = *no man weighs over 300 kilograms*

(as an adjective) **nessuna persona comprerebbe questo libro** = *no person would buy this book*

Used as a pronoun, **nessuno** does not change; it is considered a masculine word, also when it evidently refers to feminine individuals. Therefore, if a compound verb's past participle is gender- and number-sensitive (see [paragraph 6.4](#)), the pronoun **nessuno** always requires a masculine inflection.

nessuno (pronoun) **è entrato nel reparto femminile** = *nobody entered the women's ward* **nessuna**

paziente (adjective) **è entrata nel reparto femminile** = *no (female) patient entered the women's ward*

Used as an adjective, instead, **nessun** and **nessuna** match the gender of the noun they refer to, as any other ordinary adjective.

While **nessun** (+ masculine noun) turns again into **nessuno** when the following noun begins with **z** or with **s** + consonant (see [previous examples](#)), **nessuna** (+ feminine noun) may undergo an elision, i.e. the last **a** dropped and replaced by an apostrophe, when the following noun begins with the vowel **a**. This change, though, is facultative, and it rarely occurs when the noun begins with **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**.

nessun vincitore = *no winner*

nessun uomo = *no man*

nessuno sconto = *no discount*
nessuna domanda = *no question*
nessun'amica or **nessuna amica** = *no (female) friend*
nessuna imposta (seldom **nessun'imposta**) = *no tax*

nessun impiegato entrò nell'ufficio = *no clerk entered the office*
nessuno straniero venne in città = *no stranger came into town*
nessun'altra ragazza = *no other girl*

Beware of nouns whose inflection is similar to a typical feminine one, such as **atleta** (*athlete*), **poeta** (*poet*), **artista** (*artist*), **omicida** (*murderer*), **sosia** (*lookalike*), etc., see [paragraph 2.3](#). Many of them are both masculine and feminine, although a few of them have specific feminine forms (for instance **poeta** = poet, **poetessa** = *female poet*), or are only masculine (for instance **programma** = *program*).

nessun atleta = *no (male) athlete*
nessun'atleta = *no (female) athlete*

nessun sosia = *no (male) lookalike*
nessuna sosia = *no (female) lookalike*

nessun artista = *no (male) artist*
nessun'artista = *no (female) artist*

nessun poeta = *no (male) poet*
nessuna poetessa = *no (female) poet*

nessun programma = *no program*

nessuno schema = *no scheme*

19.5

THE USE OF *ALCUNO*

The introduction of the previous paragraph mentioned an exception to the use of **non** + negative adverbs or adjectives.

In fact, the adjective forms **nessun** and its feminine **nessuna** are the only expressions among the ones discussed in paragraph 19.4 that have a positive (non-negative) form, which matches the English *any*. This form is **alcuno**, more often **alcun** for phonetic reasons (same as **nessun** - **nessuno**), and its feminine **alcuna** (the latter seldom undergoes an elision, thus turning into **alcun'**).

The phonetic rules by which the aforesaid changes occur are the same ones concerning **nessuno** and **nessuna** (see again the previous [paragraph 19.4](#)).

The use of **alcun** and **alcuna** after **non** avoids a double negative sentence:

(io) **non ho alcun compito** = *I do not have any duty*

(egli / ella) **non possiede alcuna casa** = *he / she does not own any house*

il soldato **non usò alcun'arma** = *the soldier did not use any weapon*

quel negozio **non vi farà alcuno sconto** = *that shop will not give you any discount*

(voi) **non avevate commesso alcun reato** = *you had not committed any offence*

questa scuola **non insegna alcuna lingua straniera** = *this school does not teach any foreign language*

The use of **nessun** or **nessuna** after **non** is still possible, yet rather colloquial. When **alcun** / **alcuna** can be used, it is preferable to avoid a double negative sentence.

(io) **non ho alcun** (colloquially **nessun**) **compito**

(egli / ella) **non possiede alcuna** (colloquially **nessuna**) **casa**

il soldato **non usò alcun'arma** (**nessun'arma**)

quel negozio **non vi farà alcuno** (**nessuno**) **sconto**

(voi) **non avevate commesso alcun** (**nessun**) **reato**

questa scuola **non insegna alcuna** (**nessuna**) **lingua straniera**

Instead, when it is used as a pronoun (i.e. not followed by a noun), **alcuno** does not replace **nessuno**, therefore the sentence remains twice negative.

(essi) **non vedono alcuna persona** = *they don't see any person*

(essi) **non vedono nessuna persona** (colloquial) = (same, literally: "*they don't see no person*")

(essi) **non vedono nessuno** = *they don't see anybody*

(egli / ella) **non conta su alcun amico** = *he / she does not rely on any friend*

(egli / ella) **non conta su nessun amico** (colloquial) = (same as above)

(egli / ella) **non conta su nessuno** = *he / she does not rely on anybody*

questa penna non appartiene ad alcuno studente = *this pen does not belong to any student*

questa penna non appartiene a nessuno studente (colloquial) = (same as above)

questa penna non appartiene a nessuno = *this pen does not belong to anybody*

The form **non vedono alcuno, non conta su alcuno**, etc. did actually exist in the past, but now it may be found only in old texts, dating back to the 19th century (or older), therefore it can be considered obsolete.

Unlike **nessuno**, which has a feminine (**nessuna**) but no plural form, **alcuno** has the full set of regular inflections for feminine and plural: **alcuna, alcuni, alcune**.

They may be used either with positive or with negative sentences. The plural forms (**alcuni, alcune**), though, no longer mean *any* but *some*. Compare the following examples:

(tu) **non venderai alcun libro** = *you will not sell any book*

(tu) **non venderai nessun libro** (colloquial) = (same as above)

(tu) **venderai alcuni libri** = *you will sell some books*

(tu) **non venderai alcuni libri** = *you will not sell some books*

il poliziotto non sparò alcun colpo = *the policeman did not fire any shot*

il poliziotto non sparò nessun colpo (colloquial) = (same as above)

il poliziotto sparò alcuni colpi = *the policeman fired some shots*

il poliziotto non sparò alcuni colpi = *the policeman did not fire some shots*

(io) **non ho visto alcun gatto in giardino** = *I did not see any cat in the garden*

(io) **non ho visto nessun gatto in giardino** (colloquial) = (same as above)

(io) **ho visto alcuni gatti in giardino** = *I saw some cats in the garden*

(io) **non ho visto alcuni gatti in giardino** = *I did not see some cats in the garden*

The use of **alcuni / alcune** also introduces the topic of the following paragraph 19.6.

20.1

PARTITIVE

Partitive is the form used for referring to indefinite quantities (of physical objects, time periods, animals, people, etc.)

In English, the only two adjectives/pronouns used for partitive are *some* and *any*:

USED AS ADJECTIVES

*let's have **some** coffee*
*do you have **any** ice-cream?*

USED AS PRONOUNS

*I already had **some***
*no, I haven't **any***

Generally speaking, we may say that *some* is positive, while *any* conveys a negative meaning, as it is used after *not* (although *any* itself is not really negative).

Despite in English their use as adjectives (i.e. followed by a noun) and their use as pronouns (i.e. used alone) are rather similar, the two will be discussed separately.

PARTITIVE ADJECTIVES

In Italian, partitive works almost as in English, with only a few differences.

Instead of an adjective, the preposition **di** in its compound forms (**del, dello, della, dei, degli, delle**) translates the English *some*.

ho mangiato del riso e della pasta = *I ate some rice and some pasta*

quella squadra ha degli ottimi giocatori = *that team has some excellent players*

al museo ho visto dei capolavori = *at the museum I saw some masterworks*

raccoglieranno dei fiori e delle foglie = *they will gather some flowers and some leaves*

c'era del fango sul pavimento = *there was some mud on the floor*

Always remember that compound prepositions make a phonetic match with the next following word, which may not be the noun they are referred to. For instance:

ho mangiato del riso = *I ate some rice*

ho mangiato dell'ottimo riso = *I ate some excellent rice*

quella squadra ha degli ottimi giocatori = *that team has some excellent players*

quella squadra ha dei giocatori ottimi = (same as above)

If you are not confident with all the compound prepositions of **di**, it would be better to check them again in [paragraph 5.2](#) before going any further.

Another difference is that while in English either *some* or *any* may be used for questions (e.g. *have you some sugar?* or *have you any sugar?*), in Italian the only form is the positive one, which uses **del, della,** etc., even when the question is turned into negative:

vorresti del cioccolato? = *would you like some chocolate?*

non vorresti del cioccolato? = *wouldn't you like some chocolate?*

c'è dell'acqua? = *is there some (any) water?*

non c'è dell'acqua? = *isn't there some (any) water?*

hai degli amici? = *do you have some friends?*

non hai degli amici? = *haven't you any friends?*

In a more colloquial form, the partitive adjectives **del, dello, della,** etc. are replaced by **un po' di...** (short for **un poco di...**, *a little, a little bit of..., a speck of..., some, a few*), or **qualche** (*a few, some*):

vorresti del cioccolato? = **vorresti un po' di cioccolato?**

non vorresti del cioccolato? = **non vorresti un po' di cioccolato?**

c'è dell'acqua? = **c'è un po' d'acqua?**

non c'è dell'acqua? = **non c'è un po' d'acqua?**

hai degli amici? = **hai qualche amico?**

non hai degli amici? = **non hai qualche amico?**

Remember that **un po' di...** is usually followed by a plural, unless the noun it refers to does not have a plural, e.g. *air, water, intelligence, history,* etc.), while **qualche** is always followed by a singular noun.

However, since the meaning of **qualche** is plural, as well, it may not be used with nouns that have only a singular form.

The following examples should make this concept clear enough:

un po' di giornali = **qualche giornale** = *a few newspapers*

un po' di monete = **qualche moneta** = *a few coins*

un po' di fiammiferi = **qualche fiammifero** = *a few matches*

un po' di vestiti = **qualche vestito** = *a few clothes*

un po' di mele = **qualche mela** = *a few apples*

un po' di problemi = **qualche problema** = *a few problems*

...BUT

un po' d'aria (**qualche** not allowed) = *some air*

un po' di riposo (**qualche** not allowed) = *some rest*

un po' di coraggio (**qualche** not allowed) = *some courage*

un po' di pioggia (**qualche** not allowed) = *some rain*

un po' di sabbia (**qualche** not allowed) = *some sand*

un po' di luce (**qualche** not allowed, see note [*]) = *some light*

[*] - Actually, also **un po' di luci** and **qualche luce** exist, but they can only be used referring to lights as physical objects, i.e. street-lights, car-lights, lanterns, etc., not to light itself.

Instead, in negative sentences the adjective **alcun** (see the previous [paragraph 19.5](#)) or the more colloquial **nessun** may be used with a meaning of "nobody", "none" (i.e. a quantity equals to zero).

non è uscita alcuna persona = *no person came out*

non è uscita nessuna persona = (same, but more colloquial, forming a double negative sentence)

qui non vediamo alcun (nessun) negozio = *we don't see any shop here*

non c'era alcuna (nessuna) via d'uscita = *there was no way out*

non ha firmato alcun (nessun) documento = *he/she did not sign any document*

In a similar way, questions whose reply is likely to be "no", "nobody", "none", etc. may be turned into this same form.

non hai alcun parente? = *don't you have any relative?* (the reply is likely "no")

non hai nessun parente? = (same, but more colloquial, double negative)

non ha trovato alcuna (nessuna) soluzione? = *hasn't he/she found any solution?*

non mangiamo alcun (nessun) dolce? = *are we not eating any dessert?*

alla festa non è venuto alcun (nessun) ospite? = *didn't any guest come to the party?*

Note that with **alcun** or **nessun**, the object's quantity "zero" or "none" is always treated as a singular noun (either masculine or feminine, according to the object's gender).

A different way of turning this kind of sentence is to drop **alcun** (or **nessun**), and to use the noun in its plural form. In a few cases this kind of sentence may be literally translated into English, but more often it would sound strange.

qui non vedo alcun negozio = *I don't (can't) see any shop here*

qui non vedo negozi = (same, literally: *I don't see shops here*)

non c'era alcuna via d'uscita = *there was no way out*

non c'erano vie d'uscita = (same, literally: *there were no ways out*)

non hai alcun parente? = *don't you have any relative?*

non hai parenti? = *don't you have relatives?*

non ha trovato alcuna soluzione? = *hasn't he/she found any solution?*

non ha trovato soluzioni? = (same, literally: *hasn't he/she found solutions?*)

alla festa non venne alcun ospite? = *didn't any guest come to the party?*

alla festa non vennero ospiti? = (same, literally: *didn't guests come to the party?*)

When asking a question (i.e. in interrogative sentences), a good Italian speaker would use **del, dello, della**, etc. when expecting a positive reply. The partitive adjectives may be simply dropped without causing a substantial change of meaning, although in this case the expected reply would probably be negative.

non ha trovato delle soluzioni? = *hasn't he/she found some solutions?* (expectedly, yes)

non ha trovato soluzioni? = *hasn't he/she found any solution?* (expectedly, no)

alla festa non vennero degli ospiti? = *didn't some guests come to the party?* (expectedly, yes)

alla festa non vennero ospiti? = *didn't any guest come to the party?* (expectedly, no)

non hai della birra in casa? = *don't you have some beer at home?* (expectedly, yes)

non hai birra in casa? = *don't you have any beer at home?* (expectedly, no)

non hai dei vestiti? = *don't you have some clothes?* (expectedly, yes)

non hai vestiti? = *don't you have any clothes?* (expectedly, no)

THE PRONOUN *NE*

When either *some* or *any* act as pronouns, i.e. they refer to a noun which is not mentioned in the sentence (such as *I would like some*) the latter is replaced by the pronoun particle **ne** (*of this, of that, of what has been mentioned*). This particle works exactly as other similar short pronouns, i.e. **mi, me, ti, te, lo, glie, la, le, si**, etc.: it can be used either as a direct object, or in dative case, or in reflexive forms (see again the three paragraphs of [chapter 8](#)).

Briefly summarizing again the use of such particles, they bind to the verb as suffixes in three tenses: infinitive, imperative and gerund; in any other tense they come before the verb, as an individual word. For instance, adding **ne** to the verb **mangiare**, *to eat*, we obtain the following inflections (the red colour shows the use of **ne** as a suffix):

(infinitive) **mangiarne**

(present indicative) **ne mangio, ne mangi, ne mangia**, etc.

(imperfect indicative) **ne mangiavo, ne mangiavi, ne mangiava**, etc.

(simple past) **ne mangiai, ne mangiasti, ne mangiò**, etc.

(future indicative) **ne mangerò, ne mangerai, ne mangerà**, etc.

(present perfect) **ne ho mangiato, ne hai mangiato, ne ha mangiato**, etc.

(past perfect) **ne avevo mangiato, ne avevi mangiato, ne aveva mangiato**, etc.

(remote pluperfect) **ne ebbi mangiato, ne avesti mangiato, ne ebbe mangiato**, etc.

(future perfect) **ne avrò mangiato, ne avrai mangiato, ne avrà mangiato**, etc.

(present subjunctive) **(che) ne mangi** (1st, 2nd, 3rd singular), **(che) ne mangiamo**, etc.

(past subjunctive) **(che) ne mangiassi** (1st, 2nd singular), **(che) ne mangiasse**, etc.

(perfect subjunctive) **(che) ne abbia mangiato** (1st, 2nd, 3rd singular), **(che) ne abbiamo mangiato**, etc.

(pluperfect subjunctive) **(che) ne avessi mangiato** (1st, 2nd singular), **(che) ne avesse mangiato**, etc.

(present conditional) **ne mangerei, ne mangeresti, ne mangerebbe**, etc.

(past conditional) **ne avrei mangiato, ne avresti mangiato, ne avrebbe mangiato**, etc.

(imperative) **mangiane, mangiatene**

(gerund) **mangiandone**

Ne always refers to what is the main theme of the context, which is understood having already been mentioned in a previous sentence, or is pointed at by the speaker, etc.:

questo è un vino speciale; ne vuoi? = *this is a special wine; would you like some (of it)?*

no, grazie, ne ho già bevuto = *no, thanks, I already drank some (of it)*

c'è del riso: se vuoi, prendine. = *there is some rice: if you wish, have some (of it)*

grazie, ne prenderò più tardi = *thanks, I will have some (of it) later on*

(showing a bottle to somebody) **ne vuoi?** = *do you want some?*

hai della limonata? - no, non ne ho = *do you have some lemonade? - no, I haven't any*

io ne ho, ma non è fredda = *I have some, but it's not cold*

Evidently, **ne** does not translate literally *some* and *any*, but *...of it, ...of them*. In fact, a closer translation of *some* and *any* would be **un po'** (i.e. *a little, a little bit of something*), which has been previously dealt with. However, **un po'** cannot be used as a pronoun, while **ne** can; therefore, the partitive pronoun is **ne**, not **un po'**.

Compare these examples:

vorresti della pizza? = *would you like some pizza?*

vorresti un po' di pizza? (more colloquial) = *would you like some pizza / a little pizza?*

grazie, ne ho già preso = *thanks, I already had some* (literally: *I already had of it*)

grazie ne ho già preso un po' = *thanks, I already had some of it / a little*

Had the sentence been **grazie, ho già preso un po'** (literally: *thanks, I already had a little*, without **ne**) it would sound incomplete: although "pizza" is clearly mentioned in the offer, the reply would likely cause the other person to ask *of what did you already have a little?*

Extra care should be taken not to mistake the pronoun particle **ne** with **né**, which carries an acute accent over the vowel (sometimes it is also wrongly spelt **ne'**, with an apostrophe): **né** means *neither, nor*, and has nothing to do with **ne**.

20.2

MORE WAYS OF USING THE PRONOUN NE

Besides being used in the specific case of the English pronouns *some* and *any*, as described in the previous paragraph, **ne** may turn useful in a few more cases, but its shades of meaning are never too different from the one we met so far.

In first place, **ne** may be used for translating its actual English equivalents: *...of it, ...of them*.

c'erano molti giornali; ne presi uno = *there were many newspapers; I took one of them*

(in a shop, pointing at some goods) **ne vorrei cinque** = *I'd like five of them*

ho comprato un melone, ne vorresti una metà? = *I bought a melon, would you like a half of it?*

non trovo i miei gatti; non ne hai visto nessuno? = *I can't find my cats; haven't you seen any of them?*

sono nomi quasi sconosciuti, ma ne ricordo qualcuno = *they are almost obscure names, but I remember a few of them*

Ne is used also in many cases in which the English form drops *of it, of them*:

questa carne è ottima, ma ne vorrei un po' meno = *this meat is excellent, but I would like a little less [of it]*

prendine la parte centrale, è più morbida = *have the central part [of it], it's softer*

no grazie, ne ho mangiata abbastanza = *no, thanks, I ate enough [of it]*

quanti libri! Ti dispiace se ne prendo qualcuno? = *how many books! Do you mind if I take a few [of them]?*

questo è un magnifico cane, ma in passato ne ho già avuti altri = *this is a wonderful dog, but in the past I already had others [of them]*

grazie alla nuova promozione, pago un articolo e ne prendo due = *thanks to the new promotion, I pay for one item and I take two [of them]*

Note that in Italian **ne** cannot be omitted as in English.

In some cases **ne** translates the possessive pronouns *his, her, its, their*.

This happens when *his, her, its* and *their* refer either to the subject or to the object of the previous sentence.

Does this sound complicated? Focus this example:

questo attore è diventato famoso, ne leggo spesso il nome = *this actor has become famous, I often read his name*

The subject of the first sentence is *the actor*; in the second sentence, *his* refers to the same person, therefore **ne** may be used with a meaning of *his*.

Obviously, a literal translation of the English form is also possible:

questo attore è diventato famoso, leggo spesso il suo nome = *this actor has become famous, I often read his name*

But the first of the two forms is used more often.

Here are a few more examples:

c'è una palestra qui vicino, ne conosco l'indirizzo = *there is a gym nearby, I know its address*

Marco è arrivato, ne ho riconosciuto la voce = *Mark has arrived, I recognized his voice*

quello è un nuovo studente, ne ho conosciuto i genitori = *that one is a new student, I met his parents*

il gatto si nascondeva sotto il letto, ma ne vedevo la coda = *the cat was hiding under the bed, but I could see her tail*

visitai quel paese anni fa; ne ricordo il municipio = *I visited that village years ago; I remember its town hall*

In the next paragraph we shall examine a verb, **andarsene** (*to go away*), which contains at the same time the reflexive pronoun **si** and **ne**.

20.3

THE VERB *ANDARSENE*

In [paragraph 8.2](#) and [paragraph 8.3](#) we learned how to bind two different pronoun particles to the same verb. This may occur also with **ne**, which is one of them.

Should a verb take **ne** along with another pronoun particle, **ne** always comes in second position:

comprartene = *to buy you (-te-) some (-ne)* (of what has been previously mentioned)

rubarcene = *to steal from us (-ce-) some (-ne)* (of what has been previously mentioned)

portamene quattro = *bring me (-me-) four of them (-ne)*

sarà difficile dimenticarsene = *it will be difficult to forget (-se-, reflexive) about it (-ne)*

mangiatevene un paio = *eat (-se-, yourselves, emphatic reflexive) a couple of them (-ne)*

This paragraph focuses one of these verbs, **andarsene** (*to go away*), which contains the pronoun particles **si** and **ne**. In this case, both of them are merely emphatic: **si** does not have a true reflexive meaning (i.e. doing an action towards oneself), nor **ne** means *...of it, ...of them*. Actually, another verb, **andare via** (literally, *to go away*), may be used as a synonym; but between the two, **andarsene** is the one more often chosen, especially in the spoken language. Since it may be a particularly tricky verb to inflect, due to the two pronouns, this paragraph will explore its use in every possible tense, and show every phonetic change.

The plain verb, **andare** (*to go*), is already an irregular one (see [paragraph 18.4](#)); therefore it is strongly advisable for the student to practice and memorize all the inflections before going any further.

According to the phonetic rule mentioned in [paragraph 8.2](#) and [paragraph 8.3](#), when **si** is followed by any other particle, it turns into **...se-**, whence **andarsene** (not "**andarsine**").

Although this **si** is only emphatic, it normally changes into **mi**, **ti**, etc., according to the person whom the verb's inflection refers to (1st, 2nd, etc.), as in any reflexive verb, see again [paragraph 8.3](#). Furthermore, since the first pronoun is followed by **ne**, the aforesaid **mi**, **ti**, etc. phonetically turn into **me-**, **te-**, etc., respectively.

The pronoun **ne**, instead, remains constant, not being affected by the person.

As a result, the combination of the two pronoun particles appears different according to the person they refer to:

...mene (1st singular)
...tene (2nd singular)
...sene (3rd singular and plural, and impersonal tenses)
...cene (1st plural)
...vene (2nd plural)

Due to the presence of the first of the two pronoun particles, also tenses which are normally fully impersonal, may be addressed to a specific person:

andarsene = *to go away*, infinitive, fully impersonal
andarmene = *to go away*, infinitive, yet referred only to *ME* (1st singular)
andartene = *to go away*, infinitive, yet referred only to *YOU* (2nd singular)
andarcene = *to go away*, infinitive, yet referred only to *US* (1st plural)
andarvene = *to go away*, infinitive, yet referred only to *YOU* (2nd plural)
For the 3rd singular and plural person, the same impersonal **andarsene** is used.

We may think of these as semi-impersonal infinitives, since they reject any personal pronoun (*I, you, he, she, etc.*) as any other infinitive does, yet unlike a plain infinitive they do refer to a specific person.

Focus again the same infinitives, in a given context:

andarsene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (impersonal)

andarmene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (for me)

andartene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (for you)

andarsene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (for him / her)

andarcene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (for us)

andarvene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (for you [plur.])

andarsene da casa è stato difficile = *to go away from home has been difficult* (for them)

The use of these particles as suffixes, i.e. bound at the end of the verb, only occurs with the infinitive, imperative and gerund tenses (the previous paragraph too mentions this), while with any other tense they come as individual words before the verb:

io me ne vado = *I go away (I am going away)*

tu te ne vai = *you go away (you are going away)*

egli / ella se ne andò = *he/she went away*

noi ce ne andremo = *we'll go away*

voi ve ne andrete = *you'll go away [plur.]*

Since **andare** is an intransitive verb, in forming compound tenses the auxiliary verb used is **essere**; therefore, care should be taken in using the appropriate past participle, which becomes number- and gender-sensitive:

me ne sono andato = *I went away* [masculine] (literally: *I have gone away*)

me ne sono andata = (same as above) [feminine]

te ne sei andato = *you went away* [masculine]

te ne sei andata = (same as above) [feminine]

te ne eri andato = *you had gone away* see note [*] below

te ne eri andata = *you [fem.] had gone away* see note [*] below

domani ce ne saremo andati = *tomorrow we'll be gone*

domani ce ne saremo andate = *tomorrow we'll [fem.] be gone*

domani ve ne sarete andati = *tomorrow you'll [plur.] be gone*

domani ve ne sarete andate = *tomorrow you'll [fem. plur] be gone*

[*] - A simple phonetic change takes place when pronoun **ne** is followed by inflections of the verb **essere** that begin with **e**: the pronoun drops its own vowel, so the cluster **ne e...** turns into **n'e...**

se ne è andato = **se n'è andato** = *he went away*

te ne eri andata = **te n'eri andata** = *you [fem.] had gone away*

se ne erano andati = **se n'erano andati** = *they had gone away*

This change is not compulsory, so that leaving **ne** and **e...** separate is not really a mistake; but since it is customary to do so, both in the written and in the spoken language, the student should become fully confident with it.

Here is a synopsis of the inflections of all the tenses:

andarsene (infinitive)

me ne vado; te ne vai; se ne va; etc. (present indicative)

me ne andavo; te ne andavi; se ne andava; etc. (imperfect indicative)

me ne andai; te ne andasti; se ne andò; etc. (simple past)

me ne andrò; te ne andrai; se ne andrà; etc. (future)

me ne sono andato/a; te ne sei andato/a; se n'è andato/a; etc. (present perfect)

me ne ero andato/a; te ne eri andato/a; se n'era andato/a; etc. (past perfect)

me ne fui andato/a; te ne fosti andato/a; se ne fu andato/a; etc. (remote pluperfect)

me ne sarò andato/a; te ne sarai andato/a; se ne sarà andato/a; etc. (future perfect)

me ne vada; te ne vada; se ne vada; etc. (present subjunctive)

me ne andassi; te ne andassi; se ne andasse; etc. (past subjunctive)

me ne sia andato/a; te ne sia andato/a; se ne sia andato/a; etc. (perfect subjunctive)

me ne fossi andato/a; te ne fossi andato/a; se ne fosse andato/a; etc. (pluperfect subjunctive)

me ne andrei; te ne andresti; se ne andrebbe; etc. (present conditional)

me ne sarei andato/a; te ne saresti andato/a; se ne sarebbe andato/a; etc. (past conditional)

vattene (the **t** is doubled) ; **andatevene** (imperative)

andandomene (1st sing. p.); **andandotene** (2nd sing. p.); **andandosene** (3rd sing., 3rd pl. and impersonal); etc. (gerund)

Although this verb may seem complicated, it is very commonly used, and generally preferred to its non-emphatic equivalent, **andare via**.

Be careful not to mistake the emphatic **ne** appended to this verb with the **ne** described in the previous paragraph, meaning *of it, about it*, i.e. either referred to the subject or to the object of the previous sentence, or in any case to the main topic of the speech.

Appendix 1

ROMAN NUMERALS

Roman numerals are based on capital (or uppercase) letters of the western alphabet, each of which has a specific value:

I = 1 V = 5 X = 10 L = 50 C = 100 D = 500 M = 1000

All numbers can be spelled by using a combination of these letters.

This system, though, did not have a letter for **0**: the same concept of this digit and its use in mathematics was unknown to the western world, until Arabs introduced it with their own system, in mediaeval times.

In roman numbers, letters come together according to these basic rules:

- small values to the right of a greater number are added to the latter:
XV = 15 (10+5) ; **LI = 51** (50+1) ; **ML = 1050** (1000+50) ; etc.
- small values to the left of a greater number are subtracted from the latter, thus acting as negative numbers in algebraic calculations:
IX = 9 (-1+10) ; **XL = 40** (-10+50); **CM = 900** (-100+1000) ; etc.
- in "classic" notation, no more than three identical values can follow a greater one:
I = 1 ; II = 2 ; III = 3 ...but IV = 4
VI = 6 ; VII = 7 ; VIII = 8 ...but IX = 9
- numbers should be obtained by adding small ones as much as possible to a given number before subtracting them to a greater one:
13 is spelled **XIII** (i.e. 10 + 3), but to obtain **14** no further addition can be made to 10, so 1 is subtracted from 15 (spelling it as 10-1+5): **XIV**.

Therefore, as a general rule, numbers ending with 0 and 5 (5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, etc.) can be used as main quantities, to which a maximum of three digits may be added, or one subtracted, in order to obtain all the remaining ones.

- the mediaeval style notation, instead, allows four values to the right of a greater one:
I = 1 ; II = 2 ; III = 3 ; IIII = 4
VI = 6 ; VII = 7 ; VIII = 8 ; VIII = 9
XX = 20 ; XXX = 30 ; XXXX = 40

Here is a table of numbers from 1 to 100 (in "classic" form):

<i>1 - 10</i>	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
<i>11 - 20</i>	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
<i>21 - 30</i>	XXI	XXII	XXIII	XXIV	XXV	XXVI	XXVII	XXVIII	XXIX	XXX
<i>31 - 40</i>	XXXI	XXXII	XXXIII	XXXIV	XXXV	XXXVI	XXXVII	XXXVIII	XXXIX	XL
<i>41 - 50</i>	XLI	XLII	XLIII	XLIV	XLV	XLVI	XLVII	XLVIII	XLIX	L
<i>51 - 60</i>	LI	LII	LIII	LIV	LV	LVI	LVII	LVIII	LIX	LX
<i>61 - 70</i>	LXI	LXII	LXIII	LXIV	LXV	LXVI	LXVII	LXVIII	LXIX	LXX
<i>71 - 80</i>	LXXI	LXXII	LXXIII	LXXIV	LXXV	LXXVI	LXXVII	LXXVIII	LXXIX	LXXX
<i>81 - 90</i>	LXXXI	LXXXII	LXXXIII	LXXXIV	LXXXV	LXXXVI	LXXXVII	LXXXVIII	LXXXIX	XC
<i>91 - 100</i>	XCI	XCII	XCIII	XCIV	XCV	XCVI	XCVII	XCVIII	XCIX	C

When working with large numbers, it is easier to split them into thousands, hundreds, etc. before converting them:

$$1963 = 1000 + 900 + 60 + 3$$

$$1000 = \mathbf{M}; 900 = \mathbf{CM}; 60 = \mathbf{LX}; 3 = \mathbf{III} \dots \dots \text{final sequence: } \mathbf{MCMLXIII}$$

$$849 = 800 + 40 + 9$$

$$800 = \mathbf{DCCC}; 40 = \mathbf{XL}; 9 = \mathbf{IX} \dots \dots \text{final sequence: } \mathbf{DCCCXLIX}$$

To turn roman numerals into western ones, it is sufficient to write down (or memorize) the value of each single letter, considering as negative numbers all the ones which are followed by a greater value:

MCDLXXIX

M = 1000 ; **C** = -100 because followed by **D** = 500 (greater than **C**); **L** = 50; **X** = 10 ; **X** = 10; **I** = -1 because followed by **X** = 10: the final sum is 1000+(-100+500)+50+10+10+(-1+10) = **1479**

CMXCIV

C = -100 because followed by **M** = 1000 ; **X** = -10 because followed by **C** = 100 ; **I** = -1 because followed by **V** = 5: $(-100+1000)+(-10+100)+(-1+5) = 994$

Some numbers may cause a little confusion: number **999**, for example, can be spelled in two ways: **IM** which means -1+1000, and **DCCCIC** which means 500+100+100+100-1+100.

This happens because all numbers such as 999, 9999, 99999, etc. may be theoretically spelled both as the following number minus one, or as a longer sum of previous values. The easiest form (higher number minus one) is generally considered the more correct version.

To deal with very large numbers, romans used strokes:

- one stroke above the numeral multiplies its value by 1,000

$$\overline{\mathbf{V}} = 5,000 \quad \overline{\mathbf{MM}} = 2,000,000$$

- three strokes all around the numeral multiply its value by 100,000

$$\overline{\overline{\overline{\mathbf{X}}}} = 1,000,000 \quad \overline{\overline{\overline{\mathbf{MM}}}} = 200,000,000$$

Also by effect of this spelling, in some cases two versions are possible:

$$\overline{\overline{\overline{\mathbf{III}}}} = 3,000 \quad \text{but also } \mathbf{MMM} = 3,000$$

But such large numbers were rarely used. Romans used their numeral system especially for daily life purposes (i.e. for stating prices of goods at the market, or distances on mile-stones, or to indicate seat numbers in circuses and theaters, etc.).

Obviously, roman numerals were not practical at all for higher calculations.

The simple operations which they were used for, instead, could be easily understood also by illiterate people, who counted by using their fingers:

$$\mathbf{I} = \text{one finger} = 1 \quad \mathbf{V} = \text{one hand} = 5 \quad \mathbf{X} = \text{two hands (double V)} = 10$$