

## ITALIAN PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

English and Italian share the same alphabet, with the exception of five letters. (No j, k, w, x, or y. They exist only in foreign words adopted into Italian – jazz, yoga, karate, and weekend). However, the shared letters of the alphabet are often pronounced in very different ways.

The good news is that Italian is a phonetic language, which means that it is spoken the way it is written. No bows or boughs here: once you learn the rules of pronunciation in Italian, it is very regular, and the same combination of letters is pronounced the same all the time! Furthermore, although syllables and words are linked together, they never lose their fundamental sound value.

Start slowly and get a feel for the sounds. Write out the sentence phonetically. Then add the musicality. Italian is a musical language because every sound is pronounced clearly and precisely but remains soft rather than hard.

Websites like. [www.Fonetiks.org](http://www.Fonetiks.org), [www.AskOxford.com](http://www.AskOxford.com), [www.italianlanguageguide.com/italian/pronunciation](http://www.italianlanguageguide.com/italian/pronunciation), and <http://www.phrasebase.com>, among others, have pretty good pronunciation guides with audio clips.

### Buona Fortuna!

#### STRESSES

1. Usually, Italian words are stressed on the next-to-the-last syllable.
2. When the final **-e** is dropped from a word, as happens with some masculine titles when they are directly followed by a proper name, the position of the stress remains unchanged.
3. Following the above rule, **dotTORay**/doctor becomes **dotTOR Nardi**/Doctor Nardi and **profesSORay**/professor becomes **profesSOR Pace**/Professor Pace.
4. When words are stressed on the last vowel, they always have a written accent over that vowel. For instance, **ciòè** (cho-E)(namely) and **città** (chi-TA)(city).

#### CONSONANTS

1. The consonants **B, F, M, N,** and **V** are pronounced as in English. **D, L** and **P** are very similar.
  - **D** is somewhat more explosive than in English, with the tongue near the tip of the upper teeth but with no aspiration
  - **L** is as in English, but sharper and more forward in the mouth.
  - **P** is as in English, but without the aspiration that sometimes accompanies this sound in English
2. **C** before **a, o, u** and before consonants has a sound similar to the English **K**; before **e** and **i** a sound similar to the English **CH** as in church.
3. **CH** is always a hard **K** sound. **Chiesa** (**Key-AYsa**) (church)

4. **G** before **a**, **o**, and **u** and before consonants has a hard **g** sound like the **g** in **good**; when it is before **e** and **i**, it **sounds** like the **g** in **general**.
5. **Gli** sounds like the beginning of the word **liason**, and **Gn** is like the **ny** in **canyon**. (Think **lasagna**!)
6. **Ghi** & **ghe** are always a hard **g** sound.
7. **H** is silent, but is used to denote a hard **K** sound or a hard **G** sound when placed between **C** or **G** and **i** or **e**. (See rules 3 & 5, above.)
8. **Qu** is always pronounced like the English **qu** in **quest**.
9. **R** is different from the English **r**; it is pronounced with one flip of the tongue against the gums of the upper teeth. This is the trilled **r**.
10. Initial **S** before vowels and unvoiced consonants (**c**, **f**, **p**, **q**, **s**, **t**) is pronounced like the **s** in **sun**. (**sacco** – sack)
11. **S** between vowels or before voiced consonants (**b**, **d**, **g**, **l**, **m**, **n**, **r**, **v**) is pronounced like the **s** in **rose**. (more like a **z**) **snello—znello** (slim), **paese –pa-AY-zay** (country)
12. **Sci** or **Sce** is pronounced with a **sh** sound. (**prosciutto** - proSHUto, **scena** – SHAY-na)
13. **Schi** or **Sche** is pronounced as a hard **SK** sound. **Scherzo** –SKER-tso (joke)
14. **T** is approximately the same as in English, but no escaping of breath accompanies it in Italian.
15. **Z** can be voiced, like **ds** in **beds**, or voiceless, like **ts** in **bets**.
16. A double **z**, (**zz**) tends to have the **ts** sound

## DOUBLE CONSONANTS

Many Italian words have double consonants. They occur in any part of the word, but never as the first or last letters. The English language also has several words with double consonants, such as **bookkeeper**, **cattle**, and **tattle**. In Italian, though, double consonants sound stronger than in English. English speakers typically stumble when pronouncing double consonants in Italian since there are so few instances in English that require pronouncing both consonants. Italian uses double consonants as an important part of the pronunciation of the language.

### Say It with Meaning

Not sure how to pronounce double consonants in Italian? Try pronouncing it twice or holding it for an extra beat. English phrases such as "bus stop" and "bad dog" approximate the sound of double consonants in Italian. Think of the way we say "pizza", with the little hitch before the consonants – that's the double consonant in action!

## VOWELS

Italian vowels are always articulated in a sharp, clear fashion, regardless of stress; they are never slurred or pronounced weakly.

1. **A** - sounds like **a** in **father**.
2. **E** - has two sounds: short vowel like **e** in **pen**; long vowel, similar to **ay** in **say**. The **e** at the end of words is always pronounced as **ay**. **Dove?** (**where?**) is pronounced **DOV-ay?**
3. **I** - sounds like **ea** in **tea** or **i** in **marine** (the "long e" in English)
4. **O** - has two sounds: like **o** in **cozy** or similar to **o** in **got**
5. **U** - sounds like **u** in **rude**

## DIPHTHONGS

Diphthongs are two vowels fused to emit a single sound. A diphthong is formed when an unstressed **i** or **u** combines with another vowel (**a**, **e**, **o**) or when the two vowels combine with each other, in which case either the **i** or **u** may remain unstressed. In diphthongs, unstressed **i** and **u** become semivowels approximating in sound the English consonants **y** and **w**, respectively.

Examples:

- *Buono* » good. (Bwono)
- *Chiuso* » closed. (Kewzo)
- *Fiore* » flower. (Fyoray)
- *Più* » more. (Pew)

Italian diphthongs are always pronounced maintaining the sound of the individual vowels, and the closed vowel plays the role of a semivowel or a glide. You should pronounce diphthongs as follows:

- **ai** like 'i' in "fight"
- **au** like 'ow' in "brown"
- **ei** like 'ay' in "say"
- **eu** doesn't exist in English, run 'e' and 'u' together
- **ia** like "ya" in "yard"
- **ie** like 'ye' in "yes"
- **ii** not a diphthong but two syllables
- **io** like "yo" in "Yorick"
- **iu** like "ew" in "few"
- **oi** like 'oy' in "boy"
- **uo** like 'wo' in "won ton"