

First Time Round : Numbers and Counting in Italian  
Including rules, exceptions to rules, logic, patterns, diversions...but mostly counting

*Conventions used in this guide:*

Italian words or fragments are in **bold italics**. **Bold normal** is used for English words or fragments or definitions.

"Italian is accented on the penultimate syllable, except when it isn't," says Italian buddy Gianni. Penultimate is next-to-last. When Italian words are accented, this mark is used: ` downward top-left-to-right (**è, he, she, it is; università, university**).

Most often, it appears on the last (the ultimate) syllable in a word.

To indicate an accent other than one of those described above, I'll use this mark, ^ over the vowel. It is not part of the Italian spelling, but is simply an aid to proper pronunciation.

I use American to mean American English. We do encounter some American/British differences.

*A few notes on pronunciation-* (after reading everything, this may be worth a review)

A **c** followed by an *i* or *e* renders a soft English "ch" sound: *ci* (peachy, *dieci*); **ce** (**chest**, *cento*).

A **c** followed by *a*, *o*, or *u* renders a hard **c** (k sound). *Cassa di Risparmio*- a **c** followed by *a*-hard **c**! It means **savings bank**; literally, **chest of savings**. *Economia* (*economy*)- **c** followed by *o*- hard **c**! *Cucina* (*kitchen*)- **c** followed by *u*- hard **c**! And also a **c** followed by *i*- soft "ch." The *bar* (where we get our *caffè*.) may have a cashier- a *cassa*.

Double consonants-such as *cassa*, *otto*, *architetto* (*architect*), *etto* (1/10 kilo)- are , at least almost, said twice. The first one is a stop-syllable, the next a start-syllable. Or just hang on them a bit longer. Here's some you might not want to mix up: *penne* (type of pasta), *pene* (penis); *anno* (year), *ano* (anus). *Architetto del paesaggio*; **landscape architect**.

Another rule regarding **c**. **Ch** in Italian is a hard **k** sound. You surely know *Chianti*. Sure, it seems odd to us, but **ch** = **k**. Another hard "ch"- *chilo*, *kilo*. Also *chi*, relative pronoun **who**: *Chi è?* = **Who is it?** Some English parallels- **scheme**, **schizo**, **school**, **chemistry**. This should resolve the *bruschetta* (brew-'sket-uh) debate.

Pronounce each vowel...ahh, but... pertinent exceptions follow.

The vowel *i* (usually sounds like **i** in **pig**) forms a syllable; for example, *c**in**que*, *d**ie**ci*, *quatt**or**d**ic**i*, *vent**in**ove*.

Look at the underlined **c**'s in the following words—*d**ic**iasette*, *d**ic**iotto*, *d**ic**iannove*. The *i* after the **c** plays a role. It makes the **c** soft English "ch." *D**ic**iasette* (**cha** cha); *d**ic**iotto* (Cheech & **Ch**ong). Think of "**Ciao**."

It happens with *g*'s as well—the painter *G**io**tt**o*** (**jot**-**tow**), the *vino Pinot Gr**ig**io* ('gree-joe), *formagg**io*** (**for**-**ma**-joe), **cheese**. There's no strict rule, but the language has tendencies. It's something to listen for and guess at.

*Sei*, **six**, has two syllables; likewise the *i* is its own syllable in *se**i**dici*, *ventise**i*** etc. But to my ears, the second syllable, the *i*, is short and quickly said or truncated in typical speech.

Italian vowels are remarkably consistent. But *otto*, **8**, has two **o** sounds. They are very like the sequence of **o**'s in **Congo**.

Letter **a** can sound like **ah** or **uh**, depending. Letter **e** has two common sounds, like the vowel sounds in **hello** and **halo**. Letter **u** is like the **oo** in **moot**. There are nuances and reason for further study, but this is a reasonable guide.

*Counting and money*

**Zero** (**dzay-ro**) is zero.

Teach yourself one to ten.

*The teens*: Look at the column "10 to 20" that follows and see the two patterns. *S**e**id**ic**i*- 1**6**- ends one pattern and *d**ic**iasette*- 1**7**- begins the other. There's logic to both of them. They just evolved that way, maybe for a more pleasing sound.

Learning to count to 20 requires some practice and memorization. Then patterns kick in.

Page 2 begins with numbers in columns- I skipped the bold italics:

1 to 10	10 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	50-90 by tens & more	
uno	ûndici	ventuno	trentuno	cinquanta	(50)
due	dôdici	ventidue	trentadue	sessanta	(60)
tre	trêdici	ventitrè	trentatrè	settanta	(70)
quattro	quattôrdici	ventiquattro	trentaquattro	ottonta	(80)
cinque	quîndici	venticinque	trentacinque	novanta	(90)
sei	sêidici	ventisei	trentasei		
sette	diciasette	ventisette	trentasette	cento	(100)
otto	diciotto	ventotto	trentotto	due cento	(200)
nove	diciannove	ventinove	trentanove	mille	(1000)
dieci	venti (20)	trenta (30)	quaranta (40)	due mille	(2000)

From 21 to 99 is a regular and orderly pattern...ahh, but...two things to look out for.

**Uno**, **1**, and **otto**, **8**, begin with a vowel, and **venti**, **trenta**, **quaranta**, etc.—the denominators when counting by “10’s”—drop their final vowel when linked to them. Thus **trentuno** (31, from **trenta**), but **trentadue** (32); **ottantotto** (88, from **ottanta**) but **ottontanove** (89).

**Tre** gains a written accent in **ventitrè**, **trentatrè**, **eccétera** (et cetera is Latin).

One hundred is simply **cento** (not **uno cento**). But **200** is **due cento**, **300** is **tre cento**, and so on.

That’s about all you’ll need for the marketplace and buying tickets.

**One thousand** is **mille**, **two thousand**, **due mille**, etc.

Want to try years? It’s straight counting. I’m writing this in **duemillenove**. A little trickier is the year of my birth- **millenovecentocinquantuno**- 1951. Yes, they rattle off years as fast as we do. **Year** is **anno** (pl. **anni**). “Happy birthday” is **buon compleanno**. To say how old you are, say, “**Ho** (owe) (number of years) **anni**.” Literally, “I have (number of years). **Uno**’s final **o** is often dropped, sometimes replaced by a linking apostrophe when the succeeding word begins with a vowel- **uno anno** becomes **un’anno**. **Ho ventun’anni** means I’m 21. Even when followed by a consonant, **uno**’s final **o** is often dropped; e.g., **Un caffè, per favore** (A coffee (what we call an espresso), please).

**This is hot**: here is my learning tip for learning the numbers most needed- 001 through 999. By the way, my friend Mike, independently, came up with the same method to gain mastery of counting. Oregon license plates usually have three numerals- that’s handy. As I pass cars on my bike, I say the numbers. In a car, I say the numbers as plates come into view. Walking through parking lots is good. Saying them out loud is best. You will make easy-to-gauge progress. If you’re with a child or a friend, you can make a competitive game out of it.

**Million** is **milione** (meal-yol-nay). We might say, “thanks a million.” The Italians say, very commonly, **grázie mille**. It translates “Thanks a thousand.” Equally acceptable, but a bit less common, is **mille grázie**. Of course, “**grázie**” is fine by itself. A common response to these is “**grázie a voi**,” “thanks to you!”

**Billion** is **miliardo**- but that’s the Italian billion, one million million, the same as American trillion- more on that later.

€ is the symbol for euro. We say **euro** something like **your-oh**.

Most vowels get pronounced in Italian. So, in Italian, **euro** is a three-syllable word, **paid lunar row/ ai-u-row**.

That **r** is a distinctly Italian sound not at all like American English, a light slap of tongue to the front of your palate/top of your teeth, and sometimes this is a delicate trill at the very end of the tongue. It is not formed in the back of your mouth. It is sounded about where our “L’s” end. One of the hardest words for me to say correctly is **birra**, beer (so I drink (**bevo**) **vino**). Double **r**’s are often trilled, even if very slightly.

### Everything counts in large amounts:

Great Britain and Italy, among other countries, have used the same words to denote different large sums than *gli (lyee) stati uniti*, the **United States**. They're called the British and American systems.

British million is American million- 1,000,000. ( $10^6$ ). Since 1975, British billion is American billion. Previously, British billion was  $10^{12}$ , or 1,000,000,000,000 (one million million). Americans (1 billion =  $10^9$ ) today call that 1 trillion.

What gives? They have traditionally counted differently. A traditional European trillion,  $10^{18}$ , looks like this: 1,000,000,000,000,000,000, or one million (old-form) billion. Americans would call that one quintillion.

International affairs and reporting follow a hybrid form. One billion follows the American form, but the American trillion is avoided. Rather, American trillions are expressed as thousands of billions; e.g., 1.5 trillion headlines as 1,500 billion.

Where Americans use a comma, as in 1,000,000, Italians use a *punto*- 1.000.000

And where Americans use a period, Italians use a *virgola, comma*- 3,25%

*Enough with the counting, already. I just want to buy some cheese (formaggio) and cured meats (salumi):*

The basic unit of measure in the marketplace is the *etto*, .22 lbs (one-tenth of a *chilo*). Think of one *etto* as about one-quarter pound. *Un* (often abbreviated form of *uno*) *chilo* (one kilogram) = 2.2 pounds. It's all metric.

When you order food items at the market, you order by the *etto*; plural, *etti*. *Un'etto* (abbreviated form of *uno etto*) = one *etto*. Then *due etti, tre etti, eccetera*. *Cinque etti* is about 1 pound ( $5 \times .22 \text{ lbs.} = 1.1 \text{ pounds}$ ). If you're ordering 1/2 kilo (*cinque etti*), you can also say *un mezzo chilo, one-half kilo*. When shopping, try to repeat back any total amounts.

Regarding the total cost, **How much?** Is *Quanto è?* Similarly, "What does it cost" is "*Quanto costa.*"

When you're ordering at the cheese- and meat-case, the attendant will often poise the knife over what is thought to be your desired amount and say, "*Così?*" "Like this?" If it's just right, you say, "*Basta così.*" "Enough like that." "That's it!"

If you want more or less, say *più* (more, pronounced like *putrid*) or *meno* (less). To remember these, I think *plus (più)* or *minus (meno)*. *Più o meno* means **more or less**. *Basta* is always good for **Enough!** *Così così* means **so-so, not so bad**.

### Centuries

*Il quattrocento* (literally, **the 400**) refers to the 1400's. *Il novecento* (lit., **the 900**), the 1900's. This is the common form.

They also use *secolo, century*, the same way we do. So *il diciottésimo secolo* (the eighteenth century) is the 1700's, or *il settocento*. The actual 400's would be called *il quinto secolo*.

### Ordinal numbers:

1 <sup>st</sup> primo	8 <sup>th</sup> ottimo	20 <sup>th</sup> ventésimo
2 <sup>nd</sup> secondo	9 <sup>th</sup> novo	30 <sup>th</sup> trentésimo
3 <sup>rd</sup> terzo	10 <sup>th</sup> dècimo	31 <sup>st</sup> trentunésimo
4 <sup>th</sup> quarto	11 <sup>th</sup> undicésimo	32 <sup>nd</sup> trentaduésimo
5 <sup>th</sup> quinto	12 <sup>th</sup> dodicésimo	eccetera
6 <sup>th</sup> sesto	13 <sup>th</sup> tredicésimo	
7 <sup>th</sup> sèttimo	eccetera...	100 <sup>th</sup> centésimo

*Il primo di maggio, the first of May, Pope John XXIII, Papa Giovanni ventitrésimo. Papa; pope. One's father is il papá, (accent on final syllable) or il mio padre or il mio babbo (familiar). Father Christmas is Babbo Natale.*

Write with comments & suggestions

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