

Italian Pronunciation — Overview

Goal

Get a quick, practical map of Italian sounds without IPA:

- **Vowels:** stable, pure sounds (no diphthongs like in English).
- **C/G rules:** different sounds before *e*, *i* and with *h*.
- **Special combos:** **gli**, **gn**, **sc(e/i)**, **z**, **s**.
- **Stress & doubles:** where to put emphasis; double consonants matter!

Tip

Italian spelling is highly phonetic. Learn the few core rules and you can read almost anything.

Vowels (pure and stable)

Rule

Italian has five written vowels with *stable* values (avoid gliding):

- **a** as in “father”: *pasta, casa*
- **e** either like “they” (closed) or “bet” (open): *pera, caffè*
- **i** as in “machine”: *vino, Italia*
- **o** either like “go” (closed) or “off” (open): *porta, però*
- **u** as in “flute”: *luna, tutti*

Examples

pane (bread), **sera** (evening), **vino** (wine), **sole** (sun), **luna** (moon).

C/G before E/I and the role of H

Rule (C)

- **c** + **a/o/u** = hard “k”: *casa, cosa, cuore*
- **c** + **e/i** = soft “ch” (like “church”): *cena, cinema*
- **ch** + **e/i** = hard “k”: *che, chi* (as in *spaghetti*)

Rule (G)

- **g** + **a/o/u** = hard “g” (as in “go”): *gatto, gola, gustare*
- **g** + **e/i** = soft “j” (as in “jam”): *gelato, gioco*
- **gh** + **e/i** = hard “g”: *ghetto, ghiaccio*

Examples

cena vs **che**; **giro** vs **ghiro**; **spaghetti, cinema, gelato.**

Special groups: *gli*, *gn*, *sc(e/i)*, *z*, *s*

Rules

- **gli** = single sound (like “lli” merged): *famiglia*, *figlio*
- **gn** = “ny” (like Spanish ñ): *gnocchi*, *bagno*
- **sc + e/i** = “sh”: *scena*, *scimmia*; **sca/sco/scu** = “sk”: *scala*, *scuola*
- **z** = either “ts” or “dz” (both common): *pizza* (“ts”), *zucchero* (“dz” in many regions)
- **s** = “s” or “z” sound; between vowels often “z” (voiced): *casa* (often “z”-like)

Examples

famiglia, *gnocchi*, *scena*, *scuola*, *pizza*, *zucchero*, *casa*.

Stress & Double consonants

Rule

- Stress is usually on the **second-to-last** syllable: *ta-VO-lo* (table).
- Words with a final accent mark stress the **last** syllable: *città*, *perché*, *caffè*.
- **Double consonants** are *held longer* and change meaning: *casa* (house) vs *cassa* (cash register), *pala* (shovel) vs *palla* (ball).

Practice

Clap or tap on the stressed syllable: *a-MI-co*, *Do-me-ni-ca*, *Ma-cca-ri-ni*, *caffè*.

Exercise: Read aloud and mark the stress

Task

Mark the stressed syllable and identify any special sounds:

- ① **gelato, gioco, ghiaccio**
- ② **cena, che, cinema**
- ③ **famiglia, gnocchi, bagno**
- ④ **scena, scimmia, scuola**
- ⑤ **città, perché, caffè**
- ⑥ **casa vs cassa, pala vs palla**