

# **Modern Italian Grammar**

A practical guide

Third Edition

**Anna Proudfoot and  
Francesco Cardo**



Modern Grammars

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*A practical guide*  
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# Modern ITALIAN Grammar

*Modern Italian Grammar* is an innovative reference guide to Italian, combining traditional and function-based grammar in a single volume.

The *Grammar* is divided into two parts. Part A covers traditional grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs and adjectives. Part B is carefully organised around language functions and contexts such as:

- giving personal information
- social interactions
- register and style
- oral communication and telephone skills
- formal and informal written communication, including SMS and email.

With a strong emphasis on contemporary usage, all grammar points and functions are richly illustrated with examples. Implementing feedback from users of the second edition, this text includes clearer explanations, as well as a greater emphasis on areas of particular difficulty for learners of Italian.

This is the ideal reference grammar for learners of Italian at all levels, from beginner to advanced. No prior knowledge of grammatical terminology is needed and a glossary of grammatical terms is provided.

This third edition of the *Grammar* continues to be complemented by the *Modern Italian Grammar Workbook, Second Edition*, which features related exercises and activities.

**Anna Proudfoot** is Head of Italian at the Open University, UK. **Francesco Cardo** taught at the Liceo Scientifico E. Majorana in Pozzuoli, Naples.

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In memory of Franco Cardo,  
1951–2006

# Introduction

*Modern Italian Grammar* follows an entirely new approach to learning Italian. It looks at grammar not as the ultimate goal, but as the tool with which to construct a dialogue or a piece of writing.

*Modern Italian Grammar* is specifically designed to be accessible to the English reader not brought up in the Italian tradition of grammar and language analysis. It is unique both in its combination of formal grammar reference section and guide to usage organised along *functional* lines, and the fact that it was compiled by an English mother-tongue teacher of Italian and an Italian native speaker, working closely together.

It is the ideal reference text to use with newer language courses, for both beginners and advanced learners.

The course books and textbooks published over the last two decades are based on the principles of the *communicative* approach to language learning, which recognises that the objective of any language learner is to communicate, to get one's message across, and that there can be many different ways of doing this, rather than a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way.

The communicative approach emphasises language *functions* rather than structures. Traditional reference grammars present language by structure, making them inaccessible to learners who have no knowledge of grammatical terminology. *Modern Italian Grammar* presents language by *function*, with examples of usage and full explanations of how to express specific functions in Part B. At the same time it retains the traditional presentation of language by *structure* in Part A, which illustrates language forms and grammatical systems in a schematic way: word formation and morphology, verb conjugations, tenses, use of conjunctions and verb constructions.

The *language functions* included have been based on the communicative functions listed in Nora Galli de Paratesi's *Livello Soglia* (1981), itself based on J.A. van Ek's *The Threshold Level* (1975), the statement of key language functions supported by the Council of Europe. We have expanded them to provide a richer variety of examples more suited to our target readership. The division into functional areas also takes account of general linguistic *notions*, which can occur in more than one function; these include notions such as presence or absence, time and space, cause and effect. Notions and functions are integrated throughout Part B, while the structures illustrated in Part A are accessed through extensive cross-referencing.

In our choice of examples, we have included as many different contexts as possible. Some examples are typical of everyday dialogue or writing; some have been taken from the press or television, others from contemporary texts.

Our guides and inspiration in putting together this grammar have been some of the recognised authorities in the area of Italian grammar in the last few decades: to them go our thanks and our recognition of the great debt we owe them: Anna-Laura and Giulio Lepschy (*The Italian Language Today*, Routledge, 1991); Marcello Sensini (*Grammatica della lingua Italiana*, Mondadori, 1990); Maurizio Dardano and Pietro Trifone (*Grammatica Italiana*, 3rd edition, Zanichelli, 1995); Luca Serianni (*Grammatica italiana. Italiano comune e lingua letteraria*, 2nd edition, UTET, 1991); Giampaolo Salvi and Laura Vanelli (*Grammatica essenziale di riferimento della lingua italiana*, De Agostini/Le Monnier, 1992).

### Introduction to the third edition

This third edition of *Modern Italian Grammar* incorporates suggestions from readers and reviewers and updates texts taken from the press, particularly those in the later chapters. It builds on the work done jointly with my colleague and close friend Franco Cardo on the first two editions.

Sadly, Franco died soon after the second edition of *Modern Italian Grammar* came out. As a result, this third edition was prepared by me as sole author. I am grateful therefore to Italian friends and colleagues who agreed to look at new material and made the writing process less lonely. I would like to thank students and tutors of Italian at the Open University, on both Andante (Beginners' Italian) and Vivace (Intermediate Italian), for their useful and positive suggestions, and I would like to thank the Open University for allowing me study leave in order to finish this edition. Lastly, thanks to my family for their patience during the writing process.

Finally I wish all our readers 'Buono Studio'.

Anna Proudfoot



# How to use this book

Part A of the book (Chapters 1–7) is a reference guide to the grammatical structures or ‘building blocks’ of Italian: noun group, verbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs. Where possible, tables are used to illustrate forms and patterns.

Part B of the book (Chapters 8–42) shows how grammar structures are used to express communicative ‘functions’ such as giving personal information, asking someone to do something, describing something, etc. The chapters are divided into five broad sections: I Giving and seeking factual information; II Actions affecting ourselves and others; III Expressing emotions, feelings, attitudes and opinions; IV Putting in context; and finally V Expanding the horizons, which looks at special types of language, for example the formal register, bureaucratic language, and the language of telephone and letter.

The table of contents at the front of the book shows the content of each section and chapter, for Part A and Part B. It is not in alphabetical order but set out according to the layout of the book.

At the end of the book, there is a full index: grammar structures, communicative functions and keywords are all listed in alphabetical order, using both Italian and English terms.

If you want to know how to express a particular function, for example ‘Asking if something is available’ or ‘Introducing yourself’, simply look it up in the index or in the table of contents. In Part B, you will find all the different ways in which you can say what you want, with an indication of where you can find further information on the grammar structures used, and references to related functions found in other parts of the book.

If, on the other hand, you know the grammatical name for the structure you want to use, for example personal pronouns or impersonal *si*, you can look that up in the index instead. You will find each grammar structure explained in Part A. Part A is also useful as an easy-to-use quick reference section, where you can remind yourself of the correct form, or check on a verb ending, for example. A glossary, which immediately follows this short guide, gives definitions of the grammatical terms used in this book, with examples.

Note that throughout the book an asterisk is used to denote a form or wording that does not actually exist or is incorrect, shown only to demonstrate a point.

Lastly, Italian and English keywords are indexed to make it easier for the reader to look up a particular point. Grammar terminology as well as Italian examples are listed in the index (for example you will find both *lei* and ‘personal pronouns’).

We hope you enjoy learning Italian using this book as a guide. Remember that some spoken skills such as pronunciation, intonation and stress cannot simply be learned from a book. But grammar structures are the foundation of any language, and this book will teach you how to use these structures to express what you want to say.

Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo, 2005

# Glossary

## Abstract noun

One which refers to a concept or quality rather than a person or object. Examples are **la felicità** ‘happiness’, **la miseria** ‘poverty’.

## Active construction

An active construction is a sentence in which the subject of the sentence is the person carrying out the action, or the event taking place (as opposed to a *passive* construction where the subject is the person *affected* by the action): **mio marito fuma troppo** ‘my husband smokes too much’, **gli ospiti rimangono fino a sabato** ‘the guests are staying until Saturday’. A verb can therefore have an *active* form: (**chiudiamo la porta a mezzanotte** ‘we shut the door at midnight’) or a *passive* form (**la porta viene chiusa a mezzanotte** ‘the door is shut at midnight’).

## Adjective

Adjectives describe or give information about a noun. They can be descriptive (such as **grande** ‘big’, **bianco** ‘white’, **vecchio** ‘old’, **italiano** ‘Italian’), demonstrative (**questo** ‘this’, **quel** ‘that’), indefinite (**qualche** ‘some’, **alcuni** ‘some, a few’, **certo** ‘certain’), interrogative (**quale** ‘which’, **quanto** ‘how much, many’) or possessive (**mio** ‘my’, **tuo** ‘your’ etc.): **alcuni nostri amici** ‘Some friends of ours’, **la vecchia casa in campagna** ‘the old house in the country’.

## Adverb

Adverbs give information about a verb, saying how, for example, something is done: **bene** ‘well’, **male** ‘badly’, **subito** ‘immediately’, **cortesemente** ‘politely’. They can also add further information about an adjective or another adverb: **tanto stanco** ‘so tired’, **poco bene** ‘not very well’, **molto male** ‘very badly’.

## Agreement

In Italian, adjectives, articles and, in some cases, past participles have to ‘agree with’ the noun or pronoun they accompany or refer to. This means that their form varies according to whether the noun/pronoun is masculine or feminine (gender), singular or plural (number): **la casa bianca** ‘the white house’, **i miei sandali sono rotti** ‘my sandals are broken’, **loro sono andati** ‘they went’.

## Article

Italian has three types of article: the definite article **il, lo** (etc.) ‘the’, the indefinite article **un, una** (etc.) ‘a’, and the partitive **dei, delle, degli** (etc.) ‘some, any’: **il ragazzo** ‘the boy’, **una lezione** ‘a lesson’, **dei bambini** ‘some children’.

## Auxiliary verb

Auxiliary verbs such as **avere, essere** are used in combination with the past participle to form compound tenses, both active, **Ho mangiato** ‘I have eaten’, **siamo andati** ‘we have gone’, and passive, **è stato licenziato** ‘he was sacked’. See also MODAL VERB.

## Cardinal number

A number used in counting or to talk about quantities, for example **uno, due, tre**. See also ORDINAL.

## Clause

A clause is a section or part of a sentence which contains a subject and a verb. Complex sentences are made up of a series of clauses. The main clause (or clauses) is the part of a sentence which makes sense on its own and does not depend on any other element in the sentence. A subordinate clause always depends on another clause, and is often introduced by a

conjunction such as **che**. There are different types of subordinate clause, for example relative clauses: **Ho visto il ragazzo che piace a mia sorella** 'I saw the boy that my sister likes'; or purpose clauses: **Ha portato la macchina dal meccanico perché controllasse i freni** 'I took the car to the mechanic so that he could check the brakes'.

### Comparative

When one person, object or activity is compared with another, a comparative form is used. This can be a comparative adjective as in **la pasta napoletana è migliore di quella siciliana** 'Neapolitan pasta is better than Sicilian pasta', or a comparative adverb as in **mia figlia nuota meglio della sua** 'my daughter swims better than hers'.

### Compound noun

A compound noun is a noun formed by joining together one or more words, either nouns or other parts of speech: **asciugamano** 'a towel' (verb **asciugare** 'to dry' + noun **mano** 'hand'), **capotreno** 'chief guard on train' (noun **capo** 'chief' + noun **treno** 'train').

### Compound tenses

Compound tenses are tenses consisting of more than one element. In Italian, the compound tenses are formed by the auxiliary **avere** or **essere**, and the past participle: **ho mangiato troppo** 'I have eaten too much', **saremmo andati a casa** 'we would have gone home'. See also SIMPLE TENSES.

### Conditional

The conditional is not strictly a tense, but a verb mood. It can be used on its own, particularly as a polite way of expressing a request: **Le dispiacerebbe aprire la finestra?** 'Would you mind opening the window?' It can also be used in conditional sentences, where the meaning of the main sentence is dependent on some condition being fulfilled: **Andrei in vacanza anch'io, se avessi tempo** 'I would go on holiday too if I had the money'.

### Conjugation

The way in which verb forms change according to the person, tense or mood: **(io) vado** 'I go', **(noi) andremo** 'we will go', **le ragazze sono andate** 'the girls went', **voleva che io andassi a casa sua** 'he wanted me to go to his house', etc. The word conjugation is also used to mean the regular patterns of verbs ending in *-are*, *-ere*, *-ire*.

### Conjunction

A linking or joining word, usually linking two words, phrases or clauses within a sentence: **Marco e Davide** 'Marco and Davide', **con amore ma con disciplina** 'with love but with discipline', **sono andata a letto perché ero stanca** 'I went to bed because I was tired', **i giudici dicono che bisogna cambiare la legge** 'the judges say that the law should be changed'. Conjunctions can either be coordinating, linking two phrases or clauses of equal weight, or subordinating, linking main clause and subordinate clause.

### Countable

A noun is countable if it can normally be used in both singular and plural, and take the indefinite article **un, una** (etc.): **un bicchiere** 'a glass', **una pizza** 'a pizza'; whereas an uncountable noun is one which is not normally found in plural, for example **zucchero** 'sugar' and abstract nouns such as **tristezza** 'sadness'.

### Declension

This means the way in which nouns and adjectives decline, in other words, change their endings according to whether they are singular or plural, masculine or feminine: **un ragazzo** 'a boy', **una ragazza** 'a girl', **due ragazzi** 'two boys', **due ragazze** 'two girls'. This pattern of endings is known as the declension.

**Definite article:** see ARTICLE.

### Demonstrative

A demonstrative adjective or pronoun is one which demonstrates or indicates the person or object we are talking about: **questo carrello** 'this trolley', **quel professore** 'that teacher', **quelle case** 'those houses'.

**Direct object**

A direct object, whether noun or pronoun, is one which is directly affected by the action or event. A direct object can be living or inanimate. It is always used with a **transitive** verb: **I miei figli hanno mangiato tutti i cioccolatini** 'my children ate all the chocolates', **Li ho visto in città ieri sera** 'I saw them in town yesterday evening'.

**Feminine:** see GENDER.

**Finite verb**

A verb which has a subject and is complete in itself, as opposed to **infinitives** or **participles** which have to depend on another verb: **Ieri siamo andati in piscina** 'Yesterday we went to the swimming pool', **Domani i ragazzi torneranno a scuola** 'Tomorrow the kids will go back to school'.

**Gender**

All nouns in Italian have a gender: they are either masculine or feminine, even if they are inanimate objects. Even where living beings are concerned, grammatical gender is not always the same as natural gender: **una tigre** 'a tiger' (either sex unless specified), **un ippopotamo** 'a hippopotamus'. Gender is important since it determines the form of noun, the article and adjective.

**Gerund**

A gerund is a verb form ending in **-ando** or **-endo**: **parlando** 'speaking', **sorridendo** 'smiling', **finendo** 'finishing'. The gerund is most often used in Italian along with the verb **stare** to express a continuous action or event: **sto finendo** 'I'm just finishing', **stavano ancora mangiando** 'they were still eating'. The nearest equivalent in English is the '-ing' form but it is not used in exactly the same way.

**Idiomatic**

An idiomatic expression is one which cannot normally be translated literally, for example **ubriaco fradicio**, literally 'soaking drunk' but more idiomatically 'dead drunk'.

**Imperative**

The imperative mood is the verb mood used to express orders, commands or instructions: **state fermi** 'keep still', **si accomodi** 'sit down', **andiamo** 'let's go'. (See also SUBJUNCTIVE.)

**Impersonal (verbs, verb forms)**

Impersonal verbs or verb forms do not refer to any one particular person. They can generally be translated by the English 'it' form and use the third person form: **Occorre pulire prima la casa** 'It is necessary to clean the house first', **Non serve protestare** 'It's no good protesting'. These verbs can be personalised by the addition of a personal pronoun, usually the indirect object: **Non mi occorre questo maglione** 'I don't need this thick sweater'.

**Indefinite article:** see ARTICLE.

**Indefinites**

An adjective or pronoun used to refer to a person or thing in a general way, rather than a *definite* person or thing. Examples are: **alcuni** 'some', **certi** 'certain, some', **qualche** 'some'.

**Indicative (verbs)**

The verb mood we use most in speaking and writing is the indicative mood. Within this mood are a full range of tenses: present **mangio** 'I eat', past **ho mangiato** 'I have eaten', future **mangerò** 'I will eat', etc. The verb mood used to express uncertainty is the subjunctive, which also has a full range of tenses. See SUBJUNCTIVE.

**Indirect object**

An indirect object, whether noun or pronoun, is one which is indirectly affected by the action or event. An indirect object can be found with a **transitive** verb which already has one direct object: **ho mandato delle cartoline ai miei amici** 'I sent some postcards to my friends'; or it can be used with an intransitive verb which does not take a direct object, in which case it may be found together with a preposition such as **a**, **da**: **Marco telefonava a sua madre ogni sera** 'Marco used to phone his mother every evening'.

**Infinitive**

The infinitive of a verb is the form always given in a dictionary and is recognised by its endings **-are, -ere, -ire**: for example **chiacchierare** 'to chat', **sorridere** 'to smile' and **partire** 'to leave'. It cannot be used on its own but depends on a finite verb form, often a modal verb: **vorrei ringraziare i telespettatori** 'I would like to thank the TV audience'; or else is found linked with a preposition: **abbiamo fatto un salto in centro per comprare dei regali** 'we took a quick trip into town to buy some presents'.

**Interrogative**

Interrogative words are used to ask questions or indirect questions. They include **chi** 'who', **come** 'how', **cosa** 'what', **dove** 'where', **quale** 'which', **quando** 'when', **perché** 'why'.

**Intransitive (verbs)**

See also TRANSITIVE VERBS. Intransitive verbs are verbs which *cannot* be used with a direct object. Some intransitive verbs can be used with an indirect object: **Ho telefonato a Maria Teresa** 'I telephoned (to) Maria Teresa'. Some can only be used without any object: **Siamo arrivati alla stazione con un'ora di ritardo** 'we arrived at the station an hour late'. Many of these verbs take the auxiliary **essere**, but some take **avere**: **Abbiamo camminato molto** 'We walked a lot'. Sometimes a verb which can be used transitively in English ('to walk the dog') cannot be used transitively in Italian (**camminare**). Some verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively (see TRANSITIVE VERBS).

**Invariable**

Invariable nouns are nouns that have the same form for both singular and plural: **un film, dei film** 'a film, some films'; or for both masculine and feminine: **un artista, un'artista** 'an artist'. An invariable adjective is one which does not change form to agree with the noun, whether masculine or feminine, singular or plural: **un vestito rosa, una giacca rosa** 'a pink jacket', **dei pantaloni rosa** 'some pink trousers', **delle calze rosa** 'some pink stockings'.

**Irregular (noun or verb)**

A noun or verb which does not follow one of the standard patterns of forms or endings: **un uovo** 'one egg', **due uova** 'two eggs'; **andare** 'to go', **vado** 'I go', **vai** 'you go', **va** 'he/she goes', **andiamo** 'we go', **andate** 'you (pl) go', **vanno** 'they go'.

**Masculine**: see GENDER.

**Modal verb**

A verb which is used with a verb infinitive to **modify** what is being said: in Italian the modal verbs are **potere** 'to be able to', **dovere** 'to have to', **volere** 'to want to': **posso lavorare domani** 'I can work tomorrow', **devo lavorare domani** 'I have to work tomorrow', **voglio lavorare domani** 'I want to work tomorrow'.

**Mood**

The seven main ways in which verbs can express actions or events are known as **mood**. The four finite moods – all of which, except the imperative, have a full range of tenses – are the **indicative** (for example **vado** 'I go'), **subjunctive** (for example **che io vada** 'that I may go'), **conditional** (for example **andrei** 'I would go') and **imperative** (**vada!** 'go!'). The other three moods are: infinitive, gerund, participle.

**Negative**

A statement is negative when it specifies an action or event which has not taken place or will not take place. Negative words or phrases turn a positive statement or question into a negative one. Examples of negative words in Italian include: **nessun** 'no', **nessuno** 'nobody', **niente** 'nothing', **non ... mai** 'not ... ever, never', **non ... ancora** 'not yet', **non ... più** 'no longer, no more'.

**Noun**

A noun indicates a person, place, thing, or event, for example **Italia** 'Italy', **assistente** 'language assistant', **la festa** 'the party'. Nouns are inextricably linked to the articles (**il, un**, etc.) and any adjectives that accompany them. All nouns have a gender and this determines the form of the adjectives and articles that go with them.

**Number**

Number is the distinction between *singular* and *plural*. Verb forms alter according to the number of the subject: **il ragazzo nuota** 'the boy swims', **i ragazzi nuotano** 'the boys swim'.

**Object**

In grammatical terms, an object is the person or thing affected by the action or event, as opposed to the subject, which is the person or thing responsible for it. See **DIRECT OBJECT**, **INDIRECT OBJECT**.

**Ordinal number**

A number which indicates position in a series or sequence, for example **primo, secondo, terzo**.

**Participle (present, past)**

Verbs normally have a present participle and a past participle. Unlike other (finite) verb forms, it cannot be used on its own but is found together with other verb forms. The *past* participle is used with the verb **avere** or **essere** to form the *passato prossimo* tense: **Non abbiamo mangiato gli hamburgers** 'We didn't eat hamburgers'. When used with **essere**, it agrees with the subject: **Nel 2004 siamo andati a Los Angeles** 'In 2004 we went to Los Angeles'. The *present* participle, less frequently used, changes form when used as an adjective **i ... cantanti**.

**Partitive article**: see **ARTICLE**.

**Passato prossimo**

The **passato prossimo** is a compound tense formed by participle and auxiliary **avere** or **essere**: **ho mangiato** 'I ate', **sono andato** 'I went'. It is known in English as the 'perfect tense' because it refers to an action which is 'perfect' or complete. Its name in Italian suggests that it refers to a recent action or event. In the north of Italy, however, it is used to refer to actions or events further back in the past.

**Passato remoto**

The **passato remoto** is a past tense which is simple, not compound (**andai** rather than **sono andato**). It is known in English as 'past definite', 'past historic' or 'past absolute'. Its name in Italian suggests that it refers to an event far back in the past, but this is not always accurate. In Tuscany and the south of Italy, it is used in spoken Italian to refer also to recent events, which in the north would be referred to using the **passato prossimo**.

**Passive (verb forms)**

A passive construction is a sentence in which the subject of the sentence is the person or thing *affected* by the action or event taking place (as opposed to an *active* construction where the subject is the person *carrying out* the action): **tutti gli studenti vengono promossi** 'all the students get moved up a class', **il concerto è stato anticipato** 'the concert was put forward'.

**Person**

The verb subject can be a first person (**io** 'I'), second person (**tu** 'you'), third person (**lui, lei** 'he, she') and so on. Most verbs have three singular persons (English 'I, you, he/she'), and three plural (English 'we, you, they').

**Personal pronouns**

See also **PRONOUNS**. Personal pronouns can be subject pronouns **io, tu, lui** 'I, you, he' etc.; direct object pronouns **mi, ti, lo, la** 'me, you, him, her' etc.; indirect object pronouns **mi, ti, gli, le** 'to me, to you, to him, to her' etc.; disjunctive pronouns, used as stressed direct object or after a preposition (**con**) **me, te, lui, lei** '(with) me, you, him, her' etc.

**Plural**: see **NUMBER**.

**Possessive**

Possessive adjectives and/or pronouns denote ownership: **il mio orologio** 'my watch', **la nostra macchina** 'our car'.

**Preposition**

A word that introduces further information about a person, action or event, for example information about time or place, value or purpose: **ci siamo sposati nel 1975** 'we got married in 1975', **sono nata a Milano** 'I was born in Milan', **una macchina da caffè** 'a coffee machine',



**un francobollo da 2 euro** ‘a two euro stamp’, **siamo venuti per imparare l’italiano** ‘we came to learn Italian’.

### Pronoun

A word which stands in for and/or refers to a noun. There are various categories of pronoun: demonstrative, such as **Hai visto quello?** ‘Have you seen that man?’; indefinite, such as **alcuni** ‘a few people’; interrogative, such as **Chi?** ‘Who?’; personal, such as **io** ‘I’, **noi** ‘we, us’, **lo** ‘it’; possessive, such as **il mio** ‘my, mine’, **i suoi** ‘his, hers’ (masc pl form); reflexive, such as **mi, ti, si** ‘myself, yourself, himself/herself’; relative, such as **quello che** ‘the one who’.

### Question

Direct questions sometimes begin with a question word: **Dove vai stasera?** ‘Where are you going this evening?’; but sometimes not: **Hai tempo di parlarmi?** ‘Do you have time to speak to me?’ Indirect questions are introduced by words such as **chiedere** ‘to ask’: **Mi ha chiesto se avevo tempo di parlargli** ‘He asked me if I had time to speak to him’.

### Reflexive verb

A verb that can be used with a reflexive pronoun, equivalent of English ‘myself, himself’, indicating that the subject and the object are one and the same: **mi lavo** ‘I wash’, **si è fatto male** ‘he hurt himself’. Sometimes the verb can only be used reflexively, and no object is actually present: **Molte volte i drogati si vergognano di quello che fanno** ‘Often drug addicts are ashamed of what they do’.

### Regular

A regular noun or verb is one which follows one of the main noun or verb patterns, in other words whose forms and endings can be predicted, for example **-are, parlare** ‘to speak’, **-ere, sorridere** ‘to smile’ **-ire, partire** ‘to leave’.

### Relative

A relative pronoun introduces a relative clause, which gives more information about a person or thing mentioned specifically, or even an event referred to: **ho visto la studentessa che veniva sempre nel mio ufficio** ‘I saw the student who was always coming to my office’, **è andato alla discoteca senza chiedere il permesso, ciò che mi ha fatto arrabbiare** ‘he went to the disco without asking permission, which made me angry’.

### Reported speech

Also known as indirect speech, this is a way of relating words spoken or written by someone else. Reported speech is usually introduced by verbs such as **dire** ‘to say, to tell’, **scrivere** ‘to write’, **annunciare** ‘to announce’, and the conjunction **che**: **i giornali annunciano che i soldati hanno massacrato migliaia di bambini** ‘the newspapers say that the soldiers have massacred thousands of children’.

### Sentence

A sentence must have a verb and a subject. It can either be a simple sentence (one subject, one verb): **gli ospiti dormivano** ‘the guests were asleep’; or a complex sentence (main clause and one or more subordinate clauses): **mentre dormivano, i ladri hanno portato via tutto** ‘while they were asleep, the thieves took everything’.

### Simple tenses

Verb tenses which are formed of one word only. See also COMPOUND TENSES.

**Singular:** see NUMBER.

**Stem:** see VERB STEM.

### Subject

The subject is usually a noun, pronoun or proper name denoting the person or object performing the action or the event taking place: **mia madre ha comprato un tailleur** ‘my mother bought a suit’, **la festa si svolge a maggio** ‘the festival takes place in May’. In the case of a passive construction, the subject is the person or thing affected by the action: **gli studenti sono stati criticati dagli insegnanti** ‘the students were criticised by their teachers’. With Italian verbs, it

is not always essential to have a subject mentioned since it is understood from the verb form: **abbiamo mangiato a mezzogiorno** 'we ate at midday'.

### Subjunctive

The subjunctive mood is used to express doubt or uncertainty. It is almost always used in complex sentences where one clause depends on another: **Abbiamo comprato un cagnolino in modo che i bambini imparino a prendere cura degli animali** 'We bought a puppy so that the children can learn how to look after animals'; or where the subordinate clause depends on a main verb expressing uncertainty: **Dubito che lui possa farcela** 'I doubt if he can manage it'. However it can be found standing on its own, when used as an imperative form: **Vada via!** 'Go away!'

### Subordinate (clauses)

See CONJUNCTION. A subordinate clause is one which depends on another clause, usually the main clause in a sentence. It can be introduced by a conjunction such as **che** 'what', **perché** 'because', or a relative pronoun such as **che** 'who, which'. (See CLAUSES.)

### Superlative

(See also COMPARATIVE). When one or more persons, objects or activities are compared with others, or a comparison is implied, a superlative form is used to express the one which is superior to all the rest: **La casa della mia amica Matilde era la più grande del paese** 'My friend Matilde's house was the biggest in the village', **Abbiamo fatto il meglio possibile** 'We did as well as we could'.

### Tense

A finite verb form which normally provides a clue as to the time setting (present, past, future) for an action or event: **andremo a New York** 'we will go to New York', **i miei amici ci sono stati** 'my friends have been there'. Occasionally the grammatical verb tense does not correspond to the time setting, for example the future can be used for a present time setting: **Sono le 4.00. Mio marito sarà già a Palermo** 'It's 4 o'clock. My husband will be at Palermo by now'; and the imperfect can be used to express a polite request: **Volevo un francobollo da 2 euro** 'I wanted a 2 euro stamp'.

### Transitive verbs

Transitive verbs are verbs which *can* always be used transitively, in other words with a direct object: **ho fumato una sigaretta** 'I smoked a cigarette'. Sometimes no object is used: **ho fumato** 'I smoked'; but the verb is still a transitive verb since it can – and often does – take an object. Some verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively, for example **aumentare** 'to increase', **diminuire** 'to decrease', **cambiare** 'to change': **abbiamo aumentato il prezzo del biglietto** 'we have increased the price of the ticket', **il prezzo del biglietto è aumentato** 'the price of the ticket has increased'.

### Verb

A verb describes an action, event or state. It always has a subject and can also have an object. Its form varies according to mood and tense, and the person, gender and number of its subject.

### Verb stem

The stem of a verb is its 'base', the part of the verb which is left when you take away **-are**, **-ere**-, **-ire** from the infinitive form. In a regular verb the ending changes but the stem does not normally change. In an irregular verb, the stem may change too.

### Voice

Verbs normally have two voices: *active* and *passive*.



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