

**Your handy guide to
everyday words and expressions**

Italian Phrases

FOR
DUMMIES®

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®

- ✓ **Quick & easy approach gives you language fundamentals up front**
- ✓ **Words to Know sections help you find the right words fast**
- ✓ **Pronunciation keys let you talk the talk**

Francesca Romana Onofri
Karen Möller
Coauthors of Italian For Dummies



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Dummies***

**by Francesca Romana
Onofri and Karen Antje
Möller**



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After her university studies in linguistics and Spanish and English language and literature, **Francesca Romana Onofri** lived abroad for several years to better her understanding of the cultures and languages of different countries. In Spain and Ireland, she worked as an Italian and Spanish teacher, as well as a translator and interpreter at cultural events. In Germany, she was responsible for communication and special events at a museum of modern art, but even then she never gave up her passion for languages: She was an Italian coach and teacher at the Opera Studio of the Cologne Opera House and did translations — especially in the art field. Back in Italy, Francesca has edited several Italian books and works as a translator of art books, as well as a cultural events organizer and educator.

Karen Möller is currently studying Italian and English linguistics, literature, and culture. Before entering academia, Karen worked in the field of public relations and wrote articles for all kinds of fashion magazines and newspapers. She has had the occasion to work on German-Italian projects, including verb, vocabulary, and grammar handbooks and Italian exercise books.

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Introduction

As society becomes more and more international in nature, knowing how to say at least a few words in other languages becomes more and more useful. Inexpensive airfares make travel abroad a more realistic option. Global business environments necessitate overseas travel. You may have friends and neighbors who speak other languages, or you may want to get in touch with your heritage by learning a little bit of the language your ancestors spoke. Whatever your reason for wanting to learn some Italian, this book can help. We're not promising fluency here, but if you need to greet someone, purchase a ticket, or order from a menu in Italian, look no further than *Italian Phrases For Dummies*.

About This Book

This isn't a class that you have to drag yourself to twice a week. You can use this book however you want, whether your goal is to pick up some words and phrases to help you get around when you visit Italy or you just want to be able to say "Hello, how are you?" to an Italian-speaking neighbor. Go through this book at your own pace, reading as much or as little at a time as your heart desires. You don't have to trudge through the chapters in order, either; just read the sections that interest you.

If you've never taken Italian before, you may want to read Chapters 1 and 2 before you tackle the later ones. These chapters give you the basics that you need to know about the language, such as how to pronounce the various sounds and form simple sentences.

Conventions Used in This Book

To make this book easy for you to navigate, we've set up a few conventions:

- ✓ Italian terms are set in **boldface** to make them stand out.
- ✓ Pronunciations, set in *italics*, follow the Italian terms.
- ✓ Verb conjugations (lists that show you the forms of a verb) are given in tables in this order: the "I" form, the "you" (informal, singular) form, the "you" (formal, singular) form, the "he/she/it" form, the "we" form, the "you" (formal/informal plural) forms, and the "they" form. Pronunciations follow in the second column, along with the English translations in the third column.

In conjugation tables, we list the pronouns next to the verb forms simply to help you remember which form is which—in conversation, you don't say the pronoun (flip ahead to Chapter 2 for more on that subject).

✓ Memorizing key words and phrases is important in language learning, so we collect the important words in a chapter or section in a black box titled “Words to Know.” Because Italian nouns have genders, which determine the article that the noun takes, how you form the plural, and so on, we indicate the gender with either [f] for feminine nouns or [m] for masculine nouns.

Next to the Italian words throughout this book, you find the pronunciations in parentheses. We separate syllables with a hyphen, like this: **casa** (ka-zah) (house). We also underline the stressed syllable, which means that you put the stress of the word on the underlined syllable. (See Chapter 1 for information about stresses.)

Because each language has its own ways of expressing ideas, the English translations that we provide for the Italian terms may not be exactly literal. We want you to know the gist of what’s being said, not just the words that are being said. For example, the phrase **Mi dica** (*mee* dee-kah) can be translated literally as “Tell me,” but the phrase really means “Can I help you?” This book gives the “Can I help you?” translation.

Foolish Assumptions

To write this book, we had to make some assumptions about who you are and what you want. These are the assumptions we made:

- ✓ You've had little or no exposure to the Italian language—or if you took Italian back in school, you remember very little of it.
- ✓ You're not looking for a book that'll make you fluent in Italian; you just want to know some words and phrases so that you can communicate basic information.
- ✓ You don't want to memorize long lists of vocabulary words or a bunch of boring grammar rules.
- ✓ You want to have fun and learn a little bit of Italian at the same time.

If these statements apply to you, you've found the right book!

Icons Used in This Book

You may be looking for particular information while reading this book. To make important points easier to find, we've placed the following icons in the margins throughout the book:



This icon highlights tips that can make picking up Italian words and phrases easier.



To ensure that you don't forget important stuff, this icon serves as a reminder, like a string tied around your finger.

Languages are full of quirks that may trip you up if you aren't prepared for them. This icon points to



discussions of weird grammar rules.



If you're looking for information about the Italian culture, look for this icon. It draws your attention to interesting tidbits about Italy.

Where to Go from Here

Learning to speak a language is all about jumping in and giving it a try, no matter how bad your pronunciation is at first. So make the leap! Start at the beginning or turn to a chapter that interests you. Before long, you'll be able to respond **Sì!** when people ask, **Parla italiano?**

Chapter 1

I Say It How? Speaking Italian

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking note of the Italian you know
 - ▶ Appreciating cognates
 - ▶ Looking at popular expressions
 - ▶ Starting out with basic Italian pronunciation
-

You probably know that Italian is a Romance language, which means that Italian, just like Spanish, French, and Portuguese, is a child of Latin. Latin was once the official language in a large part of Europe because the Romans ruled so much of the area. Before the Romans came, people spoke their own languages, and the mixture of these original tongues with Latin produced many of the languages and dialects that are still in use today.

If you know one of the Romance languages, you can often understand bits of another. Just as members of the same family can look similar but have totally different characters, so can languages. You find the same contradictions in the *dialects* (regional or local language differences) in Italy and in other countries.

If you visit Italy, you'll hear various accents and dialects as you travel the country. Despite the number of dialects, you may be surprised to discover that everybody understands your Italian and you understand theirs. (Italians don't normally speak in their dialect with foreigners.)

We don't want to go into detail about these regional and local differences here. Language is a means of communicating with people, and to speak to people from other countries, you have to find a way to understand them and make your meaning clear. Because using gestures to make yourself understood can be tiring, this chapter presents some helpful expressions to make life easier, at least as far as Italian is concerned.

You Already Know Some Italian

Italians love to talk. Not only do they enjoy communication, but they also love their language, because it's very melodious. Opera is famous for a reason!

Although Italians are very proud of their language, they've allowed a flood of English words to enter it. They talk, for example, about gadgets, jogging, and shock; they often use the word *okay*; and since computers marked their lives, they say **cliccare sul mouse** (*kleek-*

kah-reh sool mouse) (to click the mouse). And Italians are like most others when they get TV remotes in their hands: Oftentimes, you find them **lo zapping** (*loh zap-ping*) (switching channels).

On the flip side, many Italian words are known in English-speaking countries, such as these famous food and beverage words:

- ✓ **pizza** (*peet-tsah*)
- ✓ **pasta** (*pah-stah*)
- ✓ **spaghetti** (*spah-geht-tee*)
- ✓ **tortellini** (*tohr-tehl-lee-nee*)
- ✓ **mozzarella** (*moht-tsah-rehl-lah*)
- ✓ **espresso** (*eh-sprehs-soh*)
- ✓ **cappuccino** (*kahp-poo-chee-noh*)
- ✓ **tiramisù** (*tee-rah-mee-soo*)

You may have heard words from areas other than the kitchen, such as the following:

- ✓ **amore** (*ah-moh-reh*): That word *love* that so many Italian songs tell about.
- ✓ **Avanti!** (*ah-vahn-tee*): You use this word when you want to say “Come in!” or “Come on!” or “Get a move on!”
- ✓ **bambino** (*bahm-bee-noh*): A male baby or child. The female equivalent is **bambina** (*bahm-bee-nah*).
- ✓ **Bravo!** (*brah-voh*): You can say this word of congratulations properly to only one man. To a woman, you

must say **Brava!** (*brah-vah*). To a group of people, you say **Bravi!** (*brah-vee*) — unless the group consists only of women, in which case you say **Brave!** (*brah-veh*).

✓ **Ciao!** (*chah-oh*): Means “hello” and “goodbye.”

✓ **Scusi.** (*skoo-zee*): This word stands for “excuse me” and “sorry.” You address it to people you don’t know and to those with whom you speak formally. You say **Scusa** (*skoo-zah*) to people you know and to children.

Words that sound familiar

In addition to the words that have crept into the language directly, Italian and English have many cognates. A *cognate* is a word in one language that has the same origin as a word in another and may sound similar. You can get an immediate picture of what cognates are from the following examples:

✓ **aeroporto** (*ah-eh-roh-pohr-toh*) (airport)

✓ **attenzione** (*aht-tehn-tsee-oh-neh*) (attention)

✓ **comunicazione** (*koh-moo-nee-kah-tsee-oh-neh*) (communication)

✓ **importante** (*eem-pohr-tahn-teh*) (important)

✓ **incredibile** (*een-kreh-dee-bee-leh*) (incredible, unbelievable)

You probably understand much more Italian than you think you do, because Italian and English are full of cognates. To demonstrate, read this little story with

some Italian words in it. They're so similar to the English words that you can easily understand them.

It seems **impossibile** (*eem-pohs-see-bee-leh*) to him that he is now at the **aeroporto** (*ah-eh-roh-pohr-toh*) in Rome. He always wanted to come to this **città** (*cheet-tah*). When he goes out on the street, he calls a **taxi** (*tah-ksee*). He opens his bag to see if he has the **medicina** (*meh-dee-chee-nah*) that the **dottore** (*doht-toh-reh*) gave him. Going through this **terribile traffico** (*tehr-ree-bee-leh trahf-fee-koh*), he passes a **cattedrale** (*kaht-teh-drah-leh*), some **sculture** (*skool-too-reh*), and many **palazzi** (*pah-laht-tsee*). All this is very **impressionante** (*eem-prehs-see-oh-nahn-teh*). He knows that this is going to be a **fantastico** (*fahn-tah-stee-koh*) journey.

Popular expressions

Every language has expressions that are used so often that they become routine. For example, when you give someone something and he says, "Thank you," you automatically reply, "You're welcome." When you familiarize yourself with these expressions and how to use them, you're on your way to becoming a confident speaker.

Table 1-1 shows you some of the most popular expressions in Italian.

Table 1-1 Popular Expressions		
<i>Italian</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Accidenti!	ahch-chee- <u>dehn</u> -tee	Wow! (positive); Bummer!; What a drag!; Damn! (negative)
Andiamo!	ahn-dee- <u>ah</u> -moh	Let's go!
Che bello!	keh <u>beh</u> -loh	How nice!
Che c'è?	keh cheh	What's up?
D'accordo? D'accordo!	dahk- <u>kohr</u> -doh	Agreed? Agreed!; Okay? Okay!
Dai!	<u>dah</u> -ee	Come on!; Go on!; Hurry up!
E chi se ne importa?	eh kee seh neh eem- <u>pohr</u> -tah	Who cares?
È lo stesso.	eh loh <u>stehs</u> -soh	It's all the same; It doesn't matter.
Fantastico!	fahn- <u>tah</u> -stee-koh	Fantastic!
Non fa niente.	nohn fah nee- <u>ehn</u> -teh	It doesn't matter. (You use this phrase when someone apolo- gizes to you for something.)
Non c'è di che.	nohn cheh dee keh	You're welcome.
Permesso?	pehr- <u>mehs</u> -soh	May I pass?; May I come in?
Stupendo!	stoo- <u>pehn</u> -doh	Wonderful!; Fabulous!
Va bene!	vah beh-neh	Okay!



Italians use the expression **Permesso?** every time they cross a threshold when entering a house or when passing through a crowd. A more familiar equivalent for “May I?” is **Posso?** (*pohs-soh*) (May I?; Can I?).

Mouthing Off: Basic Pronunciation

Italian provides many opportunities for your tongue to do acrobatics. In this section, we give you some basic pronunciation hints that are important both for surfing through this book and for good articulation when you speak Italian. (If you tried to read and pronounce Italian words in the English manner, Italian speakers would have problems understanding you, just as you may have trouble understanding Italians when they speak English.)

We’ll start with the tough ones: vowels. Vowels are difficult because you have to cope with new sounds. Well, the sounds aren’t that new, but the connection between the written letter and the actual pronunciation isn’t the same as it is in English.

Italian has five written vowels: **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, and **u**. The following sections tell you how to pronounce them.

The vowel “a”