

Italian B1

— What to Study

Level: **B1 (Threshold)** • Language: **Italian** • Audience: **Learners**

B1 is the level at which Italian becomes a tool rather than a subject. You can travel on your own, deal with most everyday problems, follow a conversation between native speakers when they speak clearly, and explain what you think and why. It is also the level at which the *congiuntivo* — the subjunctive — moves from textbook exercise to something you need in ordinary conversation.

The Common European Framework describes B1 as being able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school and leisure; to deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling; to produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest; and to describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Grammar to master

Narrating in the past.

- *Passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* used together confidently in a story
- The *trapassato prossimo* for an earlier past: *Quando sono arrivato, il film era già cominciato*
- Recognising the *passato remoto*, which you will meet in books, historical texts and the everyday speech of much of southern Italy

The conditional.

- The present conditional for politeness and wishes: *Vorrei un caffè, Potresti aiutarmi?, Dovresti riposarti*
- The past conditional for regrets: *Avrei voluto venire*
- Italian also uses the past conditional for a future seen from the past: *Ha detto che sarebbe venuto* — "he said he would come"

The congiuntivo. Used after verbs of opinion, will, emotion and doubt, and after certain conjunctions.

- After *penso che, credo che, spero che, voglio che, è importante che*: *Penso che sia vero*
- After *benché, sebbene, affinché, prima che, a meno che*
- The irregular forms you will use most: *sia, abbia, vada, faccia, possa, debba, sappia*
- A first contact with the *congiuntivo imperfetto* in hypotheses: *Se avessi tempo, viaggerei di più*

Pronouns in depth.

- Combined pronouns: *me lo, te la, glielo, ce ne* — *Te lo do domani, Gliel'ho detto*

- The relative pronoun *cui* after prepositions: *la ragazza con cui parlavo, il libro di cui ti ho parlato*
- *il quale* and its forms in more formal language

More structures.

- The passive with *essere* or *venire*: *La casa è stata costruita nel 1990, Il pranzo viene servito alle due*
- The impersonal *si*: *Qui si mangia bene, In Italia si parla italiano*
- Connectors: *quindi, però, invece, mentre, anche se, siccome, dato che*

Vocabulary areas

Aim for roughly 2,500 active words and a much larger passive vocabulary.

- Work: applications, interviews, the workplace, colleagues and conflicts
- Education and training, including the Italian school and university system
- Media: news, the internet, social networks
- Health and lifestyle, sport and nutrition
- Relationships, feelings and personal problems
- Travel problems: complaints, lost property, changing plans
- The environment, the city and the countryside
- Opinions, agreement and disagreement

What you should be able to do

- Handle most situations on a trip, including problems and complaints
- Describe experiences, events, hopes and plans in connected speech
- Give your opinion on a familiar topic and support it with reasons and examples
- Follow the main points of a discussion or talk in clear standard Italian
- Understand the main points of news items and articles on familiar subjects
- Write a personal letter or a simple formal email: a complaint, a request, an application
- Tell the story of a film or book and say what you thought of it
- Take part in a conversation on familiar topics without preparation

Common difficulties

When the congiuntivo is needed. Opinions introduced by *penso che* and *credo che* take the *congiuntivo* in standard Italian, even though English uses an ordinary verb. You will hear native speakers use the

indicative in casual speech; learn the standard form first.

Combined pronouns. *Glielo* can mean "it to him", "it to her" or "it to them". Learn the combinations as single words and use them in short, repeated phrases.

Regional Italian. Pronunciation, vocabulary and even tense use vary across Italy; the *passato remoto*, rare in the north, is everyday speech in parts of the south. Understand the variety; aim your own speech at standard Italian.

Speed and linking. Native speech runs words together. Wide listening — podcasts, series, radio — is the only reliable fix.

How to know you are ready for B2

You are ready when you can explain your opinion on a familiar topic for a few minutes without searching for basic structures, when *vorrei*, *potrei* and the common *congiuntivo* forms come out without thinking, and when you can read a newspaper article on a familiar topic and follow its main argument. If you still avoid the *congiuntivo* in speech, spend more time at B1.

Next step

Move on to the Italian B2 guide, which takes you into abstract topics, argued writing and the more formal registers of the language.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 descriptors. For the official Italian certification at this level, CILS UNO-B1, see the Università per Stranieri di Siena's CILS levels page.