

English Grammar for Students of Italian

***The Study Guide
For Those Learning Italian***

***Sergio Adorni
Karen Primorac***

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ENGLISH GRAMMAR FOR STUDENTS OF ITALIAN

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UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

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Preface

English Grammar for Students of Italian is a simple, practical, self-study manual written to aid high school, college and university students who are beginning the study of Italian. It is patterned after the popular *English Grammar for Students of French* by Jacqueline Morton and follows similar handbooks for students of Spanish, German and Latin. It is not meant to be comprehensive nor is it designed to replace textbooks of Italian, but rather to supplement them and make them more accessible. Students can, of course, speak and write their own native English without a conscious knowledge of grammar. Nevertheless, as they begin the study of a second language, they inevitably lose their way in a maze of grammatical terms and structures, which many of them may be encountering for the first time.

The main purpose of this manual is to help students to overcome this lack of formal knowledge by providing them with the basic elements of grammar which they can then apply to their study of Italian. In plain and simple language, *English Grammar for Students of Italian* defines terms such as “indirect object,” “past participle,” “relative pronoun” and then compares and contrasts their forms and functions in English and Italian, pointing out the major similarities and differences between the two languages. In order to simplify the presentation, certain key English and Italian structures are analyzed point-by-point and clarified by easy-to-read charts, while those which are complex and which have no English equivalent have been only briefly mentioned. For example, the treatment of the subjunctive and complex details of pronouns are left almost entirely to the Italian textbook.

This handbook covers most of the material presented in textbooks of beginning Italian and uses their conventional terminology. It contains 48 chapters, each of which may be studied as a separate entity but which can also be easily related to the others by extensive cross-references and by a carefully itemized index.

Teachers may wish to use in class the many examples and contrastive analyses presented in the manual. They may also assign specific sections as supplements to particular homework assignments, since the manual can be easily keyed to any elementary textbook. The instructor likewise will discover that use of the manual not only saves time in lesson preparation, but also frees valuable class time which can then be devoted to language practice.

We would like to thank Ana Besne for her competent preparation of the typescript and Donald Waddell for his helpful comments on the manuscript. We would also like to acknowledge our indebtedness to Jacqueline Morton for her valuable suggestions and painstaking efforts in reorganizing parts of the book.

S.A.
K.P.

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Introduction

In order to learn a foreign language, in this case Italian, you must look at every word in three ways: you must be aware of each word's meaning, class, and use.

1. **MEANING** of the word—You learn new vocabulary in Italian by memorizing each new word and its English equivalent.

The English word *book* has the same meaning as Italian **libro**.

Sometimes two words are the same or very similar in both English and Italian. These are called **COGNATES**. They are especially easy to learn.

<u>English</u>	<u>Italian</u>
intelligent	intelligente
student	studente
to continue	continuare
dentist	dentista

Sometimes knowing one Italian word will help you learn another.

Knowing that **bambino** is *boy* should help you learn that **bambina** is *girl*; or knowing that **latte** means *milk* should help you to learn that **lattaio** means *milkman*.

But generally there is little similarity between words, and knowing one Italian word will not help you to learn another. Therefore, you must learn each vocabulary item separately.

Knowing that **uomo** means *man* will not help you learn that **donna** means *woman*.

Moreover, sometimes words in combination will take on a special meaning.

In Italian **fare** means *to make*; **coda** means *tail*. However **fare la coda** means *to line up*.

Such an expression, which has a meaning as a whole different from the combined meaning of the individual words in it, is called an **IDIOM**. For instance, when we say in English "They threw the book at him" we are not really talking about throwing books but rather we are expressing the idea that someone received a severe penalty. Be careful not to turn English idioms word for word into Italian, for example "to have a good time" is not **avere un buon tempo*, but **divertirsi**. You will need to pay special attention to idioms in order to recognize them and use them correctly.

2. **CLASS of the word**—English and Italian words are classified according to **PART OF SPEECH**. We shall consider eight different parts of speech:

noun	verb
pronoun	adverb
adjective	preposition
article	conjunction

Each part of speech has its own rules for use. You must learn to identify the part of speech to which a word belongs in order to choose the correct Italian equivalent and use it correctly in a sentence.

In your dictionary, the part of speech is always given in italics right after the word entry. If you look up *student*, you will find *student, n.* (noun); if you look up *beautiful*, you will find *beautiful, adj.* (adjective), etc. However, a word may belong to more than one part of speech.

* An asterisk means that what follows is incorrect. It is merely an illustration.

Look at the word *that* in the following sentences:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| a. <i>That</i> girl is my sister. | (adjective) |
| b. I don't believe <i>that</i> . | (pronoun) |
| c. He was <i>that</i> smart | (adverb) |
| d. He said <i>that</i> he was busy. | (conjunction) |

The same word, *that*, represents four different parts of speech. You must recognize them in order to find the Italian equivalent where, in this case, a different word corresponds to each part of speech.

3. **USE of the word**—In addition to its classification as part of speech, each word has a special **FUNCTION** or use within a sentence. A noun or pronoun, for example, can be used as a subject, direct object, indirect object, or object of a preposition. Determining the function of a word will help you choose the correct Italian form and know what rules apply.

Look at the word *him* in the following sentences:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. I don't know <i>him</i> . | (direct object) |
| b. Have you told <i>him</i> ? | (indirect object) |
| c. Are you going with <i>him</i> ? | (object of preposition) |

In English the same word *him* has three different functions, but in Italian a different form of the pronoun will correspond to each function.

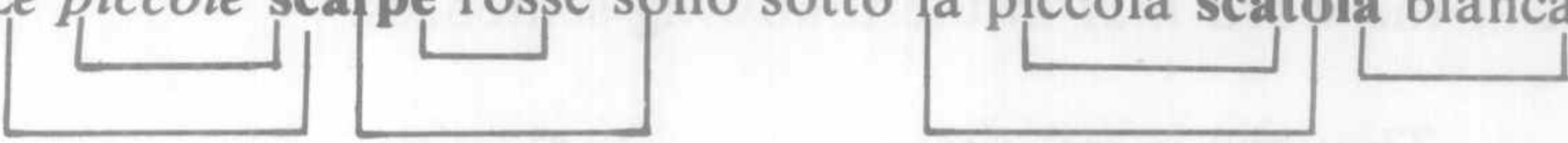
Note: As a student of Italian you must learn to recognize parts of speech and determine the use of words within a sentence. This is essential because in Italian words have a great deal of influence upon each other.

Compare the following sentence in English and Italian.

The small red shoes are under the small white box.



Le piccole scarpe rosse sono sotto la piccola scatola bianca.



In English: The only word that affects the form of another word in the sentence is *shoes*, which affects *are*. (If the word were *shoe*, *are* would be *is*.)

In Italian: The word for *shoes* (*scarpe*) affects not only the word for *are* (*sono*) but also the form of the words for *the* (*le*), *little* (*piccole*), and *red* (*rosse*).

The word for *box* (*scatola*) affects the words for *the* (*la*), *small* (*piccola*), and *white* (*bianca*).

The only word which is not affected is the word for *under*, *sotto*.

Since parts of speech and function are usually determined in the same way in English and Italian, this handbook will show you how to identify them in English. You will then learn to compare English and Italian constructions. This will give you a better understanding of the grammar explanations in your Italian textbook.

What is a Noun?

A **NOUN** is a word that names:

- a person teacher, boy, Frank, Smith, friend
- a place city, state, country, Rome, Italy
- a thing or animal book, house, cat, water, duck
- an idea or quality truth, beauty, peace, happiness, democracy

Nouns that always begin with a capital letter, such as the names of people and places (Mary Smith, Italy), are called **PROPER NOUNS**. Nouns that do not begin with a capital letter (house, bicycle, piano) are called **COMMON NOUNS**.

To help you to recognize nouns, here is a paragraph where the nouns are in italics:

Italy produces many agricultural, industrial and artistic *items* which are in *demand* throughout the *world*. The *cultivation* of the *grape* and the *olive* is of great *importance* to the Italian *economy* and many *countries* import fine Italian *wines* and olive¹ *oil*. Among the many industrial *exports* are *automobiles*, *typewriters*, sewing *machines* and electrical *appliances*. *Italy* is also famous for its *handicrafts*; among them leather¹ *goods* from *Florence*, *glassware* from *Venice*, coral¹ *jewelry* from *Naples*, and *ceramics* from *Faenza*. The *achievements* of Italian *artists* and *musicians* have been recognized for *centuries* and the *popularity* of Italian *fashion*, industrial *design* and *movies* extends far beyond the *borders* of the *country*.

¹These are examples of a noun used as an adjective, that is, to describe another noun. See p. 107.

What is Meant by Gender?

When a word can be classified as to whether it is masculine, feminine, or neuter, it is said to have a **GENDER**.

Gender plays a very small role in English; however, since it is at the very heart of the Italian language, let us see what evidence of gender we have in English.

In English: Normally gender reflects the noun's biological sex; that is male beings are masculine, female beings are feminine. Objects and abstract ideas are neuter. When we use a noun we often do not realize that it has a gender. But when we replace the noun with *he*, *she*, or *it*, we choose only one of the three without hesitation because we automatically give a gender to the noun we are replacing.

The **boy** came home; **he** was tired, and I was glad to see **him**.

A noun (*boy*) is of the **MASCULINE GENDER** if *he* or *him* is used to substitute for it.

My **aunt** came for a visit; **she** is nice and I like **her**.

A noun (*aunt*) is of the **FEMININE GENDER** if *she* or *her* is used to substitute for it.

There is a **tree** in front of the house. **It** is a maple.

A noun (*tree*) is of the **NEUTER GENDER** if *it* is substituted for it.¹

In Italian: All nouns are either masculine or feminine. Nouns indicating male beings are masculine and those indicating female beings are feminine. There are no neuter nouns. This means that

¹There are a few well-known exceptions, such as *ship*, which is referred to as *she*. It is custom, not logic, which decides. "The S/S United States sailed for Europe. She is a good ship."

all nouns referring to objects or abstract ideas are either masculine or feminine. In this case gender is somewhat arbitrary and cannot be figured out in the same way as in English. Therefore you should pay special attention to the gender of these nouns.

Examples of English neuter nouns
which have MASCULINE equivalents
in Italian

book
country
vice
Canada
Monday
sorrow
power

Examples of English neuter nouns
which have FEMININE equivalents
in Italian

library
nation
virtue
Italy
Sunday
happiness
weakness

It is essential to know the gender of nouns since it influences other words in the sentence (articles, adjectives, pronouns).

Gender can usually be determined by looking at the ending of a noun. All Italian nouns, with a few exceptions, end in a vowel.

- nouns ending in **-o** are usually masculine

il libro	<i>book</i>
il giorno	<i>day</i>
il gatto	<i>cat</i>
il maestro	<i>teacher</i>

- nouns ending in **-a** are usually feminine

la carta	<i>paper</i>
la rosa	<i>rose</i>
la casa	<i>house</i>
la maestra	<i>teacher</i>

- nouns ending in **-e** can be masculine or feminine

When you encounter one of these nouns you will have to memorize it with its gender.

Masculine Nouns

il dottore	<i>doctor</i>
il nome	<i>name</i>
il giornale	<i>newspaper</i>
il signore	<i>gentleman</i>
il professore	<i>professor</i>
il bicchiere	<i>glass</i>

Feminine Nouns

la lezione	<i>lesson</i>
la televisione	<i>television</i>
la capitale	<i>capital</i>
la sete	<i>thirst</i>
la voce	<i>voice</i>
la notte	<i>night</i>

There are a few exceptions to the above rules, for instance, **la mano** (*the hand*) is a feminine noun even though it ends in **-o**; **il problema** (*the problem*) is a masculine noun even though it ends in **-a**. Your textbook and instructor will point out the exceptions. When you are not sure, remember that the gender of a noun is always indicated in an Italian dictionary. Also, whenever a definite or indefinite article is used with a noun, the article usually indicates the gender of the noun. (See **What are Indefinite and Definite Articles?**, p. 12.)

What is Meant by Number?

NUMBER is the designation of a word as singular or plural. When a word refers to one person or thing, it is said to be **SINGULAR**; when it refers to more than one, it is called **PLURAL**.

In English: Nouns, pronouns and verbs are the parts of speech which have number, i.e., which have a singular and plural form.

- I read the *book*.

|
noun
singular

- I read the *books*.

|
noun
plural

- *I* read the book.

|
pronoun
singular

- They* read the book.

|
pronoun
plural

See **What is a Subject Pronoun?**, p. 32.

- I *am* reading the book.

|
verb
singular