

Complete Guide to Italian Prepositions

Guida Completa alle Preposizioni Italiane

IdiomAry

What are Italian prepositions?

Italian prepositions (preposizioni) are essential words that connect nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words in a sentence. They indicate relationships of time, place, direction, manner, and possession. Understanding prepositions is crucial for constructing grammatically correct and natural-sounding Italian sentences, as they often differ significantly from their English counterparts.

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1 Types of Prepositions

Tipi di Preposizioni - Understanding preposition categories

1.1 Simple Prepositions

Italian has nine simple prepositions that form the foundation of the prepositional system:

- **di** - *of, from, about, by*
Indicates possession, origin, material, or topic.
Il libro di Maria (Maria's book), *Sono di Roma* (I'm from Rome)
- **a** - *to, at, in*
Shows direction, location, or time.
Vado a scuola (I go to school), *Arrivo a mezzogiorno* (I arrive at noon)
- **da** - *from, by, at, since*
Indicates origin, agent, or starting point.
Vengo da casa (I come from home), *È scritto da Marco* (It's written by Marco)
- **in** - *in, into, by*
Shows location, direction, or means of transport.
Sono in Italia (I'm in Italy), *Vado in macchina* (I go by car)
- **con** - *with*
Indicates company, instrument, or manner.
Vado con te (I go with you), *Scrivo con la penna* (I write with a pen)
- **su** - *on, about, over*
Shows position, topic, or approximate quantity.
Il libro è su tavolo (The book is on the table)
- **per** - *for, through, by*
Indicates purpose, duration, or means.
Studio per l'esame (I study for the exam)
- **tra/fra** - *between, among, in*
Shows position between things or future time.
Tra te e me (Between you and me), *Arrivo tra un'ora* (I'll arrive in an hour)

1.2 Articulated Prepositions

Simple prepositions combine with definite articles to form articulated prepositions:

	il	lo	la	i	gli	le
di	del	dello	della	dei	degli	delle
a	al	allo	alla	ai	agli	alle
da	dal	dallo	dalla	dai	dagli	dalle
in	nel	nello	nella	nei	negli	nelle
su	sul	sullo	sulla	sui	sugli	sulle

2 The Preposition DI

La Preposizione DI - Expressing possession, origin, and specification

2.1 Main Uses of DI

2.1.1 Possession and Relationship

- **La macchina di Paolo** - *Paolo's car*
- **Il fratello della mia amica** - *My friend's brother*
- **Le chiavi di casa** - *The house keys*

2.1.2 Origin and Provenance

- **Sono di Milano** - *I'm from Milan*
- **Il vino del Chianti** - *Wine from Chianti*
- **Una lettera di mia madre** - *A letter from my mother*

2.1.3 Material and Composition

- **Un anello d'oro** - *A gold ring*
- **Una camicia di cotone** - *A cotton shirt*
- **Una statua di marmo** - *A marble statue*

2.1.4 Topic and Subject

- **Parliamo di politica** - *We talk about politics*
- **Un libro di storia** - *A history book*
- **Il professore di italiano** - *The Italian professor*

2.1.5 Partitive Use

- **Bevo del caffè** - *I drink some coffee*
- **Mangio della pasta** - *I eat some pasta*
- **Compro delle mele** - *I buy some apples*

3 The Preposition A

La Preposizione A - Indicating direction, location, and time

3.1 Main Uses of A

3.1.1 Direction and Destination

- **Vado a Roma** - *I go to Rome*
- **Torniamo a casa** - *We go back home*
- **Andiamo al cinema** - *We go to the cinema*

3.1.2 Location (Cities and Small Places)

- **Vivo a Firenze** - *I live in Florence*
- **Sono al bar** - *I'm at the bar*
- **Ti aspetto alla stazione** - *I'll wait for you at the station*

3.1.3 Time Expressions

- **Alle otto** - *At eight o'clock*
- **A mezzogiorno** - *At noon*
- **A Natale** - *At Christmas*

3.1.4 Indirect Object

- **Parlo a Maria** - *I speak to Maria*
- **Scrivo ai miei genitori** - *I write to my parents*
- **Telefono al dottore** - *I call the doctor*

3.1.5 Manner and Style

- **Una camicia a righe** - *A striped shirt*
- **Fatto a mano** - *Handmade*
- **A piedi** - *On foot*

4 The Preposition DA

La Preposizione DA - Expressing origin, agent, and purpose

4.1 Main Uses of DA

4.1.1 Origin and Starting Point

- **Vengo da scuola** - *I come from school*
- **Il treno parte da Milano** - *The train leaves from Milan*
- **Dall'inizio alla fine** - *From beginning to end*

4.1.2 Agent in Passive Voice

- **Il libro è scritto da Dante** - *The book is written by Dante*
- **La casa è costruita da mio padre** - *The house is built by my father*
- **È amato da tutti** - *He is loved by everyone*

4.1.3 Purpose and Function

- **Una macchina da corsa** - *A racing car*
- **Un vestito da sera** - *An evening dress*
- **Scarpe da tennis** - *Tennis shoes*

4.1.4 Time Duration (since/for)

- **Studio italiano da tre anni** - *I've been studying Italian for three years*
- **Non lo vedo da molto tempo** - *I haven't seen him for a long time*
- **Da bambino giocavo sempre** - *As a child, I always played*

4.1.5 At Someone's Place

- **Vado dal dottore** - *I go to the doctor's*
- **Sono da Maria** - *I'm at Maria's place*
- **Ceniamo dai nonni** - *We have dinner at the grandparents'*

5 The Preposition IN

La Preposizione IN - Indicating location, time, and manner

5.1 Main Uses of IN

5.1.1 Location (Countries, Regions, Large Places)

- **Vivo in Italia** - *I live in Italy*
- **Siamo in Toscana** - *We are in Tuscany*
- **Studio in biblioteca** - *I study in the library*

5.1.2 Means of Transportation

- **Vado in macchina** - *I go by car*
- **Viaggiamo in treno** - *We travel by train*
- **Andiamo in aereo** - *We go by plane*

5.1.3 Time Expressions

- **In estate** - *In summer*
- **Nel 2020** - *In 2020*
- **In cinque minuti** - *In five minutes*

5.1.4 Material and Language

- **Scritto in italiano** - *Written in Italian*
- **Una statua in bronzo** - *A bronze statue*
- **Parlare in inglese** - *To speak in English*

6 Other Important Prepositions

Altre Preposizioni Importanti - CON, SU, PER, TRA/FRA

6.1 CON (with)

6.1.1 Company and Association

- **Vado con te** - *I go with you*
- **Parlo con il professore** - *I speak with the professor*
- **Caffè con latte** - *Coffee with milk*

6.1.2 Instrument and Means

- **Scrivo con la matita** - *I write with a pencil*
- **Taglio con il coltello** - *I cut with a knife*
- **Apro con la chiave** - *I open with the key*

6.2 SU (on, about, over)

6.2.1 Position and Location

- **Il libro è sul tavolo** - *The book is on the table*
- **Camminiamo sulla spiaggia** - *We walk on the beach*
- **L'uccello vola sulla casa** - *The bird flies over the house*

6.2.2 Topic and Subject

- **Un libro sulla storia** - *A book about history*
- **Discutiamo sul problema** - *We discuss about the problem*
- **Informazioni sulla città** - *Information about the city*

6.2.3 Approximate Quantity

- **Sui trent'anni** - *About thirty years old*
- **Costa sui cinquanta euro** - *It costs about fifty euros*
- **Siamo sui venti studenti** - *We are about twenty students*

6.3 PER (for, through, by)

6.3.1 Purpose and Reason

- **Studio per l'esame** - *I study for the exam*
- **Lo faccio per te** - *I do it for you*
- **È famoso per i suoi libri** - *He's famous for his books*

6.3.2 Duration of Time

- **Studio per tre ore** - *I study for three hours*
- **Resterò per una settimana** - *I'll stay for a week*
- **Per tutta la vita** - *For a whole lifetime*

6.3.3 Movement Through

- **Passare per il centro** - *To pass through the center*
- **Camminiamo per la strada** - *We walk through the street*
- **Viaggiare per l'Europa** - *To travel through Europe*

6.4 TRA/FRA (between, among, in)

6.4.1 Position Between

- **Tra te e me** - *Between you and me*
- **La casa è tra il bar e la farmacia** - *The house is between the bar and the pharmacy*
- **Scegli tra questi due** - *Choose between these two*

6.4.2 Future Time

- **Arrivo tra un'ora** - *I'll arrive in an hour*
- **L'esame è fra due giorni** - *The exam is in two days*
- **Tra poco partiamo** - *We'll leave in a little while*

6.4.3 Among a Group

- **È il più bravo tra tutti** - *He's the best among all*
- **Tra gli studenti c'è Marco** - *Among the students there's Marco*
- **Scegli fra queste opzioni** - *Choose among these options*

7 Prepositions with Verbs

Preposizioni con i Verbi - Verb-preposition combinations

7.1 Verbs Requiring Specific Prepositions

7.1.1 Verbs + DI

- **Avere bisogno di** - *to need* - Ho bisogno di aiuto
- **Avere paura di** - *to be afraid of* - Ha paura di volare
- **Parlare di** - *to talk about* - Parliamo di lavoro
- **Dimenticarsi di** - *to forget* - Mi dimentico di chiamarlo
- **Finire di** - *to finish* - Finisco di studiare

7.1.2 Verbs + A

- **Andare a** - *to go* - Vado a lavorare
- **Imparare a** - *to learn* - Imparo a cucinare
- **Iniziare a** - *to start* - Inizio a studiare
- **Pensare a** - *to think about* - Penso a te
- **Telefonare a** - *to phone* - Telefono a mia madre

7.1.3 Verbs + DA

- **Dipendere da** - *to depend on* - Dipende da te
- **Venire da** - *to come from* - Vengo da Roma
- **Scappare da** - *to escape from* - Scappa da casa
- **Uscire da** - *to exit from* - Esco da scuola
- **Tornare da** - *to return from* - Torno dalle vacanze

7.1.4 Verbs + IN

- **Entrare in** - *to enter* - Entro in classe
- **Andare in** - *to go* - Vado in Italia
- **Credere in** - *to believe in* - Credo in te
- **Riuscire in** - *to succeed in* - Riesce in tutto

7.1.5 Verbs + CON

- **Parlare con** - *to speak with* - Parlo con lui
- **Sposarsi con** - *to marry* - Si sposa con Maria
- **Giocare con** - *to play with* - Gioca con i bambini
- **Litigare con** - *to fight with* - Litiga con tutti

8 Prepositions of Place

Preposizioni di Luogo - Expressing location and movement

8.1 Static Location (Where?)

Preposition	Usage	Example
in	countries, regions	Vivo in Francia
a	cities, small places	Sono a Roma
su	on, above	Sul tavolo
sotto	under, below	Sotto il letto
davanti a	in front of	Davanti alla casa
dietro	behind	Dietro la scuola
accanto a	next to	Accanto al bar
vicino a	near	Vicino alla stazione
lontano da	far from	Lontano dal centro

8.2 Movement (Where to/from?)

Direction	Preposition	Example
To cities	a	Vado a Milano
To countries	in	Vado in Spagna
From places	da	Vengo da casa
Through	per	Passo per il centro
Towards	verso	Cammino verso casa
Along	lungo	Lungo il fiume

9 Prepositions of Time

Preposizioni di Tempo - Expressing temporal relationships

9.1 Specific Time Points

Time Expression	Preposition	Example
Clock time	a	alle otto
Months	in	in gennaio
Years	in	nel 2020
Seasons	in	in estate
Days of week	(none)	lunedì
Dates	(none)	il 5 maggio
Christmas/Easter	a	a Natale

9.2 Duration and Periods

- **Per + duration** - *Studio per tre ore* - I study for three hours
- **Da + starting point** - *Studio da tre anni* - I've been studying for three years
- **In + time needed** - *Finisco in un'ora* - I'll finish in an hour
- **Tra/fra + future time** - *Arrivo tra mezz'ora* - I'll arrive in half an hour

- **Durante + period** - *Durante la lezione* - *During the lesson*

10 Common Mistakes and Tips

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

1. **A vs IN with places:** Use 'a' for cities, 'in' for countries
2. **DA vs DI with origin:** Use 'da' for movement, 'di' for static origin
3. **Wrong articulated forms:** Remember agreement with gender/number
4. **Direct translation:** Italian prepositions don't always match English ones
5. **Omitting prepositions:** Some verbs require specific prepositions
6. **CON + articles:** 'Con' doesn't combine with articles (con il, not col)

Pro Tips for Mastering Italian Prepositions:

1. **Learn in context:** Study prepositions within phrases and sentences
2. **Memorize verb combinations:** Each verb has its preferred preposition
3. **Practice articulated forms:** Master the combinations with articles
4. **Use visual aids:** Draw diagrams for spatial prepositions
5. **Compare with English:** Note differences to avoid false friends
6. **Read extensively:** Exposure to authentic texts builds intuition

11 Quick Reference Table

Prep.	Main Uses	Examples
DI	Possession, origin, material	La casa di Marco, Sono di Roma, Anello d'oro
A	Direction, cities, time	Vado a scuola, Vivo a Milano, Alle otto
DA	Origin, agent, duration	Vengo da casa, Scritto da Dante, Da tre anni
IN	Countries, transport, time	Vivo in Italia, In macchina, In estate
CON	Company, instrument	Con te, Con la penna
SU	On, about, approximately	Sul tavolo, Sui trent'anni

Prep.	Main Uses	Examples
PER	Purpose, duration, through	Per l'esame, Per un'ora, Per la strada
TRA/FRA	Between, among, in (time)	Tra noi, Tra un'ora

12 Practice Exercises

Exercise 1: Choose the correct preposition

Complete with the appropriate simple preposition:

1. Vado _____ scuola _____ piedi.
2. Il libro _____ Mario è _____ tavolo.
3. Parto _____ Roma _____ Milano.
4. Studio italiano _____ tre anni.

Exercise 2: Articulated prepositions

Combine the preposition with the article:

1. di + il = _____
2. a + gli = _____
3. in + la = _____
4. su + le = _____

Exercise 3: Verb + preposition

Complete with the correct preposition:

1. Ho bisogno _____ aiuto.
2. Penso _____ te.
3. Dipende _____ te.
4. Credo _____ questo progetto.

13 Practice Strategies

To master Italian prepositions:

1. **Learn common collocations** - memorize frequent verb-preposition combinations

2. **Practice with real contexts** - use prepositions in meaningful sentences
3. **Create mental maps** for spatial prepositions with visual associations
4. **Study articulated prepositions systematically** - practice the combinations daily
5. **Compare with your native language** but don't rely on direct translation
6. **Use flashcards** for verb-preposition combinations
7. **Listen to native speakers** to develop natural prepositional intuition
8. **Keep a preposition journal** noting new combinations you encounter

Remember: Italian prepositions are logical but often different from English. Focus on the most common uses first, then gradually expand your knowledge. Consistent practice and exposure to authentic Italian will help you develop natural prepositional intuition!

14 Advanced Preposition Usage

Uso Avanzato delle Preposizioni - Complex prepositional expressions

14.1 Compound Prepositions

Italian also uses compound prepositions formed by combining simple prepositions with other words:

- **invece di** - *instead of* - Invece di studiare, guardo la TV
- **insieme a** - *together with* - Vado insieme ai miei amici
- **grazie a** - *thanks to* - Grazie al tuo aiuto, ho capito
- **a causa di** - *because of* - A causa del traffico, sono in ritardo
- **prima di** - *before* - Prima di partire, saluto tutti
- **dopo di** - *after* - Dopo di te, passo io
- **accanto a** - *next to* - La banca è accanto alla farmacia
- **davanti a** - *in front of* - Ti aspetto davanti al cinema
- **dietro a** - *behind* - Il parcheggio è dietro alla scuola
- **sopra a** - *above* - L'appartamento sopra al nostro

14.2 Prepositions in Idiomatic Expressions

- **di quando in quando** - *from time to time*
- **di fronte a** - *in front of, facing*
- **a proposito di** - *speaking of, about*
- **per quanto riguarda** - *as for, regarding*
- **nei confronti di** - *towards, regarding*
- **a differenza di** - *unlike, different from*
- **per via di** - *because of, due to*
- **al di là di** - *beyond*

15 Regional Variations

Variazioni Regionali - Different prepositional usage across Italy

15.1 Common Regional Differences

- **Northern Italy** - *"In piazza" vs "sulla piazza" (in/on the square)*
- **Southern Italy** - *Different usage with time expressions*
- **Formal vs Informal** - *Some prepositions vary in register*

Note: While regional variations exist, standard Italian rules apply in formal writing and official communication. Learning standard usage is recommended for beginners.

16 Answer Key to Exercises

Exercise 1 - Correct prepositions:

1. Vado **a** scuola **a** piedi.
2. Il libro **di** Mario è **sul** tavolo.
3. Parto **da** Roma **per** Milano.
4. Studio italiano **da** tre anni.

Exercise 2 - Articulated prepositions:

1. di + il = **del**

2. a + gli = **agli**

3. in + la = **nella**

4. su + le = **sulle**

Exercise 3 - Verb + preposition:

1. Ho bisogno **di** aiuto.

2. Penso **a** te.

3. Dipende **da** te.

4. Credo **in** questo progetto.

17 Additional Practice Activities

Challenge Exercise: Complete sentences

Fill in all missing prepositions:

1. Maria va _____ università _____ autobus ogni giorno.
2. Il regalo _____ mia sorella è _____ scatola _____ tavolo.
3. Parliamo _____ politica _____ il professore _____ storia.
4. _____ tre giorni parto _____ le vacanze _____ Spagna.
5. Il libro scritto _____ Dante si trova _____ biblioteca _____ centro.

Translation Exercise:

Translate paying attention to prepositions:

1. I come from Rome but I live in Milan.
2. The book about Italian history is on the table.
3. We talk with the teacher for two hours.
4. I'll arrive in Florence in three days.
5. The letter from my mother is in the drawer.

Buona fortuna con lo studio delle preposizioni italiane!
Good luck with studying Italian prepositions!