

Complete Guide to Italian Verbs

Guida Completa ai Verbi Italiani

IdiomAry

What are Italian verbs?

Italian verbs (verbi) are the backbone of the Italian language. They express actions, states, and conditions and are highly inflected, changing form based on person, number, tense, mood, and voice. Mastering Italian verb conjugation is essential for fluency and allows you to express complex ideas with precision and elegance.

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1 Verb Classifications

Classificazione dei Verbi - Understanding verb categories

1.1 By Conjugation Groups

Italian verbs are divided into three main conjugation groups based on their infinitive endings:

- **First Conjugation (-ARE)** - *parlare, amare, studiare*
These are the most numerous and regular verbs in Italian.
Parlare (to speak), *amare* (to love), *studiare* (to study)
- **Second Conjugation (-ERE)** - *vedere, credere, vendere*
These verbs have more irregular forms than first conjugation.
Vedere (to see), *credere* (to believe), *vendere* (to sell)
- **Third Conjugation (-IRE)** - *sentire, dormire, finire*
Divided into two sub-groups: regular and -isc- insertion verbs.
Sentire (to hear), *dormire* (to sleep), *finire* (to finish)

1.2 By Function

- **Auxiliary Verbs** - *essere, avere*
Essential for forming compound tenses.
Essere (to be), *avere* (to have)
- **Modal Verbs** - *dovere, potere, volere*
Express necessity, ability, or desire.
Dovere (must), *potere* (can), *volere* (to want)
- **Reflexive Verbs** - *alzarsi, lavarsi, divertirsi*
Actions performed on oneself.
Alzarsi (to get up), *lavarsi* (to wash oneself)
- **Impersonal Verbs** - *piovere, nevicare, bisognare*
Used only in third person singular.
Piovere (to rain), *nevicare* (to snow)

2 Present Tense (Presente)

Il Tempo Presente - Actions happening now or regularly

2.1 Regular Conjugations

2.1.1 First Conjugation (-ARE): Parlare

Person	Italian	English
io	parlo	I speak
tu	parli	you speak
lui/lei	parla	he/she speaks
noi	parliamo	we speak
voi	parlate	you (plural) speak
loro	parlano	they speak

2.1.2 Second Conjugation (-ERE): Credere

Person	Italian	English
io	credo	I believe
tu	credi	you believe
lui/lei	crede	he/she believes
noi	crediamo	we believe
voi	credete	you (plural) believe
loro	credono	they believe

2.1.3 Third Conjugation (-IRE): Sentire

Person	Italian	English
io	sento	I hear/feel
tu	senti	you hear/feel
lui/lei	sente	he/she hears/feels
noi	sentiamo	we hear/feel
voi	sentite	you (plural) hear/feel
loro	sentono	they hear/feel

2.1.4 Third Conjugation with -ISC-: Finire

Person	Italian	English
io	finisco	I finish
tu	finisci	you finish
lui/lei	finisce	he/she finishes
noi	finiamo	we finish
voi	finite	you (plural) finish
loro	finiscono	they finish

2.2 Irregular Present Tense Verbs

2.2.1 Essere (to be)

io	sono	I am
tu	sei	you are
lui/lei	è	he/she is
noi	siamo	we are
voi	siete	you (plural) are
loro	sono	they are

2.2.2 Avere (to have)

io	ho	I have
tu	hai	you have
lui/lei	ha	he/she has
noi	abbiamo	we have
voi	avete	you (plural) have
loro	hanno	they have

2.2.3 Other Important Irregular Verbs

- **Andare (to go)** - *vado, vai, va, andiamo, andate, vanno*
- **Fare (to do/make)** - *faccio, fai, fa, facciamo, fate, fanno*
- **Stare (to stay/be)** - *sto, stai, sta, stiamo, state, stanno*
- **Dare (to give)** - *do, dai, dà, diamo, date, danno*
- **Sapere (to know)** - *so, sai, sa, sappiamo, sapete, sanno*
- **Uscire (to go out)** - *esco, esci, esce, usciamo, uscite, escono*

3 Past Tenses

I Tempi Passati - Expressing past actions

3.1 Passato Prossimo (Present Perfect)

The most common past tense, formed with auxiliary verb + past participle.

3.1.1 With Avere

- **Ho parlato** - *I have spoken/I spoke*
Used with transitive verbs and some intransitive verbs.
- **Hai mangiato la pizza?** - *Did you eat the pizza?*
- **Abbiamo studiato italiano** - *We studied Italian*
- **Hanno lavorato tutto il giorno** - *They worked all day*

3.1.2 With Essere

- **Sono andato/a** - *I went*
Used with intransitive verbs of movement and reflexive verbs.
- **È arrivata tardi** - *She arrived late*
- **Siamo partiti presto** - *We left early*
- **Si sono divertiti** - *They had fun*

3.2 Imperfetto (Imperfect)

Used for ongoing past actions, descriptions, and habitual actions.

3.2.1 Regular Formation

Remove infinitive ending and add imperfect endings:

	-ARE	-ERE	-IRE
io	parlavo	credevo	sentivo
tu	parlavi	credevi	sentivi
lui/lei	parlava	credeva	sentiva
noi	parlavamo	credevamo	sentivamo
voi	parlavate	credevate	sentivate
loro	parlavano	credevano	sentivano

3.2.2 Usage Examples

- **Quando ero bambino, giocavo sempre** - *When I was a child, I always played*
- **Pioveva mentre camminavamo** - *It was raining while we were walking*
- **La casa era grande e bella** - *The house was big and beautiful*

3.3 Trapassato Prossimo (Past Perfect)

Expresses actions completed before other past actions.

- **Avevo già mangiato quando sono arrivato** - *I had already eaten when I arrived*
- **Era partita prima che io arrivassi** - *She had left before I arrived*

4 Future Tenses

I Tempi Futuri - Expressing future actions

4.1 Futuro Semplice (Simple Future)

4.1.1 Regular Formation

For -ARE and -ERE verbs, change the final -e to -ò and add endings:

Person	Parlare	Credere
io	parlerò	crederò
tu	parlerai	crederai
lui/lei	parlerà	crederà
noi	parleremo	crederemo
voi	parlerete	crederete
loro	parleranno	crederanno

4.1.2 Common Irregular Future Verbs

- **Essere** - sarò, sarai, sarà, saremo, sarete, saranno
- **Avere** - avrò, avrai, avrà, avremo, avrete, avranno
- **Andare** - andrò, andrai, andrà, andremo, andrete, andranno
- **Fare** - farò, farai, farà, faremo, farete, faranno
- **Venire** - verrò, verrai, verrà, verremo, verrete, verranno

4.2 Futuro Anteriore (Future Perfect)

Expresses actions that will be completed before other future actions.

- **Avrò finito il lavoro prima che tu arrivi** - *I will have finished the work before you arrive*
- **Quando sarà arrivato, potremo partire** - *When he will have arrived, we can leave*

5 Conditional Mood

Il Modo Condizionale - Expressing hypothetical actions

5.1 Condizionale Presente (Present Conditional)

Used for polite requests, hypothetical situations, and expressing desires.

Person	Parlare	Credere
io	parlerei	crederei
tu	parleresti	crederesti
lui/lei	parlerebbe	crederebbe
noi	parleremmo	crederemmo
voi	parlereste	credereste
loro	parlerebbero	crederebbero

5.2 Usage Examples

- **Vorrei un caffè, per favore** - *I would like a coffee, please*
- **Andresti al cinema con me?** - *Would you go to the cinema with me?*
- **Se avessi tempo, viaggierei di più** - *If I had time, I would travel more*

6 Subjunctive Mood

Il Modo Congiuntivo - Expressing doubt, emotion, and subjectivity

6.1 Congiuntivo Presente (Present Subjunctive)

	-ARE	-ERE	-IRE
io	parli	creda	senta
tu	parli	creda	senta
lui/lei	parli	creda	senta
noi	parliamo	crediamo	sentiamo
voi	parliate	crediate	sentiate
loro	parlino	credano	sentano

6.2 When to Use Subjunctive

- After expressions of emotion *Sono felice che tu venga*
- After expressions of doubt *Dubito che sia vero*
- After expressions of will/desire *Voglio che tu studi*
- After certain conjunctions *Benché sia difficile, ci provo*

7 Imperative Mood

Il Modo Imperativo - Giving commands and instructions

7.1 Positive Commands

Person	Parlare	Credere	Sentire
tu	parla!	credi!	senti!
Lei	parli!	creda!	senta!
noi	parliamo!	crediamo!	sentiamo!
voi	parlate!	credete!	sentite!

7.2 Negative Commands

- **Tu form** - *Non parlare!* (Don't speak!)
- **Lei form** - *Non parli!* (Don't speak! - formal)
- **Voi form** - *Non parlate!* (Don't speak! - plural)

8 Reflexive Verbs

I Verbi Riflessivi - Actions performed on oneself

8.1 Common Reflexive Verbs

- **Alzarsi** - *to get up*
Mi alzo alle sette ogni mattina.
I get up at seven every morning.
- **Lavarsi** - *to wash oneself*
Ti lavi i denti dopo i pasti?
Do you brush your teeth after meals?
- **Vestirsi** - *to get dressed*
Si veste sempre elegantemente.
He/she always dresses elegantly.
- **Divertirsi** - *to have fun*
Ci divertiamo molto alle feste.
We have a lot of fun at parties.
- **Sposarsi** - *to get married*
Vi sposate il prossimo anno?
Are you getting married next year?

8.2 Reflexive Pronouns

Person	Pronoun
io	mi
tu	ti
lui/lei	si
noi	ci
voi	vi
loro	si

9 Modal Verbs

I Verbi Modali - Expressing ability, necessity, and desire

9.1 Dovere (must/have to)

- **Present** - *devo, devi, deve, dobbiamo, dovete, devono*
- **Usage** - *Devo studiare per l'esame - I must study for the exam*

9.2 Potere (can/to be able to)

- **Present** - *posso, puoi, può, possiamo, potete, possono*
- **Usage** - *Puoi aiutarmi? - Can you help me?*

9.3 Volere (to want)

- **Present** - *voglio, vuoi, vuole, vogliamo, volete, vogliono*
- **Usage** - *Voglio imparare l'italiano - I want to learn Italian*

9.4 Sapere (to know how to)

- **Present** - *so, sai, sa, sappiamo, sapete, sanno*
- **Usage** - *So cucinare la pasta - I know how to cook pasta*

10 Common Mistakes and Tips

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

1. **Wrong auxiliary verb:** Confusing essere/avere in compound tenses
2. **Agreement errors:** Forgetting past participle agreement with essere
3. **Subjunctive avoidance:** Using indicative when subjunctive is required
4. **False friends:** Assuming similarity with English verb patterns
5. **Reflexive pronoun placement:** Incorrect positioning of pronouns

Pro Tips for Mastering Italian Verbs:

1. **Learn patterns:** Focus on regular conjugation patterns first
2. **Practice daily:** Use different tenses in everyday conversations
3. **Memorize key irregulars:** Master the most common irregular verbs
4. **Use mnemonics:** Create memory aids for difficult conjugations
5. **Read and listen:** Expose yourself to authentic Italian content

11 Quick Reference Table

Tense/Mood	Usage	Example
Presente	Current/habitual actions	Parlo italiano
Passato Prossimo	Completed past actions	Ho parlato con lui
Imperfetto	Ongoing past actions	Parlavo spesso
Futuro	Future actions	Parlerò domani
Condizionale	Hypothetical/polite	Parlerei se potessi
Congiuntivo	Doubt/emotion/will	Spero che parli
Imperativo	Commands	Parla più forte!

12 Practice Exercises

Exercise 1: Conjugate in Present Tense

Conjugate these verbs for all persons:

1. Mangiare (to eat): io _____, tu _____, lui/lei _____
2. Scrivere (to write): noi _____, voi _____, loro _____

3. Partire (to leave): io _____, tu _____, lui/lei _____

Exercise 2: Choose the correct auxiliary

Complete with avere or essere:

1. Maria _____ mangiato la pizza.
2. Noi _____ andati al cinema.
3. Loro _____ studiato tutta la notte.

Exercise 3: Transform to Past

Change these present tense sentences to passato prossimo:

1. Studio italiano. → _____ italiano.
2. Vai al mercato. → _____ al mercato.
3. Dormiamo bene. → _____ bene.

13 Practice Strategies

To master Italian verbs:

1. **Start with regular patterns** and build your foundation systematically
2. **Practice conjugation drills** daily for 10-15 minutes
3. **Use verbs in context** rather than memorizing isolated forms
4. **Focus on the most common verbs** first (top 100 Italian verbs)
5. **Practice with native speakers** to develop natural rhythm and intonation
6. **Keep a verb journal** noting new verbs and their conjugations
7. **Use online conjugation tools** to verify your knowledge
8. **Read Italian texts** paying attention to verb usage patterns

Remember: Italian verbs follow logical patterns. Once you understand the system, conjugation becomes much easier. Be patient with irregulars and practice consistently!

Buona fortuna con lo studio dei verbi italiani!
Good luck with studying Italian verbs!