

Modern Italian Grammar

A PRACTICAL GUIDE
THIRD EDITION

Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo



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.

Routledge Modern Grammars

Series concept and development – Sarah Butler

Other books in the series:

Modern Mandarin Chinese Grammar

Modern Mandarin Chinese Grammar Workbook

Modern French Grammar, Second Edition

Modern French Grammar Workbook, Second Edition

Modern German Grammar, Second Edition

Modern German Grammar Workbook, Second Edition

Modern Italian Grammar Workbook, Second Edition

Modern Russian Grammar

Modern Russian Grammar Workbook

Modern Spanish Grammar, Third Edition

Modern Spanish Grammar Workbook, Third Edition

Modern ITALIAN Grammar

A practical guide
Third Edition

Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo

Third edition published 2013

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2013 Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo

The right of Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

First edition published by Routledge 1997

Second edition published by Routledge 2005

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Proudfoot, Anna.

Modern Italian grammar : a practical guide / Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo. — 3rd ed.

p. cm. — (Routledge modern grammars)

Text in English and Italian.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Italian language—Textbooks for foreign speakers—English. 2. Italian language—Grammar.

I. Cardo, Francesco, 1951– II. Title.

PC1129.E5P76 2012

458.2'421—dc23

2012015143

ISBN: 978-0-415-67187-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-67186-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-136-19546-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman and Berthold Akzidenz Grotesk

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge ownership of copyright. The publishers will be glad to make suitable arrangements with any copyright holders whom it has not been possible to contact.

In memory of Franco Cardo,
1951–2006

Contents

Introduction	xiii
How to use this book	xv
Glossary	xvi

Part A Structures

1 The noun group	2
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 The noun	2
1.3 The article	9
1.4 The adjective	14
1.5 Agreement of noun, article and adjective	19
2 Verbs	21
2.1 General features of verbs	21
2.2 Individual verb moods and tenses	30
3 Pronouns	57
3.1 What is a pronoun?	57
3.2 Personal pronouns: introduction	57
3.3 Stressed personal pronouns	57
3.4 Unstressed personal pronouns	59
3.5 Relative pronouns	65
3.6 Interrogative pronouns and adjectives	66
3.7 Possessive pronouns and adjectives	68
3.8 Demonstrative pronouns and adjectives	71
3.9 Indefinite pronouns and adjectives	73
3.10 Pronouns and adjectives of quantity	77
4 Prepositions	78
4.1 What is a preposition?	78
4.2 Combined prepositions and articles	78
4.3 Common prepositions used with nouns	79
4.4 Common prepositions used with verbs	83
4.5 Other prepositions	85
5 Conjunctions	88
5.1 What is a conjunction?	88
5.2 Coordinating conjunctions	88
5.3 Subordinating conjunctions	90

6	Adverbs	94
6.1	What is an adverb? 94	
6.2	Formation of adverbs 94	
6.3	Functions of adverbs 96	
6.4	Comparative and superlative adverbs 99	
7	Numbers	101
7.1	What is a number? 101	
7.2	Cardinal numbers 101	
7.3	Ordinal numbers 102	
7.4	Calculations 103	
7.5	Percentages 103	
7.6	Collective and approximate numbers 104	
7.7	Dates 104	
7.8	Time 105	
7.9	Weights and measures 106	
7.10	Currency 106	
7.11	Table of numbers 107	

Part B Functions

I	Giving and seeking factual information	110
8	Identification: giving personal information	111
8.1	Introduction 111	
8.2	<i>Tu or Lei?</i> 111	
8.3	Giving different kinds of personal information 111	
8.4	Emphasising the person referred to 116	
8.5	Eliciting personal information 116	
8.6	<i>Dialoghi</i> 117	
9	Specifying people or objects	119
9.1	Introduction 119	
9.2	Specifying a known or particular person or object 119	
9.3	Specifying a category or type 120	
9.4	Specifying ownership 121	
10	Describing people or things	122
10.1	Introduction 122	
10.2	Physical characteristics 122	
10.3	Non-physical characteristics 126	
10.4	Position of adjectives 129	
10.5	Intensifying the meaning of the adjective 129	
10.6	Diminishing the intensity of the adjective 131	
10.7	<i>Essere, stare</i> 132	
10.8	<i>Dialogo</i> 132	
11	Talking about existence, occurrence and availability	133
11.1	Introduction 133	
11.2	Talking about existence and/or presence 134	
11.3	Talking about occurrence 135	

11.4	Talking about presence, attendance and participation at an event	136
11.5	Talking about availability	137
11.6	Expressing 'some, any'	138
11.7	Specifying the quantity available	140
11.8	Expressing 'something/anything', 'someone/anyone'	140
11.9	Specifying location, time or frequency	140
11.10	Expressing non-existence or non-availability	141
12	Talking about the present	144
12.1	Introduction	144
12.2	Describing present situations, actions and events	144
12.3	Expressing ongoing actions	146
12.4	Words and phrases indicating present time	146
12.5	<i>Dialogo</i>	147
13	Speaking and writing about the past	148
13.1	Introduction	148
13.2	<i>Passato prossimo</i> and <i>passato remoto</i>	148
13.3	Using the <i>passato prossimo</i>	149
13.4	Using the <i>passato remoto</i>	150
13.5	Using the <i>imperfetto</i>	151
13.6	Combinations of perfect and imperfect tenses	153
13.7	Present tense expressing past	156
13.8	Indicators of past time	157
14	Talking about the future	158
14.1	Introduction	158
14.2	Using the future tense	158
14.3	Using the present tense	158
14.4	Indicators of future time	159
14.5	Expressing the immediate or very near future	160
14.6	Expressing the English 'going to'	161
14.7	The 'past in the future'	161
14.8	The future seen from the past	161
14.9	Expressing intention and future plans	162
15	Asking questions	163
15.1	Introduction	163
15.2	Asking a question using interrogative intonation	163
15.3	Asking a question using interrogative words	163
15.4	<i>Dialogo</i>	167
16	Negative sentences	168
16.1	Introduction	168
16.2	Reinforcing a negative statement	168
16.3	Expressing negation using <i>niente, nulla</i>	170
16.4	Expressing negation using the pronoun <i>nessuno/a</i>	170
16.5	Expressing negation using the adjective <i>nessun/o/a</i>	170
16.6	Other negative elements <i>non . . . mai, non . . . ancora, non . . . più</i>	171
16.7	Expressing negation using <i>né . . . né</i>	171
16.8	Omitting <i>non</i>	172
16.9	Specifying negation with a <i>che</i> clause	172

17	Comparisons and degrees of intensity	173
17.1	Introduction	173
17.2	Using comparative adjectives and adverbs	173
17.3	Expressing 'than'	174
17.4	Expressing 'which'	176
17.5	Expressing different degrees of intensity	176
18	Referring to objects and people	179
18.1	Introduction	179
18.2	Using a pronoun to refer back	179
18.3	Using a pronoun: referring to the subject of the action	179
18.4	Using a pronoun: referring to the object of the action	179
18.5	Referring to someone or something using <i>questo, quello</i>	182
18.6	Using indefinite pronouns to refer to someone/something	183
18.7	Referring to something or someone mentioned	183
18.8	Referring to what has been said or will be said	183
19	Focusing on the action	184
19.1	Introduction	184
19.2	Focusing on the action using the passive	184
19.3	Situations when the passive is not used	186
19.4	Focusing on the action using <i>si passivante</i> (passive form with <i>si</i>)	188
19.5	<i>Si impersonale</i> (impersonal <i>si</i>)	189
19.6	Focusing on the object of the action	189
II	Actions affecting ourselves and others	190
20	Social interactions	191
20.1	Greeting, welcoming	191
20.2	Introducing oneself and others	192
20.3	Saying goodbye	193
20.4	Wishes	193
20.5	Expressing and receiving thanks, appreciation	194
20.6	Compliments and congratulations	194
20.7	Making and accepting excuses, apologies	195
20.8	Expressing commiseration, sympathy	195
20.9	Using titles, salutations	196
21	Getting other people to do things	198
21.1	Introduction	198
21.2	Giving orders and commands	198
21.3	Making negative requests and commands	200
21.4	Written instructions and recipes	200
21.5	Asking someone to do something	202
21.6	Giving an order using 'command' verbs	203
21.7	<i>Far fare, lasciar fare</i>	203
21.8	Using persuasion	204
21.9	<i>Monologo</i>	205
22	Permission and possibility	206
22.1	Asking or granting permission	206
22.2	Denying permission	207
22.3	Speaking about the ability or opportunity to do something	207
22.4	Making a request	208

CONTENTS

23	Expressing need, obligation or desire	210
23.1	Introduction	210
23.2	Expressing wants	210
23.3	Expressing needs	211
24	Suggesting, proposing, advising and recommending	214
24.1	Giving advice	214
24.2	Making a suggestion	215
24.3	Choices	216
24.4	More expressions of advising or suggesting	217
24.5	Advising someone not to do something, giving a warning	218
24.6	Asking for advice	219
III	Expressing emotions, feelings, attitudes and opinions	220
25	Expressing emotions: positive, negative, other	221
25.1	Introduction	221
25.2	Interjections (positive, negative, other)	221
25.3	Expressing positive emotions	222
25.4	Expressing negative emotions	225
25.5	Expressing other emotions	228
26	Expressing emotions: hope, fear, doubt	231
26.1	Introduction	231
26.2	Expressing hope	231
26.3	Expressing fear, pessimism or regret	232
26.4	Expressing doubt	234
27	Expressing an opinion or belief, agreement or disagreement	236
27.1	Expressing or seeking an opinion or belief	236
27.2	Expressing agreement, disagreement	238
28	Indicating preference, likes and dislikes	240
28.1	Introduction	240
28.2	Expressing likes	240
28.3	Expressing dislikes	242
28.4	Expressing a preference	244
29	Expressing certainty and knowledge	245
29.1	Introduction	245
29.2	<i>Sapere</i>	245
29.3	<i>Essere certo, sicuro, convinto</i>	246
29.4	<i>Non . . . certo, poco certo, incerto, poco sicuro</i>	247
29.5	<i>Pensare, credere, sembrare, parere</i>	247
29.6	<i>Ricordare, dimenticare</i>	247
IV	Putting in context	249
30	Combining messages	250
30.1	Introduction	250
30.2	Combining statements of equal importance	250
30.3	Combining statements of unequal importance	252
30.4	Setting events in a time context	252

CONTENTS

30.5	Sequence of tenses	253
30.6	Infinitives and gerunds	259
30.7	Relationship of tenses in complex texts	261
31	Quoting or reporting events and hearsay	265
31.1	Introduction	265
31.2	Quoting: direct speech	266
31.3	Reporting: indirect speech	267
31.4	Reporting information or quoting hearsay	268
32	Expressing possibility and probability	271
32.1	Introduction	271
32.2	Certainty, uncertainty	271
32.3	Knowing, not knowing	272
32.4	Possible or impossible, probable or improbable	272
32.5	Evident, obvious	273
33	Expressing purpose	274
33.1	Introduction	274
33.2	Purpose involving only the subject of the action	274
33.3	Purpose involving someone or something else	275
33.4	Purpose attached to a person or object	277
34	Expressing causes and reasons	278
34.1	Introduction	278
34.2	Specific people, factors or events responsible	278
34.3	General cause or reason	278
34.4	<i>Il motivo, la causa, la ragione</i>	280
34.5	<i>Causare, provocare, suscitare</i>	281
34.6	<i>Dovere, dovuto</i>	281
34.7	Asking why	282
34.8	Using the imperfect tense to give reasons	282
35	Expressing result, effect and consequence	283
35.1	Introduction	283
35.2	Coordinating conjunctions	283
35.3	Conclusive (result) conjunctions	284
35.4	<i>Così, tale, tanto, troppo</i>	284
35.5	Words expressing result, effect	285
36	Specifying time	287
36.1	Introduction	287
36.2	Expressing same time context	287
36.3	Sequences of events	288
36.4	Defining the limits of a period: 'since'/'until'	290
36.5	Specifying repetition and frequency	291
36.6	Other expressions of time	292
37	Place and manner	293
37.1	Introduction	293
37.2	Place: adverbs	293
37.3	Place: prepositions	294
37.4	Manner	297

CONTENTS

38	Expressing a condition or hypothesis	300
38.1	Introduction	300
38.2	A condition which is likely to be met (probable or highly possible)	300
38.3	A condition which is unlikely to be met (improbable)	301
38.4	A condition which can no longer be met (impossible)	301
38.5	Expressing conditions with other conjunctions	302
38.6	Expressing conditions with gerund, infinitive or participle	303
38.7	Unfinished conditional sentence	304
38.8	Other uses of <i>se</i>	304
39	Expressing reservation, exception and concession	305
39.1	Introduction	305
39.2	Expressing reservation or exception	305
39.3	Modifying a statement by concession	307
V	Expanding the horizons	310
40	Register and style	311
40.1	Introduction	311
40.2	Spoken and written discourse	311
40.3	Differences in lexis	312
40.4	Differences in syntax	312
40.5	Formal and informal registers	315
40.6	Word order	316
41	Oral communication and telephone skills	319
41.1	Introduction	319
41.2	The <i>Lei</i> form	319
41.3	Discourse markers	320
41.4	Techniques of oral communication	322
41.5	Spelling on the telephone	324
41.6	Telephone phrases	324
41.7	On the telephone	326
42	Written communication	328
42.1	Introduction	328
42.2	Business letters	328
42.3	Informal written communication	331
42.4	Extended writing: differences between English and Italian	332
42.5	Writing essays, making connections	332
42.6	Reports	333
42.7	Bureaucratic language	336
42.8	Scientific and technical language	336
42.9	Journalistic language	337
	Appendix I: Spelling and pronunciation	339
	Appendix II: Regular verb forms	344
	Appendix III: Irregular verb forms	350
	Appendix IV: Verbs and prepositions	363
	Appendix V: Sequence of tenses	368
	Index	371

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*.

Part A

Structures

1

The noun group

1.1 Introduction

Nouns are generally used together with definite or indefinite articles (in English *the, a*) and/or adjectives (describing physical or other characteristics), which provide information about the entity or concept. Together they form a group of words called the *noun group* as in the two examples shown below:

una (<i>article</i>) grande (<i>adjective</i>) casa (<i>noun</i>)	a big house
la (<i>article</i>) ragazza (<i>noun</i>) inglese (<i>adjective</i>)	the English girl

Although the noun group may contain other elements (for example, adverbs, prepositional phrases), in this chapter we will only look at the three basic elements of noun/article/adjective, analysing them one by one. In Italian the three components of the noun group also have to be considered as a ‘whole’, in which the three components ‘agree’, so we will also look at how the three elements are used together.

1.2 The noun

1.2.1 What is a noun?

The main function of nouns in any language is to denote an entity (person, object, etc.) or concept (situation, abstract idea, etc.). The noun is the focus of the noun group, so the article and adjectives always agree with the noun in gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural). The two grammatical features of *gender* and *number* determine the form of noun, article and adjective.

1.2.2 Gender

All Italian nouns have either a masculine or a feminine gender. Gender is a purely *grammatical* term. Nouns referring to human beings or animals sometimes have the same *grammatical* gender as their *natural* gender, but not always (see below). Italian native speakers rarely find this a problem. However speakers of other languages often find it difficult to remember the gender of nouns and this creates a problem when it comes to making the other components of the noun group ‘agree’ with the noun.

With non-animate objects, there is not always an obvious explanation for their gender. Why, for example, should **sera** ‘evening’ be feminine, while **giorno** ‘day’ is masculine? Learners of Italian either have to learn and memorise the genders of words or consult a dictionary. Italian dictionaries usually indicate the gender of nouns with abbreviations such as **s.m.** (**sostantivo maschile**) and **s.f.** (**sostantivo femminile**).

Grammatically speaking, Italian does not always have a male and a female of each animal species, for example:

una tigre (tiger) is always feminine.

un ippopotamo (hippopotamus) is always masculine.

In order to provide the other half of the species, you have to say:

una tigre maschio a male tiger

un ippopotamo femmina a female hippopotamus

Some animals – as in English – have two distinct names for the male and the female of the species:

un cane	dog	una cagna	bitch
un gallo	cock	una gallina	hen

Some, but not all, professional and other titles may have a distinct form for the feminine. Nouns whose masculine form ends in **-e** have a feminine form ending either in **-a** or in **-essa**:

cameriere	cameriera	waiter/waitress
infermiere	infermiera	nurse
padrone	padrona	master/mistress
barone	baronessa	baron/baroness
conte	contessa	count/countess
presidente	presidentessa	president
principe	principessa	prince/princess
studente	studentessa	student

Most nouns with masculine form ending in **-tore** have a feminine form ending in **-trice**:

ambasciatore	ambasciatrice	ambassador
attore	attrice	actor
autore	autrice	author
direttore	direttrice	director, manager
imperatore	imperatrice	emperor/empress
pittore	pittrice	painter
scultore	scultrice	sculptor
scrittore	scrittrice	writer
senatore	senatrice	senator

But note the following masculine nouns with a feminine equivalent ending in **-essa**:

dottore	dottoressa	doctor
professore	professoressa	teacher

The use of the masculine/feminine forms of professional titles is fully illustrated in **20.9**.

1.2.3

Number

Unlike gender, the grammatical concept of singular or plural ('number') causes no problem for speakers of English. Occasionally (as in English) a singular noun is used to refer to a collective entity that one might expect to be grammatically plural, for example, **la gente** 'people'. On the other hand, some objects that are singular in English may be plural in Italian, for example, **i capelli** 'hair' and most types of pasta: **i cannelloni**, **le lasagne**, **gli spaghetti**, **le tagliatelle**, **i tortellini**, which an English speaker would refer to in the singular ('This spaghetti is delicious').

1.2.4

Common noun patterns

The gender and number determine the ending of the noun. These patterns of endings are called *inflexions*. Italian nouns can be divided into several different groups, according to their patterns

of inflexion. The three most common patterns, also followed by most adjectives (see 1.4 below), are:

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	-o	-i
Feminine	-a	-e
Masculine or feminine	-e	-i

NOTE Nouns ending in **-e** in the singular, **-i** in the plural, have the same ending whatever their gender.

Examples

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
Masculine ending in -o			
tavolo	table	tavoli	tables
albero	tree	alberi	trees
sbaglio	mistake	sbagli	mistakes
Feminine ending in -a			
donna	woman	donne	women
parola	word	parole	words
scuola	school	scuole	schools
Masculine ending in -e			
padre	father	padri	fathers
studente	student	studenti	students
bicchiere	glass	bicchieri	glasses
Feminine ending in -e			
madre	mother	madri	mothers
occasione	occasion	occasioni	occasions
chiave	key	chiavi	keys

Some nouns, while still following these patterns, present slight variations in their plural endings, as shown below.

Masculine nouns ending in -io

In the plural, nouns ending in **-io** sometimes double the final **i**. Here are some guidelines to help you.

When the **i** is stressed, the plural form has double **ii**:

zio	uncle	zii
rinvio	postponement	rinvii

When the **i** is unstressed, the final **i** does not double in the plural:

studio	study	studi
---------------	-------	--------------

In words where the **i** is not doubled, the final **i** may have a written accent on it, indicating where the stress lies, to distinguish it from a similar plural form with a different pronunciation:

principio (principe)	principle prince	principi or prìncipi prìncipi
--------------------------------	---------------------	---

Tempio (temple) also has an alternative plural ending which distinguishes it from the plural of **tempo** (time):

tempio	temple	tempî or templi
(tempo)	time	tempi)

(In the following sets of examples, the written accent is only there to demonstrate where the stress falls.)

Masculine nouns ending in -co, -go

Masculine nouns ending in **-co** or **-go** in the singular normally form the plural as follows:

- in **-chi** and **-ghi**, with the hard **c, g** sound, if the stress falls on the penultimate syllable:

fuoco	fuochi	fire
ago	aghi	needle
buco	buchi	hole
albèrgo	albèrghi	hotel
sacco	sacchi	sack
sugo	sughi	sauce

This also applies to a few nouns where the stress does not fall on the penultimate syllable, for example:

catàlogo	catàloghi	catalogue
diàlogo	diàloghi	dialogue

- in **-ci** and **-gi**, with a soft **c, g** sound, if the stress falls on the third last syllable (the written accent is only there to demonstrate where the stress falls):

mèdico	mèdici	doctor
aspàrago	aspàragi	asparagus
mònaco	mònaci	monk
biòlogo	biòlogi	biologist

This also applies to a few nouns where the stress falls on the penultimate syllable, for example:

amìco	amìci	friend
nemìco	nemìci	enemy
greco	greci	Greek
porco	porci	pig

Masculine and feminine nouns ending in -ca, -ga

Feminine nouns ending in **-ca, -ga** form their plural in **-che, -ghe**, with a hard **c, g** sound:

amica	amiche	friend
lega	leghe	league

In 1.2.5 below, we look at nouns ending in **-a**, which can refer to either men or women. If these nouns end in **-ca** or **-ga**, they normally form their plural in **-chi, -ghi** for male and **-che, -ghe** for female:

collega	colleague	colleggi (m.)	colleghe (f.)
----------------	-----------	----------------------	----------------------

But note this variation:

belga	(a) Belgian	belgi (m.)	belghe (f.)
--------------	-------------	-------------------	--------------------

Feminine nouns ending in -cia, -gia

Feminine nouns ending in **-cia, -gia** form their plural as follows:

- in **-cie, -gie** when the stress falls on the **i** (as indicated in the examples below), and when the last syllable is preceded by a vowel:

farmacia	farmacie	pharmacy
bugia	bugie	lie
camìcia	camìcie	shirt
ciliègia	ciliègie	cherry
acàcia	acàcie	acacia
valìgia	valìgie	suitcase

- in **-ce**, **-ge** when the ending is preceded by a consonant:

arància	arànce	orange
spiàggia	spiàgge	beach
provincia	province	province
frangia	frange	fringe
faccia	facce	face
pioggia	piogge	rain

Learners often pronounce the endings above incorrectly. The pronunciation of **-cia** is like the 'cha' in English 'charm', **-gia** is like the 'ja' in 'jacket', **-cie** like the 'chai' in 'chair', **-gie** like the 'jay' in 'jaywalker'. There is absolutely no difference in pronunciation between the **-cie** of **camìcie** and the **-ce** of **arance**. The **i** is only pronounced and given its full value as a syllable when it is stressed as in **farmacie** and **bugie**.

1.2.5 Other noun patterns

A large number of Italian nouns do not follow the patterns shown above. Here are some other noun patterns.

Masculine or feminine nouns with singular ending in **-a**

<i>Singular -a (m. or f.)</i>		<i>Plural -i (m.)</i>	<i>Plural -e (f.)</i>
atleta	athlete	atleti	atlete
artista	artist	artisti	artiste
autista	driver	autisti	autiste
giornalista	journalist	giornalisti	giornaliste

The nouns in the above group refer to categories of people. The singular ending **-a** is used whether they are male or female, but the plural form is different according to the 'natural' gender. A very large number of these nouns end in **-ista** (English 'ist') indicating an ideology (**socialista**, **marxista**), profession (**dentista**, **giornalista**), musician (**chitarrista**, **pianista**, **violinista**) or sport (**ciclista**, **tennista**). See also nouns ending in **-ca**, **-ga** in 1.2.4 above.

Masculine nouns with singular ending in **-a**

<i>Singular -a (m.)</i>		<i>Plural -i (m.)</i>
monarca	monarch	monarchi
poeta	poet	poeti
problema	problem	problemi
programma	programme	programmi
sistema	system	sistemi
Papa	Pope	Papi

This pattern is similar to that of masculine and feminine nouns ending in **-a** shown above, but only has masculine forms in both singular and plural.

Feminine nouns with singular ending in **-o**, plural in **-i**

The two nouns shown below are both feminine in the singular, but have different genders in the plural: **mani** is feminine, while **echi** is masculine:

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
mano (<i>f.</i>)	hand	mani (<i>f.</i>)
eco (<i>f.</i>)	echo	echi (<i>m.</i>)

► See 1.2.6 for invariable feminine nouns ending in **-o**.

Nouns with masculine singular in **-o**, feminine plural in **-a**

A number of nouns which are masculine in the singular become feminine in the plural, with an irregular ending in **-a**:

<i>Singular (m.)</i>		<i>Plural (f.)</i>
uovo	egg	uova
miglio	mile	miglia
paio	pair	paia

Nouns with masculine singular in **-o**, masculine plural in **-i** and feminine plural in **-a**

Some nouns which are masculine in the singular have both regular masculine plural in **-i** and irregular feminine plural in **-a**. Many of these denote parts of the body.

<i>Singular (m.)</i>		<i>Plural in -i (m.)</i>	<i>Plural in -a (f.)</i>
dito	finger	diti	dita
braccio	arm	bracci	braccia
ginocchio	knee	ginocchi	ginocchia
labbro	lip	labbri	labbra
osso	bone	ossi	ossa
gesto	gesture	gesti	gesta
lenzuolo	sheet	lenzuoli	lenzuola
muro	wall	muri	mura
urlo	shout	urli	urla

There are differences in the meaning of the two different plurals: the **-a** plural generally emphasises the collective nature of the plural, while the **-i** ending tends to denote either a more figurative sense or the plural as a collection of separate and/or individual elements.

For example, **le dita** are the fingers of your hand, when talked about collectively (**ho le dita gelate** ‘my fingers are frozen’), while **i diti** are the fingers considered individually or separately (**ho due diti rotti** ‘I have two broken fingers’). **Le mura** are the walls of a city (**Lucca è una città circondata da mura romane** ‘Lucca is a city surrounded by Roman walls’), while **i muri** refer to all other kinds of walls. **Le ossa** is the plural form normally used when talking about the skeletal system (**mi fanno male le ossa** ‘my bones ache’), while the masculine plural **gli ossi** is used when talking about separate bones, for example broken bones or dog bones (**ho dato due ossi al cane** ‘I gave the dog two bones’).

1.2.6

Invariable nouns

Invariable nouns have the same form in the plural as in the singular. These include the following groups.

Nouns with stress falling on last syllable

With few exceptions, these are feminine in gender, coming from an older form of the word, of Latin origin, ending in **-tate** (**civitate**, **libertate**), now abbreviated and ending in **-à**:

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
Feminine	città	town	città
	università	university	università
	libertà	freedom	libertà
Masculine	caffè	coffee	caffè

Feminine nouns ending in -i

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
crisi	crisis	crisi
ipotesi	hypothesis	ipotesi
analisi	analysis	analisi

Feminine nouns ending in -ie

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
serie	series	serie
specie	species	specie

But note:

moglie	wife	mogli
---------------	------	--------------

Feminine nouns with abbreviated singular

These end mainly in **-o** and are usually abbreviations, derived from longer or compound words (**automobile** > **auto**, **fotografia** > **foto**):

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
auto	car	auto
moto	motorbike	moto
radio	radio	radio
foto	photo	foto
bici	bike	bici

Nouns of one syllable

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	re	king	re
	sci	ski	sci
Feminine	gru	crane	gru

Words borrowed from another language

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	bar	bar, café	bar
	sport	sport	sport
	film	film	film
Feminine	computer	computer	computer
	reclame	advert	reclame
	gaffe	gaffe	gaffe
	brioche	brioche	brioche

Remember not to add **-s** in the plural (**il film** – **i film**).

1.2.7**Nouns with extremely irregular plurals**

Here are a few nouns whose plural forms are extremely irregular:

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
Masculine	uomo	man	uomini	men
	dio	god	dei	gods
	bue	ox	buoi	oxen
Feminine	ala	wing	ali	wings
	arma	arm	armi	arms

1.3

The article

1.3.1

What is an article?

There are two main types of article in Italian, as there are in English: the *indefinite* article (**articolo indeterminativo**) and the *definite* article (**articolo determinativo**). They distinguish the generic from the specific, the known from the unknown (see also 9.2):

In giardino c'è un cane.

There is **a** dog in the garden. (*unknown dog – indefinite article*)

In giardino c'è il cane.

There is **the** dog in the garden. (*your own dog or a dog you know about – definite article*)

In Italian the form of the article (whether definite or indefinite) has to agree with the gender and number of the noun it relates to, but also depends on the initial letter of the word immediately following it, *whether noun or adjective*. This rule applies also to a third type of article, the partitive article.

1.3.2

Indefinite article *un, uno, una, un'*

Indefinite articles only apply to singular nouns and therefore only have singular forms. The form of the indefinite article varies according to the gender of the noun it relates to, but also whether it comes immediately before a word beginning with a vowel, a consonant or a certain combination of consonants, as shown below.

Masculine nouns

The correct form of indefinite article before a vowel or most consonants is **un**:

un espresso	an espresso
un telefono	a telephone
un nuovo studente	a new student

The correct form of indefinite article before a word starting with **s** + a consonant, **gn**, **pn**, **ps**, **x**, **z** and the semivowel **i** (**j**, **y**) is **uno**:

uno studente	a student
uno stupido errore	a stupid mistake
uno gnomo	a gnome
uno pneumatico	a tyre
uno psichiatra	a psychiatrist
uno xenofobo	a xenophobe (someone who hates foreigners)
uno zoo	a zoo
uno yogurt	a yogurt

Feminine nouns

The correct form of indefinite article before a word starting with a consonant is **una**:

una bottiglia	a bottle
una spremuta	a fresh fruit juice
una grande aranciata	a large orangeade

Before a word starting with a vowel (**a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**), the indefinite article **una** is elided to **un'**:

un'aranciata	an orangeade
un'ampia distesa di neve	a wide expanse of snow

Here are all the indefinite articles shown in table form:

Masculine	un	before a vowel or most consonants	un albergo
	uno	before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	un ragazzo uno sbaglio uno gnomo uno pneumatico uno psicologo uno xilofono uno zoo uno yogurt
Feminine	una	before a consonant	una ragazza
	un'	before a vowel	una brava insegnante un'automobile un'eccellente cena

1.3.3 Definite article *il, lo, la, l', i, gli, le*

The definite article has both singular and plural forms. The form of the definite article varies according to the number (singular/plural) and gender (masculine/feminine) of the noun it relates to, but also whether it comes directly before a word (*whether noun or adjective*) beginning with a vowel, a consonant or a particular combination of consonants, as shown below.

Masculine nouns (singular)

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a consonant is **il** (but there are exceptions – see below):

il cantante	the singer
il famoso albergo	the famous hotel

The correct form of definite article before a word starting with **s** + a consonant, **gn, pn, ps, x, z** and semivowel **i** (**j, y**) is **lo**:

lo strano inglese	the strange Englishman
lo Ionio	the Ionian (sea)
lo yogurt	the yogurt

The correct form of definite article before a word starting with a vowel is **l'**:

l'albergo	the hotel
l'insegnante	the teacher (<i>male</i>)
l'incauto atto	the incautious act

Masculine nouns (plural)

The correct form of definite article before most consonants is **i**:

i ragazzi italiani	the Italian boys
i fiori bianchi e rossi	the white and red flowers

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a vowel or with **s** + a consonant, **gn, pn, ps, x, z** and semivowel **i** (**j, y**) is **gli**:

gli alberghi a cinque stelle	the five star hotels
gli stranieri	the foreigners
gli zii americani	the American uncles
gli yacht	the yachts

Feminine nouns (singular)

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a consonant is **la**:

la cioccolata calda	the hot chocolate
la spremuta	the fresh fruit juice

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a vowel is **l'**:

l'aranciata	the orangeade
l'insegnante	the teacher (<i>female</i>)

Feminine nouns (plural)

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with either vowel or consonant is **le**, which is *never* abbreviated:

le automobili bianche	the white cars
le studentesse	the students (<i>female</i>)

Here are all the definite articles shown in table form:

Masculine singular	il	before most consonants	il ragazzo
	lo	before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	lo sbaglio lo gnomo lo pneumatico lo psicologo lo xilofono lo zoo lo yogurt l'albergo
Masculine plural	l'	before a vowel	i ragazzi i fiori
	gli	before a vowel and before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	gli spaghetti gli gnocchi gli pneumatici gli psicologi gli xenofobi gli zoo gli yogurt
Feminine singular	la	before consonant	la ragazza la bella insegnante
	l'	before vowel	l'automobile l'eccellente cena
Feminine plural	le	before consonant or vowel	le ragazze le studentesse le automobili le belle automobili

1.3.4 Partitive article *dei, degli, delle*

The *partitive* article indicates some *part* (an unspecified number) of a group or category of things/people; it is formed by the preposition **di** combined with the *definite article* and, following a similar pattern, changes according to gender, number and the word that follows.

A partitive article can be used in the plural, indicating 'some':

Vorrei dei biscotti.	I'd like some biscuits.
Vorrei delle lasagne.	I'd like some lasagne.

A partitive article can also be used in the singular, indicating a quantity of something or else an abstract concept:

Vorrei *del* pane.

I'd like some bread.

Vorrei *dello* zucchero.

I'd like some sugar.

C'è ancora *della* speranza.

There is still some hope.

The forms of the partitive article have the same endings as those of the definite article, seen above.

Masculine singular	del	before most consonants	del burro
	dello	before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	dello zucchero
	dell'	before a vowel	dello yogurt dell'olio
Masculine plural	dei	before most consonants	dei fiori
	degli	before a vowel and before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	degli spaghetti degli gnocchi degli yogurt
Feminine singular	della	before consonant	della gente
	dell'	before vowel	dell'aranciata
Feminine plural	delle	before consonant or vowel	delle ragazze delle studentesse delle automobili

► See also 11.6.1 for more details on **del, della** as 'some'.

1.3.5 Use of definite, indefinite or partitive articles

The use of the definite, indefinite or partitive article depends on whether the person or object is known or unknown, or whether an individual or class/species is being referred to, as in the examples below.

- A particular, clearly identified thing or things, known or visible to the speaker and to the person(s) addressed (definite article):

Dammi *gli* stuzzicadenti.

Give me the toothpicks.

- Referring to any toothpicks, without reference to a particular or known set, using partitive article:

Dammi *degli* stuzzicadenti.

Give me some toothpicks.

Known or unknown, specified or unspecified

- (a) The *definite* article is used to specify known people or things:

Flavia vuole portare *l'amico* alla festa.

Flavia wants to take her friend to the party. (= particular friend or boyfriend)

Vorrei *la camera* che abbiamo avuto l'anno scorso.

I would like the room we had last year. (= specific room)

- (b) The *indefinite* article is used, as in English, for an unknown or unspecified individual or thing:

Flavia vuole portare *un amico* alla festa.

Flavia wants to take *a* friend to the party. (= an unspecified friend)

Vorrei *una camera* per stasera, per favore.

I would like a room for tonight. (= any old room, unspecified)

Individual or class/species

- (a) The *definite* article is used when you want to identify a whole class, category or species of things or creatures, distinct from other species or categories, for example an animal species or a category of films:

Il delfino è un mammifero.

The dolphin is a mammal. (= dolphins are mammals)

Mi piacciono i film americani.

I like American films.

Italian usage is different from English, which uses the definite article 'the' in the singular ('the dolphin') but not in the plural ('dolphins').

- (b) The *indefinite* article is used to talk about an individual dolphin or film (unless it is a particular dolphin or film known to us):

Guarda! C'è un delfino!

Look! There is *a* dolphin!

Ho visto un bel film americano alla televisione.

I've seen *a* nice American film on television.

These are only general guidelines. In many cases the use or omission of the article depends on different linguistic habits.

Some particular uses of the definite article

Towns, countries and geographical features

In Italian the definite article is always used with the proper names of geographical features such as mountains, rivers, etc.:

<i>le Alpi, gli Appennini</i>	the Alps, the Appenines
<i>il Tamigi, la Senna</i>	the Thames, the Seine

but *not* with the names of cities:

<i>Firenze</i>	Florence
<i>Londra</i>	London

except when qualified in some way:

la Firenze del Settecento
eighteenth-century Florence

The definite article is used with the names of countries or nations:

Amo l'Italia.

I love Italy.

Il Brasile è campione del mondo.

Brazil is world champion.

To talk about living in or going to a country, using the preposition **in**, the definite article is not normally used:

<i>Vivo in Italia.</i>	I live in Italy.
<i>Andiamo in Spagna.</i>	We go to Spain.
<i>Vivo in Brasile</i>	I live in Brazil.

unless the country is qualified in some way, for example by an adjective:

Si vive meglio nell'Italia meridionale.

One lives better in southern Italy.

The combined form of preposition and definite article is usually used when the name of the country is plural:

Vivo negli Stati Uniti. I live in the USA.

For the combined forms of the definite article with the prepositions **in**, **a**, etc., see 4.2.

Professions

When speaking of somebody’s profession, you should use the article with **fare**:

Faccio l’ingegnere. I am an engineer.

but omit it with **essere**:

Sono ingegnere. I am an engineer.

► See also 8.3.3 and 8.3.4 for further examples of these points.

We can summarise these patterns as follows:

<i>Noun</i>	<i>Article</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Class/group/species	Definite	Il cavallo è un animale docile The horse is a docile animal
Individual member of class	Indefinite	Ho comprato un cavallo I’ve bought a horse
Known	Definite	Il mio cavallo si chiama Max My horse’s name is Max
Unknown	Indefinite	C’è un cavallo nel campo There is a horse in the field

1.4

The adjective

1.4.1

What is an adjective?

An adjective is a word that qualifies the meaning of a noun by adding some specification or description to it. There are many different categories of adjective including demonstrative (**questo, quello**), indefinite (**alcuni, qualche**) including adjectives of quantity (**molto, poco, tanto, troppo**), interrogative (**quale**), negative (**nessun**), and possessive (**mio, tuo**).

In this section however we only cover **aggettivi qualificativi**: *descriptive adjectives* that describe qualities (physical or otherwise) of a person or object, and *classifying adjectives*, such as nationality, which describe the category or classification that the person or thing belongs to (see also Chapter 10). The other types of adjectives will be shown in Chapter 3, together with the corresponding pronouns.

1.4.2

Common adjective patterns

Almost all descriptive adjectives follow the same basic patterns as the nouns (see 1.2.4 above), with their endings depending on gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular/plural). There are two main groups of adjectives:

<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a Singular</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a Plural</i>	<i>ending in -e Singular</i>	<i>ending in -e Plural</i>
<i>Masculine</i>	-o	-i	-e	-i
<i>Feminine</i>	-a	-e	-e	-i

Here are some examples:

<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a Singular</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a Plural</i>	<i>ending in -e Singular</i>	<i>ending in -e Plural</i>
<i>Masculine</i>	piccolo	piccoli	grande	grandi
<i>Feminine</i>	piccola	piccole	grande	grandi

The gender and number of the adjective must agree with the noun to which it refers (see 1.2.2 and 1.2.3). Here are some examples of how this looks in practice:

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Masculine (-o)</i>	libro piccolo	libri piccoli	libro grande	libri grandi
<i>Masculine (-e)</i>	balcone piccolo	balconi piccoli	balcone grande	balconi grandi
<i>Feminine (-a)</i>	penna piccola	penne piccole	penna grande	penne grandi
<i>Feminine (-e)</i>	stazione piccola	stazioni piccole	stazione grande	stazioni grandi

1.4.3 Exceptions to these patterns

Only a few descriptive adjectives have a different pattern from those shown above. Adjectives with singular **-a** (for both masculine and feminine) have masculine plural in **-i** and feminine plural in **-e**. Many of these have endings such as **-ista**, **-asta**, **-ita**, **-ida**, **-ota** (for nouns with similar endings, see 1.2.5 above):

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Masculine/feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>
socialista	socialisti	socialiste
entusiasta	entusiasti	entusiaste
ipocrita	ipocriti	ipocrite
suicida	suicidi	suicide
idiota	idioti	idiote
Il partito socialista	I paesi socialisti	
La bandiera socialista	Le idee socialiste	

1.4.4 Invariable adjectives

Invariable adjectives have the same ending, whatever their gender and number, and retain the same form whatever noun they are referring to. The most common invariable adjectives are:

- Certain colours: **beige**, **blu**, **lilla**, **marrone**, **rosa**, **viola**:

un pantalone blu	navy trousers
una gonna beige	a beige skirt
una giacca lilla	a lilac jacket
i sandali rosa	pink sandals
le scarpe marrone	brown shoes

- Colours indicated by two words: **verde bottiglia**, **giallo canarino**, **bianco latte**:

camicia verde bottiglia	bottle green shirt
pantaloni giallo canarino	canary yellow trousers
lampadine bianco latte	milk white light bulbs

- Pari** 'even, equal', **dispari** 'odd' and **impari** 'uneven, unequal':

numero pari	even number
carte dispari	odd-numbered playing cards
pari condizioni	equal conditions
una lotta impari	an unequal struggle

- Arrosto** (roast):

pollo arrosto	roast chicken
patate arrosto	roast potatoes
carne arrosto	roast meat

1.4.5 Position of adjectives

Unlike English, and many other languages, the most common position for the adjective in the Italian noun group is after the noun. This is the usual position occupied by the adjective, when it is not emphatic and simply expresses a basic, intrinsic characteristic of the noun:

Ho visto un film <i>interessante</i>	I saw an interesting film
Abbiamo visitato una città <i>storica</i>	We visited a historic city

Adjectives of shape, colour and nationality almost *always* come *after* the noun. Note that adjectives of nationality never have a capital letter in Italian:

una tavola <i>rotonda</i>	a round table
una maglia <i>bianca</i>	a white sweater
uno studente <i>francese</i>	a French student

There are a few exceptions, for idiomatic phrases:

un <i>bianco</i> Natale	a white Christmas
--------------------------------	-------------------

Adjectives qualified, for example by an adverb or a prepositional phrase, also come after:

una persona <i>enormemente simpatica</i>	a really nice person
un viaggio <i>pieno di problemi</i>	a journey full of problems

As do participles used as adjectives:

le mele <i>cotte</i>	cooked apples
le patate <i>fritte</i>	fried potatoes

However in Italian, unlike in English, where adjectives almost always come before the noun ('an interesting film'), the order of the noun group is flexible, and changing the position of the adjectives can change the emphasis of the sentence.

Although Italian descriptive adjectives, particularly the most common (for example, **nuovo, vecchio, giovane, piccolo, bello, brutto**), are placed *after* the noun when used to specify it or distinguish it from similar objects, they can be placed *before* the noun when you need to change the emphasis:

Dammi il cacciavite <i>piccolo</i>.	Give me the <i>small</i> screwdriver. (not the big one)
Sul tavolo c'era un <i>piccolo</i> cacciavite.	There was a <i>small</i> screwdriver on the table. (description of screwdriver)
Sandra è una ragazza <i>bella</i>.	Sandra is a <i>beautiful</i> girl. (not merely nice)
Sandra è una <i>bella</i> ragazza.	Sandra is a <i>really beautiful</i> girl.
Ho comprato una macchina <i>nuova</i>.	I bought a <i>new</i> car. (rather than a second-hand one)
Paola si è messa un <i>nuovo</i> vestito.	Paola put on a <i>new</i> dress. (another, a different one)

Some adjectives have a completely different meaning when their position is changed, expressing their *literal* meaning when used *after*, but a quite different, often *figurative*, meaning when used *before*. Here we look at **alto, bello, certo, grande** and **povero**:

un film <i>bello</i>	a <i>nice</i> film
un <i>bel</i> problema	a <i>pretty difficult</i> problem
un ufficiale <i>alto</i>	a <i>tall</i> officer
un <i>alto</i> ufficiale	a <i>high-ranking</i> officer
un uomo <i>grande</i>	a <i>big</i> man (for example, Pavarotti)
un <i>grande</i> uomo	a <i>great</i> man (for example, Napoleon)

Ci sono molti studenti *poveri*.
***Poveri* studenti! L'esame sarà duro!**
Preferisco avere regole *certe*.
Non capisco *certe* regole.

There are many *poor* students.
Poor students! The exam will be hard!
 I prefer to have *reliable* rules.
 I don't understand *certain* (some) rules.

Bello, buono

The adjective **bello**, when positioned before the noun (see example above, **un *bel* problema**), changes its endings in the same way as the definite article **il, lo, l', la**, etc. (see 1.3.3), the partitive article **del, dello, dell', della** (see 1.3.4) and the demonstrative adjective **quel, quello, quell', quella**, etc. (see 3.8.1): **un *bel* libro, un *bello* specchio, un *bell'*uomo, una *bell'*esperienza, una *bella* ragazza.**

The adjective **buono**, on the other hand, follows the pattern of the indefinite article **un, uno, una, un'** (see 1.3.2): ***buon* esempio, *buon* film, *buono* studio, *buona* fortuna, *buon'*esperienza, etc.**

1.4.6

Comparative adjectives

Più, meno

In making a comparison between two elements (whether people, objects or other), you can use a *comparative adjective* to express the concept of 'more' or 'less'. The words **più** ('more') and **meno** ('less') make a descriptive adjective into a comparative adjective:

La mia macchina è *più veloce* della tua.

My car is faster than yours.

La mia macchina è *meno veloce* della tua.

My car is less fast than yours.

Quanto, come

The concept of 'same as' is expressed by using **quanto** or **come** to introduce the second element of the comparison:

La mia macchina è *veloce quanto* la tua.

My car is as fast as yours.

In Italia le melanzane non sono care *come* in Inghilterra.

In Italy aubergines are not *as* dear *as* in England.

As a reinforcement, you can also use the words **tanto**, **altrettanto** or **così** before the first element of the comparison:

La mia collega è *tanto carina quanto efficiente*.

My colleague is *as* pretty *as* she is efficient.

Di, che

Either **di** or **che** introduces the second element of the comparison, where English would use 'than':

Sandro è *più bravo di* Angelo a bridge.

Sandro is better than Angelo at bridge.

È stato *meno facile di quanto* pensassi.

It was less easy than I expected.

È *più facile criticare che* risolvere i problemi.

It's easier to criticise than to solve problems.

Sara è *più carina che* intelligente.

Sara is prettier than she is intelligent.

The choice of **di** or **che** depends on what part of speech the second element of the comparison is, and on its position in the sentence:

più/meno . . .	di (before noun, pronoun, adverb, numeral)
più/meno . . .	che (before adjective, verb, noun/pronoun preceded by preposition)

Further examples of usage are shown in 17.2 and 17.3.

Special forms of comparative

Four of the most common Italian adjectives have a special form of comparative:

buono	good	migliore (più buono)
cattivo/brutto	bad	peggiore (più cattivo)
grande	big	maggiore (più grande)
piccolo	small	minore (più piccolo)

The regular comparative form (shown in brackets) is also possible. While there is little difference between **più buono/migliore** and **più cattivo/peggiore**, there can be a difference in meaning between **maggiore** and **più grande**. **Maggiore** can mean ‘bigger, older/elder’ in a physical sense, but can also mean ‘greater’ in an abstract sense. Similarly, **minore** can mean ‘smaller’ or ‘younger’, but can also mean ‘less, the lesser’ when referring to an abstract quality:

Ho due sorelle. La maggiore si chiama Diana.

I have two sisters. The elder is called Diana.

Noi abbiamo una maggiore responsabilità di voi.

We have a greater responsibility than you.

Il mio fratello minore frequenta la scuola elementare.

My little (younger) brother goes to elementary school.

Lui lavora con minore impegno da quando si è sposato.

He works with less commitment since he got married.

1.4.7

Relative superlatives

To refer to something or somebody as having ‘the most’ of a certain quality, in relation to other objects or people, you use **il più** together with the relevant adjective. This is called the *relative* superlative:

Silvia è la più brava studentessa della nostra classe.

Silvia is the best student in our class.

Pavarotti era il tenore italiano più famoso del mondo.

Pavarotti was the most famous Italian tenor in the world.

Il Po è il più lungo fiume italiano.

The Po is the longest Italian river.

As with the comparative, the four most common Italian adjectives have a special form of relative superlative, as well as the regular one:

buono	good	il migliore (il più buono)	the best
cattivo	bad	il peggiore (il più cattivo)	the worst
grande	big	il maggiore (il più grande)	the biggest, oldest
piccolo	small	il minore (il più piccolo)	the smallest, youngest

As with the comparative, there can be a difference of meaning between the two forms **il maggiore/il più grande** and **il minore/il più piccolo**:

Secondo me, il problema maggiore dei giorni nostri è la droga.

In my opinion, the greatest problem in our time is that of drugs.