

- » Speaking formally and informally
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- » Working with gender

Chapter 1

Greetings! Getting to Know You

You've picked up this book because you're interested in learning Italian — **molto bene!** (*great!*) Whatever your reasons — heritage, travel, work, food, Italophilia, love of languages — you're in the right place: **Benvenute/Benvenuti!** (*Welcome!*)

What are some essential first steps in getting your feet wet in another language? Communication, making yourself understood, and understanding throughout a variety of social situations, as well as creating a solid foundation on which to build.

This chapter provides you with some Italian basics on using formal and informal conventions. I illustrate the formal and informal with communicative exercises that can help you confidently express — whether you're speaking or writing in Italian — greetings and salutations, and forms of courtesy. This chapter also provides a preliminary consideration of pronunciation and gender, two elements you can't do without.

Deciding between Formal and Informal

The Italian language clearly recognizes and requires two different conventions of address, formal and informal, depending on whom you're addressing and also the situation. When you understand what convention to use, you're better equipped to communicate meaningfully, to convey respect for the person, and to also show regard for cultural differences.

The informal is usually designated with the pronouns **tu/voi** (*you*) and the formal **Lei** (*you*): These pronouns connect concretely to verb forms (see Chapter 4) and possessive adjectives (see Chapter 10). In Italian, you generally use the formal address to write or speak to a stranger, teacher, business acquaintance, customer, waitstaff, salesperson, or boss. You usually use the informal address with family members, friends, people your same age or younger, or children.



REMEMBER

Italian is a living language. I can't emphasize enough how important it is for you to practice saying and hearing Italian while you go through this book. Although you need to approach the language holistically and in context, you also need a grasp on the individual parts of the whole, which is where this book comes in.



TIP

When meeting someone for the first time, Italians customarily shake hands. When you see someone whom you haven't seen in a while, or when you stop by your aunt's house, Italians customarily kiss each other on both cheeks, first on one side, then the other.

To put formal and informal conventions to use, the following sections walk you through Italian greetings and phrases.

Formal greetings

Use the following formal phrases when you want to meet and greet a stranger, someone whom you don't know very well, and/or someone to whom you should show respect. Use titles when you know what titles apply, such as **Dottore/Dottoressa** (*Doctor*), or either **Signore** (*Mr.*) or **Signora** (*Mrs.*).

Table 1-1 provides you with some terms generally associated with greetings and salutations. While you go through this table, make a mental note (or even underline and highlight) some of the differences and similarities between Table 1-1 and Table 1-2 (in the next section), which provides the informal phrases.



REMEMBER

You use **buona notte** when you know it's actually bedtime; consider it another way of saying, "*Have a good sleep.*" Start to use **buona sera** in the late afternoon until you go to bed. For example, say it's 10 p.m. and you walk into your hotel. You first greet the concierge by saying, "**Buona sera.**" After you get your key and are on your way to your room, you can say, "**Buona notte.**"



REMEMBER

Cut off the final e when using a last name with masculine titles:

- » **Signore** becomes **Signor Tarroni**.
- » **Dottore** becomes **Dottor Costa**.
- » **Professore** becomes **Professor Gambi**.

The title *Ms.* doesn't exist in Italian, so you use either **Signora** (*Miss*) or **Signorina** (*Mrs./Ma'am*).

For female professional titles of doctor and professor, you use **Dottoressa** and **Professoressa**.

Table 1-1 Formal Greetings and Salutations

English	Italian
<i>Hello/Good morning</i>	Buon giorno/Buongiorno
<i>Hello</i>	Salve
<i>Good afternoon</i>	Buon pomeriggio
<i>Good evening</i>	Buona sera/Buonasera
<i>Good night</i>	Buona notte/Buonanotte
<i>Miss (young woman)</i>	Signorina
<i>Mrs./Ma'am (older married or unmarried woman)</i>	Signora
<i>Mr./Sir</i>	Signore
<i>My name is . . .</i>	Mi chiamo . . .
<i>What's your name?</i>	Come si chiama?
<i>How are you?</i>	Come sta?
<i>Where are you from?</i>	Di dov'è?
<i>Sono di . . .</i>	I'm from . . .
<i>Well.</i>	Bene.
<i>Very well.</i>	Molto bene.
<i>So-so.</i>	Così così.
<i>Fair/pretty well.</i>	Abbastanza bene.
<i>(I'm) not well.</i>	(Sto) male.
<i>Not bad.</i>	Non c'è male.
<i>Thank you, and you?</i>	Grazie, e lei?
<i>Nice to meet you.</i>	Piacere (di conoscerla).
<i>It's a pleasure.</i>	È un piacere.
<i>It's a great pleasure.</i>	Molto piacere.
<i>The pleasure is mine.</i>	Il piacere è mio.
<i>Goodbye.</i>	Arrivederci.
<i>See you later.</i>	A dopo.
<i>See you soon.</i>	A presto.
<i>See you tomorrow.</i>	A domani.
<i>Have a good day.</i>	Buona giornata.
<i>Have a good evening.</i>	Buona serata.

Here are a few more titles in both their masculine and feminine forms:

- » **Avvocato/Avvocata** (*Attorney*)
- » **Giudice** (*Judge*)
- » **Sindaco/Sindaca** (*Mayor*)



DIFFERENCES

The title **Dottore/Dottoressa** can have two meanings in Italian: You can use it for someone who has a university degree (meaning a B.A. or a B.S.), as well as for a medical doctor and a person who has a Ph.D. In the United States, the word *doctor* is reserved for medical doctors and people who have Ph.D.s.

Informal greetings

Use informal phrases when you want to meet and greet a friend, relative, child, people who are younger than you, and (of course) your beloved pet. Notice that you find some overlap between some of the terms in the formal list (see Table 1-1) and the informal list in Table 1-2.



TIP

A good rule of thumb is that you use the informal when on a first name basis with someone.

Table 1-2 Informal Greetings and Salutations

English	Italian
<i>Hi.</i>	Ciao.
<i>My name is . . .</i>	Mi chiamo . . .
<i>I'm (meaning My name is . . .)</i>	Sono. . .
<i>What's your name?</i>	Come ti chiami?
<i>How are you?</i>	Come stai?
<i>Thank you, and you?</i>	Grazie, e tu?
<i>Well.</i>	Bene.
<i>Very well.</i>	Molto bene.
<i>So-so.</i>	Così così.
<i>Fair./Pretty well.</i>	Abbastanza bene.
<i>Not well.</i>	Male.
<i>Not bad.</i>	Non c'è male.
<i>Where are you from?</i>	Di dove sei?
<i>I'm from . . .</i>	Sono di . . .
<i>It's a pleasure (to meet you).</i>	Piacere (di conoscerti).
<i>How nice it is to see you.</i>	Che piacere vederti.
<i>How's it going?</i>	Come va?
<i>What's new?</i>	Che c'è di nuovo?
<i>What's up?/What's wrong?</i>	Che c'è?
<i>Nothing much.</i>	Niente.
<i>See you later.</i>	Ci vediamo.
<i>See you (very) soon.</i>	A presto.
<i>Until next time.</i>	Alla prossima
<i>See you tomorrow.</i>	A domani.
<i>Have a good day.</i>	Buona giornata.
<i>Have a good evening.</i>	Buona serata.
<i>Bye.</i>	Ciao.

**REMEMBER**

Prego not only means *You're welcome*. It also means, *Please, come this way; Please, by all means, you first; or Here you go!*

You're not always spontaneously introducing yourself to someone else. Sometimes, you're introduced. Compare the informal and the formal introductions in the following examples.

Ti presento Camilla (informal). (*This is Camilla./Let me introduce you to Camilla.*)

Le presento mia madre, Mary (formal). (*This is my mother, Mary./Let me introduce you to my mother, Mary.*)

Formal and informal usage distinctions inform your use of everything from possessive adjectives to verbs in all tenses. You can't get away from this convention — but of course, it's okay to make mistakes! You just need to make yourself understood.

**PRACTICE**

Translate the following.

Q. *What's new?*

A. **Che c'è di nuovo?**

- 1 My name is. . .
- 2 Good morning!
- 3 Hi! (informal)
- 4 Where are you from? (informal)
- 5 Good evening, Mr. Marotti.
- 6 Nothing's new.
- 7 Have a good day!
- 8 How are you? (formal)
- 9 How nice to see you! (informal)
- 10 See you soon!
- 11 Thank you. . . You're welcome.
- 12 Pleasure to meet you.

**TIP**

Don't panic if the distinctions and terms related to formal and informal address don't seem so straightforward. You can gain a lot of practice by using formal and informal with all of the verb tenses covered in this book, as well as with possessive adjectives (Chapter 10).



PRACTICE

Now fill in the missing term and practice the following mini-dialogue based on the cues provided. Practice reading them aloud.

Q. You see your neighbor, Mrs. Coia.

Buon _____ (day), _____ (Mrs.) Coia
 _____ (how) sta?

A. Buon giorno, signora Coia.

Come sta?

13 You see your friend Giorgio.

“(Hi) _____ Giorgio! Come _____ (are you)?”

“Bene, _____ (thanks), e _____ (you)?”

“Non _____ (not bad).”

Forms of courtesy

It's always good to know how to be courteous when communicating with others. Saying *please* and *thank you* in any language goes a long way. Table 1-3 lists common forms of courtesy.

Table 1-3 Being Polite

English	Italian
<i>please</i>	per favore
<i>please</i>	per piacere
<i>please</i>	per cortesia
<i>Thank you.</i>	Grazie.
<i>Thanks so much.</i>	Grazie mille.
<i>Thank you very much.</i>	Molte grazie.
<i>Thank you, that's very kind (of you).</i>	Grazie, molto gentile.
<i>You're welcome.</i>	Prego
<i>Don't mention it.</i>	Non c'è di che.
<i>It was nothing.</i>	Niente
<i>Excuse me.</i>	(Mi) scusi. (formal)
<i>Excuse me, I need some information, please.</i>	Mi scusi, un'informazione, per favore.
<i>Excuse me./I'm sorry.</i>	Scusa/scusami (informal)
<i>I'm sorry.</i>	Mi dispiace.



PRACTICE

Provide the most appropriate response to the following statements/situations by using the forms of courtesy in Table 1–3. (Check the answer key if in doubt!)

Q. You need to ask someone for information.

A. *Mi scusi, un’informazione, per favore.*

14 Someone gives up their seat for you on a crowded bus. Thank them profusely.

15 They tell you not to worry about their kind gesture. _____

16 You’re late for your aperitivo date with your friend. _____

17 You ask for a glass of water at the bar (caffè): Un bicchiere d’acqua, _____.

18 Your friend has just told you they just lost their job: _____

Working with Pronunciation

Italian provides many opportunities to have fun because the language offers you some new sounds. In this section, I give you some basic pronunciation hints that can help you both surf through this book and have good articulation when you speak Italian.

Next to the Italian words in this chapter, you can find the pronunciation in parentheses. Then I give you some helpful hints about how to read these pronunciations — that is, how to pronounce the Italian words. Follow the code that I give you outlining which letters refer to which sounds all through this book.



TIP

The best way to understand Italian pronunciation though, is to listen to it. I highly recommend finding some reliable sites on the Internet, from the alphabet to podcasts to cartoons to music, to help you get this pronunciation down. Listen, read, and repeat as much as you need to!

In the pronunciations, I separate the syllables with a hyphen, like this: **casa** (ka-sah) (*house*). Furthermore, I underline the stressed syllable, which means that you emphasize your tone on the underlined syllable. If you can figure out the correct pronunciation in this chapter, starting with the alphabet (see Table 1–4), you’ll read Italian like, well, a real Italian.

Table 1-4 Alfabeto (ahl-fah-beh-toh)

Letter	Pronunciation	Letter	Pronunciation	Letter	Pronunciation
a	ah	l	el-le	u	ooh
b	bee	m	em-me	v	vooh
c	chee	n	en-ne	z	dzeh-tah
d	dee	o	oh		
e	eh	p	pee		
f	ef-fe	q	kooh		
g	jee	r	ehr-reh		
h	ahk-kah	s	ehs-she		
i	ee	t	Tee		

Stressing Words Properly

In Romance languages, accents can make a big difference. In Italian, you write the accent only on vowels.

Stress is the audible accent that you put on a syllable when you speak it. One syllable always gets more stress than all the others.

Some words give you a hint as to where to stress them: They have an accent — (˘) or (´) — above one of their letters. The accent falls on the vowel at the end of the last syllable, as in **città** (*city*) and **virtù** (*virtue*). You should memorize the spelling of these common words with an accented final vowel.

Here are some examples:

- » **caffè** (kahf-feh) (*coffee*)
- » **città** (cheet-tah) (*city*)
- » **lunedì** (loo-neh-dee) (*Monday*)
- » **perché** (pehr-keh) (*why*)
- » **però** (peh-roh) (*but*)
- » **università** (ooh-nee-vehr-see-tah) (*university*)
- » **virtù** (veer-tooh) (*virtue*)

If the word doesn't have an accent, you're unfortunately left on your own. Italian tends to have the stress on the *penultimate* (next-to-last) syllable. Although there are too many rules and exceptions to list them all here, keep the following points in mind:

- » The accent tells you where to stress the word.
- » The most important function of an accent is to change a word's meaning.

Fortunately, only a few words have the same spelling and only an accent to distinguish them. But it can be a very important distinction, as in the following examples:

- **la** (*the/her*) and **là** (*there*)
- **da** (*from/by*) and **dà** (*she/he gives*)

e (eh) (*and*) and **è** (eh) (*he/she/it is*) are distinguished only by the accent on the vowel, which means *is*.



REMEMBER

Using Gender in Italian

You can't get around the use of gender in Italian. Nouns are either masculine or feminine: There's no neutral. (Chapter 2 goes into detail about the gender and number of nouns and articles.) Most of the elements that make up a sentence — definite articles (*the*), indefinite articles (*a/an*), contracted prepositions, adjectives, personal pronouns, direct and indirect object pronouns, past participles — must reckon with gender and number, and follow some basic rules. Keep the following in mind:

- » Nouns and articles: As in **il gatto** (*the male cat*) or **la gatta** (*the female cat*).
- » Adjectives: As in **bello, bella, belli, belle, bei, bel, begli**, or **bell'**, which all mean *beautiful*, have to agree in gender and number with the noun.
- » Past participles: Used frequently in compound tenses, as in **andato** and **andati** (*went/gone*, referring to a singular and a plural masculine noun) or **andata** and **andate** (*went/gone*, referring to a singular feminine and plural noun).
- » Masculine singular: It is the default gender. In an Italian dictionary, adjectives and other qualifiers that can vary in gender and/or number are listed in the masculine singular (unless they exist only in the feminine, such as **la spia** [*spy*]).

For example, no one is listed under **nessuno** (*nobody*). Only the examples in the entry indicate (if you don't know it already) that you can use **nessuna** (feminine singular). Similarly, the color red is an adjective listed as **rosso** (*red*), even though it can become **rossa, rossi**, and **rosse**, depending on the gender and number of the noun it's modifying.

Even though Italian grammar dictates that the gender defaults to masculine, even when referring to a room that has, for example, 14 women and 2 men, things are changing slowly in Italy to become more inclusive.

In the spirit of inclusivity, many of my friends who are high school teachers and college professors use an asterisk (*) or a schwa (ə) when writing (and speaking) to groups of mixed gender, and also where some participants may identify as non-binary or whose gender isn't known, so that they can avoid privileging one gender over the other. They might start an e-mail with, for example: **Car* tutt*** instead of **Cari tutti** (Dear All), which defaults to the masculine.

Other colleagues choose to make the feminine the default gender in the classroom, just to mix things up. Many maintain that women fought so hard and for so long to be recognized that they're not quite willing to subsume themselves in an asterisk or schwa.

Still others refer to both genders: **le mie studentesse e i miei studenti** (*my female students and my male students*) instead of the conventional **i miei studenti** for *my students* (which is masculine by default).

In Italian, you only use **loro/il-la-i-le loro** (*they/theirs*) when you are referring to a plural subject. But what to do with pronouns in the inclusive classroom where *they/theirs* isn't an option because of the very gendered nature of Italian? Some people ask non-binary students to choose which gender they want to use in the classroom, for the purpose of agreement, and with the understanding that they can always change it. Recent progressive initiatives in some Italian schools are also sensitive to naming, asking students and teachers to choose their preferred pronouns. In Italy, like in the United States, some are resistant to inclusive language, while others are actively adopting it.

Answers to “Greetings! Getting to Know You” Practice Questions

- 1 **Mi chiamo. . .** (*My name is. . .*)
- 2 **Buon giorno!/Buongiorno!** (*Good morning!*)
- 3 **Ciao!** (*Hi! informal*)
- 4 **Di dove sei?** (*Where are you from? informal*)
- 5 **Buona sera, signor Marotti.** (*Good evening, Mr. Marotti.*)
- 6 **Niente di nuovo.** (*Nothing's new.*)
- 7 **Buona giornata!** (*Have a good day!*)
- 8 **Come sta?** (*How are you? formal*)
- 9 **Che piacere vederti!** (*How nice to see you! informal*)
- 10 **A presto!** (*See you soon!*)
- 11 **Grazie. . . Prego.** (**Thank you. . . You're welcome.**)
- 12 **Piacere!** (*Pleasure to meet you!*)
- 13 “(Hi) **Ciao Giorgio! Come stai** (*are you?*)?”
 “Bene, grazie (*thanks*), **e tu** (*you?*)?”
 “Non non c'è male (*not bad*).”
- 14 **Grazie mille!** (*Thank you so much!*)/**Molto gentile!** (*That's very kind!*)
- 15 **Non c'è di che.** (*Don't mention it.*)/**Niente.** (*It was nothing.*)
- 16 **Scusami!** (*Excuse me!*)
- 17 **per favore/per piacere/per cortesia** (*please*)
- 18 **Mi dispiace!** (*I'm sorry!*)

