

ITALIAN GRAMMAR UNLOCKED – VOL. 1

Italian Grammar Unlocked

Vol. 1 – Beginner Edition

Level A1–A2

Clear explanations, practical examples, and progressive exercises — everything you need to build a solid foundation in Italian grammar.

Vega Publishing | 2026

Italian Grammar Unlocked: Vol. 1 — Beginner Edition

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How to Use This Book

This book is designed for absolute beginners and elementary learners of Italian (CEFR levels A1 and A2). Whether you are starting from scratch or looking to build a stronger grammatical foundation, this book will guide you step by step.

Book Structure

Each of the 20 chapters follows the same clear, proven structure:

- **Grammar Explanation** – Plain-English description of the rule, written the way a good teacher would explain it
- **Summary Tables** – Visual overviews of verb forms, article agreements, and patterns
- **Examples** – Italian sentences with English translations, presented in context
- **Consiglio (Tip) boxes** – Shortcuts and memory tricks to help rules stick
- **Attenzione! (Warning) boxes** – Common traps that catch English speakers
- **Mini-Dialogue** – A short real-world conversation using the chapter's grammar
- **Mistake Clinic** – The most common errors learners make, and how to fix them
- **Exercises** – Controlled practice with two to three exercise types per chapter

How to Study

- Work through the chapters **in order** – each chapter builds on the previous one
- After every five chapters, a **Spaced Review** section helps consolidate what you have learned
- Check your answers in the **Answer Key** at the back immediately after each exercise
- Use the **100 Essential Phrases** section to see real grammar in action
- The **Conjugation Reference** gives you all key verb tables in one place for quick review

Consiglio -- Study a little every day. Even 20 minutes of focused grammar practice will produce results faster than occasional long sessions. Consistency is everything in language learning.

The Italian Alphabet & Pronunciation

Sounds, stress, and spelling rules

A1

The Italian Alphabet

The standard Italian alphabet has **21 letters**. The letters *j, k, w, x, y* appear mainly in foreign loanwords. Italian spelling is highly phonetic — once you know the rules, you can pronounce almost any word correctly from its written form alone.

Letter	Name	Sound	Example word
A a	a	like “a” in <i>father</i>	<i>amico</i> (friend)
B b	bi	like English “b”	<i>bello</i> (beautiful)
C c	ci	“k” before a, o, u “ch” before e, i	<i>casa, cena</i>
D d	di	like English “d”	<i>dove</i> (where)
E e	e	open “eh” or closed “ay”	<i>essere</i> (to be)
F f	effe	like English “f”	<i>fare</i> (to do)
G g	gi	“g” before a, o, u “j” before e, i	<i>gatto, gente</i>
H h	acca	always silent	<i>hotel</i>
I i	i	like “ee” in <i>see</i>	<i>Italia</i>
L l	elle	like English “l”	<i>latte</i> (milk)
M m	emme	like English “m”	<i>madre</i> (mother)
N n	enne	like English “n”	<i>nome</i> (name)
O o	o	open “aw” or closed “oh”	<i>ora</i> (hour)
P p	pi	like English “p”	<i>padre</i> (father)
Q q	qu	always “kw” — always followed by u	<i>quando</i> (when)
R r	erre	trilled “r” (tip of tongue vibrates)	<i>Roma</i>
S s	esse	“s” voiceless or “z” voiced (between vowels)	<i>sole, casa</i>
T t	ti	like English “t” (less aspirated)	<i>tavolo</i> (table)
U u	u	like “oo” in <i>food</i>	<i>uva</i> (grape)
V v	vu	like English “v”	<i>vino</i> (wine)
Z z	zeta	“ts” or “dz”	<i>pizza, zero</i>

Key Consonant Combinations

Several letter combinations produce sounds very different from their individual letters. These must be memorized:

CH	hard “k”	used before e/i to keep the hard sound: <i>che</i> (that), <i>chi</i> (who), <i>chiave</i> (key)
GH	hard “g”	used before e/i to keep hard g: <i>ghiaccio</i> (ice), <i>spaghetti</i>
CI	“ch” as in chair	before a, o, u: <i>ciao</i> , <i>cioccolato</i> , <i>ciuffo</i>
GI	“j” as in jet	before a, o, u: <i>giacca</i> (jacket), <i>giorno</i> (day)
GL	“ly” sound	<i>gli</i> (the, m. pl.), <i>figlio</i> (son), <i>moglie</i> (wife)
GN	“ny” sound	<i>gnocchi</i> , <i>bagno</i> (bath), <i>ogni</i> (every)
SC	“sk” or “sh”	before a/o/u = sk: <i>scuola</i> before e/i = sh: <i>pesce</i> , <i>sci</i>
QU	always “kw”	<i>quando</i> (when), <i>quanto</i> (how much), <i>questo</i> (this)

Double Consonants

Italian doubles consonants and the distinction is meaningful. A doubled consonant is held slightly longer. The difference between single and double changes the meaning of words:

SINGLE VS. DOUBLE – DIFFERENT MEANINGS

<i>pala</i>	shovel palla = ball
<i>casa</i>	house cassa = box / cash register
<i>nono</i>	ninth nonno = grandfather
<i>sete</i>	thirst sette = seven

Stress Rules

Most Italian words are stressed on the **second-to-last syllable**:

STRESS PATTERNS

<i>par-LA-re</i>	to speak — stress on 2nd-to-last
<i>ca-SA</i>	house — stress on 2nd-to-last
<i>TA-vo-lo</i>	table — stress on 3rd-to-last (exceptions exist)
<i>si-MI-le</i>	similar — stress on 3rd-to-last
<i>città</i>	city — written accent = stress always there
<i>perché</i>	why/because — acute accent on final syllable

Consiglio -- Words with a written accent (grave ` or acute ´) are ALWAYS stressed on that vowel. For all other words, stress usually falls on the second-to-last syllable. When you learn a new word, note its stress pattern — it will soon become automatic.

Attenzione! -- English speakers often mispronounce Italian by ignoring written accents. *Città* is not “CIT-ta” — it is “cit-TA” with stress on the final syllable.

EXERCISES – CHAPTER 1

A. How is C pronounced? Write “k” or “ch”:

1. *cena* (dinner) ____
2. *casa* (house) ____
3. *cielo* (sky) ____
4. *come* (how) ____
5. *cinema* ____
6. *cane* (dog) ____

B. How is G pronounced? Write “hard g” or “j”:

1. *gatto* (cat) ____
2. *gente* (people) ____
3. *gusto* (taste) ____
4. *giorno* (day) ____
5. *lago* (lake) ____
6. *gelato* ____

C. Mark the stress – underline the stressed syllable:

1. *parlare*
2. *tavolo*
3. *città*
4. *italiano*
5. *telefono*

D. True or False?

1. The letter H is always silent in Italian. ____
2. SC before “e” makes a “sk” sound. ____
3. Double consonants are always pronounced the same as single ones. ____
4. CH makes a “ch” sound as in English “church”. ____

MISTAKE CLINIC – CHAPTER 1

X <i>Che cosa ci sono?</i>	✓ <i>Che cosa c'è?</i>	confusing <i>ci sono</i> / <i>c'è</i>
X <i>Cielo</i> = “ki-e-lo”	✓ <i>Cielo</i> = “ch eh-lo”	CI before E/I = ch sound
X <i>Gente</i> = “gen-teh”	✓ <i>Gente</i> = “jen-teh”	G before E/I = j sound
X <i>Che</i> = “ch eh”	✓ <i>Che</i> = “keh”	CH always makes a hard k sound
X <i>Spaghetti</i> stressed: “SPA-ghetti”	✓ <i>Spa-GHET-ti</i>	stress on 2nd-to-last syllable

Consiglio -- Practice aloud every day. Italian pronunciation is consistent – once you know the rules, reading Italian out loud will get easier very quickly. Record yourself and compare to native speakers online.

Nouns & Gender

Masculine, feminine, singular, plural

A1

Every Italian noun has a **grammatical gender** — either **masculine** or **feminine**. There is no neutral gender in Italian. Gender affects the article you use, how adjectives agree, and even past participle agreement. Always learn a noun together with its article.

Noun Endings and Gender Patterns

Typical ending	Gender	Singular example	Meaning
-o	Masculine	<i>il libro</i>	the book
-a	Feminine	<i>la casa</i>	the house
-e	Either	<i>il padre / la madre</i>	father / mother
-à / -ù	Usually Feminine	<i>la città</i>	the city
-ione	Feminine	<i>la stazione</i>	the station
-ore	Masculine	<i>il professore</i>	the professor

How to Form Plurals

Singular ending	Plural ending	Example	Plural
-o (m.)	-i	<i>libro</i>	<i>libri</i>
-a (f.)	-e	<i>casa</i>	<i>case</i>
-e (m. or f.)	-i	<i>padre / madre</i>	<i>padri / madri</i>
-ca / -ga (f.)	-che / -ghe	<i>amica</i>	<i>amiche</i>
-co / -go (m.)	-chi / -ghi	<i>lago</i>	<i>laghi</i>
accented (-à, -ò, -ù)	unchanged	<i>città</i>	<i>città</i>

Attenzione! -- Important exceptions: *il problema* (m.), *il poeta* (m.), *la mano* (f. — despite ending in -o). Always learn gender as part of the word itself. When in doubt, use a dictionary.

Essential Nouns to Know

MASCULINE NOUNS

<i>il ragazzo</i>	the boy
<i>il libro</i>	the book
<i>il giorno</i>	the day
<i>il cane</i>	the dog
<i>il pane</i>	the bread
<i>il tempo</i>	time / weather
<i>il lavoro</i>	the work / job
<i>il numero</i>	the number
<i>il paese</i>	the country / village
<i>il negozio</i>	the shop

FEMININE NOUNS

<i>la ragazza</i>	the girl
<i>la casa</i>	the house
<i>la scuola</i>	the school
<i>la notte</i>	the night
<i>la mano</i>	the hand (irregular: f.!)
<i>la città</i>	the city
<i>la settimana</i>	the week
<i>la lingua</i>	the language
<i>la stazione</i>	the station
<i>la chiave</i>	the key

Gender with Professions

Many professions have both masculine and feminine forms:

Masculine	Feminine	Meaning
<i>il professore</i>	<i>la professoressa</i>	teacher/professor
<i>il dottore</i>	<i>la dottoressa</i>	doctor
<i>lo studente</i>	<i>la studentessa</i>	student
<i>l'attore</i>	<i>l'attrice</i>	actor / actress
<i>il cameriere</i>	<i>la cameriera</i>	waiter / waitress

Consiglio -- The golden rule: learn every Italian noun WITH its article from day one. Do not just say *libro* — say *il libro*. The article is your constant reminder of gender, and it will make adjective agreement and article use feel automatic later.

EXERCISES – CHAPTER 2

A. Write M (masculine) or F (feminine):

1. *studente* (student) ____
2. *problema* (problem) ____
3. *porta* (door) ____
4. *numero* (number) ____
5. *stazione* (station) ____
6. *mano* (hand) ____

B. Write the plural form:

1. *amico* → ____
2. *amica* → ____
3. *esame* (exam) → ____
4. *città* → ____
5. *lago* (lake) → ____
6. *banca* (bank) → ____

C. Add the missing noun from the list: (*ragazzo, settimana, pane, scuola, chiave, cane*)

1. Ho un ____ grande. (I have a big dog.)
2. Dov'è la ____? (Where is the key?)
3. Vai a ____? (Are you going to school?)
4. Compro il ____ ogni giorno. (I buy bread every day.)

MINI-DIALOGUE – TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE AND THINGS

Marco: *Chi è quella ragazza? (Who is that girl?)*

Lucia: *È Sofia, la mia amica. (She is Sofia, my friend.)*

Marco: *Ha un cane, vero? (She has a dog, right?)*

Lucia: *Sì, due cani! E una gatta. (Yes, two dogs! And a cat (f.))*

Marco: *Anche io ho un cane. Si chiama Fido. (I have a dog too. His name is Fido.)*

MISTAKE CLINIC – CHAPTER 2

✗ <i>la problema</i>	✓ <i>il problema</i>	-ema nouns = masculine
✗ <i>il mano</i>	✓ <i>la mano</i>	mano is feminine despite -o
✗ <i>gli amicos</i>	✓ <i>gli amici</i>	-co (m.) pluralizes to -chi
✗ <i>le amica</i>	✓ <i>le amiche</i>	-ca (f.) pluralizes to -che

Definite & Indefinite Articles

il, la, i, le — un, una, uno

A1

Italian articles agree with their noun in **gender** and **number**. There are more forms than in English because Italian also distinguishes masculine nouns starting with a vowel, with *z*, or with *s + consonant*. Mastering articles is essential because they appear in almost every Italian sentence.

Definite Articles — the

Gender	Used before	Singular	Plural
Masculine	most consonants	il	i
Masculine	vowel, z, s+cons., gn, ps, x, y	lo	gli
Masculine	vowel (elides)	l'	gli
Feminine	consonant	la	le
Feminine	vowel (elides)	l'	le

DEFINITE ARTICLES IN USE

<i>il libro / i libri</i>	the book / the books
<i>lo studente / gli studenti</i>	the student / the students
<i>l'amico / gli amici</i>	the friend / the friends (m.)
<i>lo zaino / gli zaini</i>	the backpack / the backpacks
<i>la casa / le case</i>	the house / the houses
<i>l'amica / le amiche</i>	the friend / the friends (f.)
<i>lo specchio / gli specchi</i>	the mirror / the mirrors
<i>lo psicologo / gli psicologi</i>	the psychologist / the psychologists

Attenzione! -- Use *lo / gli* before: **z** (zero), **s + consonant** (studente, sport, sbaglio), **gn** (gnocco), **ps** (psicologo), **x**, **y**. In ALL other cases, use *il / i*.

Indefinite Articles – a / an

Gender	Used before	Form	Example
Masculine	most consonants	un	<i>un ragazzo</i>
Masculine	vowel, z, s+cons., gn, ps, x, y	uno	<i>uno studente</i>
Feminine	consonant	una	<i>una donna</i>
Feminine	vowel (elides)	un'	<i>un'amica</i>

INDEFINITE ARTICLES IN CONTEXT

<i>un caffè</i>	a coffee
<i>uno zaino</i>	a backpack
<i>una pizza</i>	a pizza
<i>un'ora</i>	an hour
<i>un errore</i>	a mistake
<i>uno specchio</i>	a mirror
<i>un'idea</i>	an idea

When Italian Uses the Article But English Doesn't

- With **languages**: *Parlo l'italiano.* (I speak Italian.)
- With **abstract nouns**: *La libertà è importante.* (Freedom is important.)
- With **titles** (not in direct address): *Il signor Rossi è arrivato.* (Mr. Rossi has arrived.)
- With **body parts**: *Mi fa male la testa.* (My head hurts.)

When Italian Does NOT Use the Article

- Professions after *essere*: *Sono medico.* (I am a doctor.)
- After *di* in certain expressions: *Ho bisogno di aiuto.* (I need help.)

Consiglio -- A useful trick: if the noun needs *lo* in the definite form (*lo studente*), it also needs *uno* in the indefinite form. The rules for *lo/uno* are identical. Learn one, get both free!