

# Nouns

## What is a noun?

A **noun** is a naming word for a living being, a thing, or an idea, for example, *woman, Andrew, desk, happiness*.

## Using nouns

### The basics

- In Italian, all nouns, whether referring to living beings or to things and ideas, are either masculine or feminine. This is their gender.

Masculine		Feminine	
<b>olio</b>	oil	<b>acqua</b>	water
<b>uomo</b>	man	<b>donna</b>	woman
<b>delfino</b>	dolphin	<b>tigre</b>	tiger
<b>concetto</b>	concept	<b>idea</b>	idea
<b>armadio</b>	wardrobe	<b>sedia</b>	chair

- The letter a noun ends with is often a reliable guide to its gender. For instance, words ending in **-o** will nearly always be masculine.
- When you use an Italian noun you need to know if it is masculine or feminine so that you can make other words that go with it masculine or feminine too:
  - how you translate the words for 'the' or 'a' depends on the noun's gender. For instance, with masculine nouns you use **il** and **un**, and with feminine nouns you use **la** and **una**.

Masculine		Feminine	
<b>il giorno</b>	the day	<b>la notte</b>	the night
<b>un gelato</b>	an ice cream	<b>una mela</b>	an apple

- adjectives describing a noun are masculine or feminine in form.

Masculine		Feminine	
<b>un abito caro</b>	– an expensive suit	<b>una macchina cara</b>	– an expensive car
<b>l'Antico Testamento</b>	– the Old Testament	<b>l'antica Roma</b>	– ancient Rome

- words that replace nouns – called pronouns – must also be masculine or feminine. The translation for *Do you want it?* is "**Lo vuoi?**" if you're offering **un gelato** (*an ice cream*), and "**La vuoi?**" if you're referring to **una mela** (*an apple*).

↪ For more information on **Articles, Adjectives** or **Pronouns**, see pages 14, 24 and 53.

## 2 NOUNS

- Just like English nouns, Italian nouns can be singular or plural. Most English nouns add **-s** in the plural, for example, *days*, *apples*. Most Italian nouns change their final letter from one vowel to another:

<b>Singular</b>		<b>Plural</b>	
<b>giorno</b>	day	<b>giorni</b>	days
<b>mela</b>	apple	<b>mele</b>	apples
<b>rivoluzione</b>	revolution	<b>rivoluzioni</b>	revolutions

### *Tip*

When in doubt, you can find out a noun's gender by looking it up in a dictionary. When you come across a new word it's a good idea to memorize the article that goes with it, to help you remember its gender.

### **KEY POINTS**

- ✓ All nouns in Italian are either masculine or feminine.
- ✓ This affects the words you use with them.
- ✓ In most cases it is possible to work out a noun's gender from its ending.

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

# Test yourself

## 1 Match the noun on the left with its description on the right.

- |                     |                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>a una mela</b>   | a piece of furniture; masculine noun |
| <b>b la notte</b>   | a fruit; feminine noun               |
| <b>c un armadio</b> | a liquid; feminine noun              |
| <b>d un delfino</b> | a marine mammal; masculine noun      |
| <b>e l'acqua</b>    | opposite of day; feminine noun       |

## 2 Give the gender (use *un* or *una*) for each of the words below.

- a** ..... tigre
- b** ..... concetto
- c** ..... donna
- d** ..... gelato
- e** ..... giorno
- f** ..... macchina
- g** ..... uomo
- h** ..... casa
- i** ..... sedia
- j** ..... abito

## 4 NOUNS

### How to recognize what gender a noun is

► There are some simple rules that will enable you to work out the gender of a very large number of Italian nouns from their last letter in the singular:

- nearly all words ending in **-o** are masculine.
- nearly all words ending in **-a** are feminine.
- nearly all words ending in **-à**, **-sione** and **-zione** are feminine.
- nearly all words ending with a consonant are masculine.

🔍 Note that words ending in **-e** are masculine in some cases and feminine in others.

► The following are typical masculine nouns ending in **-o**: **il treno** the train

<b>il supermercato</b>	the supermarket
<b>l'aeroporto</b>	the airport
<b>il toro</b>	the bull
<b>un topo</b>	a mouse
<b>un gatto</b>	a (tom) cat
<b>un italiano</b>	an Italian (man)

🔍 Note that a few very common nouns ending in **-o** are feminine.

<b>la mano</b>	the hand
<b>una foto</b>	a photo
<b>la radio</b>	the radio
<b>una moto</b>	a motorbike

► The following are typical feminine nouns ending in **-a**: **la casa** the house

<b>la macchina</b>	the car
<b>una donna</b>	a woman
<b>una regola</b>	a rule
<b>una gatta</b>	a (she) cat
<b>un'italiana</b>	an Italian (woman)

🔍 Note that some very common words ending in **-a** are masculine.

<b>il problema</b>	the problem
<b>il programma</b>	the programme
<b>il sistema</b>	the system
<b>il clima</b>	the climate

- Most words for professions and jobs ending in **-ta** are masculine or feminine, according to whether a male or female is meant.

<b>un giornalista</b>	a (male) journalist
<b>una giornalista</b>	a (female) journalist
<b>un dentista</b>	a (male) dentist
<b>una dentista</b>	a (female) dentist

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

- The following are typical feminine nouns ending in **-à**, **-sione**, and **-zione**:

Ending	Example	Meaning
<b>-à</b>	<b>una difficoltà</b>	a difficulty
	<b>la realtà</b>	the reality
<b>-sione</b>	<b>la versione</b>	the version
	<b>un'occasione</b>	an opportunity
<b>-zione</b>	<b>una lezione</b>	a lesson
	<b>una conversazione</b>	a conversation

- Nouns ending in a consonant are nearly always masculine.

<b>un film</b>	a film
<b>un bar</b>	a bar
<b>un computer</b>	a computer
BUT	
<b>una jeep</b>	a jeep

- Nouns ending in **-e** can be masculine in some cases and feminine in others.

<b>un mese</b>	a month
<b>il mare</b>	the sea
<b>la gente</b>	the people
<b>la mente</b>	the mind
<b>il mese di giugno</b>	the month of June
<b>una mente logica</b>	a logical mind

- ❗ Note that the names of languages are always masculine, whether they end in **-e** or in **-o**.

**Il giapponese è molto difficile.**  
**L'italiano è bellissimo.**

Japanese is very difficult.  
Italian is beautiful.

### Grammar Extra!

Some words have different meanings depending on whether they are masculine or feminine.

Masculine	Meaning	Feminine	Meaning
<b>il fine</b>	the objective	<b>la fine</b>	the end
<b>un posto</b>	a place	<b>la posta</b>	the mail
<b>un modo</b>	a way	<b>la moda</b>	the fashion
<b>il capitale</b>	capital (money)	<b>una capitale</b>	a capital city
<b>un bel posto</b>	a nice place	<b>la posta elettronica</b>	email

## Nouns for males and females

- In Italian, just as in English, there are sometimes very different words for male and female people and animals.

<b>un uomo</b>	a man
<b>una donna</b>	a woman
<b>un fratello</b>	a brother
<b>una sorella</b>	a sister
<b>un toro</b>	a bull
<b>una mucca</b>	a cow

- In most cases, though, a noun referring to a male can be made to refer to a female by changing the ending:
- Many Italian nouns ending in **-o** can be made feminine by changing the ending to **-a**.
 

<b>un cuoco</b>	a (male) cook
<b>una cuoca</b>	a (female) cook
<b>un ragazzo</b>	a boy
<b>una ragazza</b>	a girl
<b>un fotografo</b>	a (male) photographer
<b>una fotografa</b>	a (female) photographer
<b>un italiano</b>	an Italian (man)
<b>un'italiana</b>	an Italian (woman)
<b>un gatto</b>	a (tom) cat
<b>una gatta</b>	a (she) cat
  - If a noun describing a male ends in **-tore**, the feminine form ends in **-trice**.
 

<b>un attore</b>	a (male) actor
<b>un'attrice</b>	a (female) actor
<b>un pittore</b>	a (male) painter
<b>una pittrice</b>	a (female) painter
<b>uno scrittore</b>	a (male) writer
<b>una scrittrice</b>	a (female) writer
  - Certain nouns describing males ending in **-e** have feminine forms ending in **-essa**.
 

<b>il professore</b>	the (male) teacher
<b>la professoressa</b>	the (female) teacher
<b>uno studente</b>	a (male) student
<b>una studentessa</b>	a (female) student
<b>un leone</b>	a lion
<b>una leonessa</b>	a lioness
- Many nouns ending in **-a** can refer either to males or to females, so there is no change of ending for the feminine.
- |                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>un turista</b>      | a (male) tourist             |
| <b>una turista</b>     | a (female) tourist           |
| <b>un collega</b>      | a (male) colleague           |
| <b>una collega</b>     | a (female) colleague         |
| <b>il mio dentista</b> | my dentist (if it's a man)   |
| <b>la mia dentista</b> | my dentist (if it's a woman) |

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

- Many nouns ending in **-e** can refer either to males or to females, so there is no change of ending for the feminine.

<b>un nipote</b>	a grandson
<b>una nipote</b>	a granddaughter
<b>un cantante</b>	a (male) singer
<b>una cantante</b>	a (female) singer

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### *Grammar Extra!*

A few nouns that are feminine refer both to men and women.

<b>una guida</b>	a guide (male or female)
<b>una persona</b>	a person (male or female)
<b>una spia</b>	a spy (male or female)
<b>una star</b>	a star (male or female)
<b>Sean Connery è ancora una star.</b>	Sean Connery's still a star.

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#### KEY POINTS

- ✓ Most nouns referring to males can be made to refer to females by changing the ending.
- ✓ Some nouns are the same whether they refer to males or to females, but the words used with them change.
- ✓ In a few cases the nouns used for male and female are completely different.

## Test yourself

### 3 Complete the phrase by adding the feminine form of the noun.

- a un gatto e .....
- b un attore e .....
- c un cuoco e .....
- d un fotografo e .....
- e un ragazzo e .....
- f uno scrittore e .....
- g un italiano e .....
- h un professore e .....
- i un pittore e .....
- j un leone e .....

### 4 Replace the highlighted masculine nouns with the feminine form.

- a **Il nipote** di Marco arriva stasera. ....
- b Abita con **un italiano**. ....
- c Abbiamo visto **un leone** allo zoo. ....
- d **Il giornalista** mangia sempre in questo ristorante. ....
- e Come si chiama **il professore** di francese? .....
- f Ha un cane e **un gatto**. ....
- g Vado al bar con **un collega**. ....
- h È **il dentista** di mia sorella. ....
- i **Un turista** ci chiede la strada. ....
- j Maria parla con **un ragazzo**. ....

### 5 Match each noun with its translation.

- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| a la fine      | the sea         |
| b il programma | the end         |
| c la mano      | the opportunity |
| d l'occasione  | the hand        |
| e il mare      | the programme   |



## Making nouns plural

- ▶ There are two main ways of making nouns plural in Italian. In most cases you change the ending, but in a few cases the same form as the singular is used. There are also some plurals which are irregular.

### Nouns which you make plural by changing the ending

- ▶ In English you usually make nouns plural by adding *-s*. In Italian you usually do it by changing the ending from one vowel to another:
  - Change the *-o*, *-a* or *-e* ending of masculine nouns to *-i*. Nearly all masculine plurals end in *-i*.

Ending	Example	Meaning
<b>-o</b>	<b>un anno</b>	one year
	<b>due anni</b>	two years
	<b>un ragazzo</b>	one boy
	<b>due ragazzi</b>	two boys
<b>-a</b>	<b>un ciclista</b>	a (male) cyclist
	<b>due ciclisti</b>	two cyclists
	<b>un problema</b>	a problem
	<b>molti problemi</b>	lots of problems
<b>-e</b>	<b>un mese</b>	one month
	<b>due mesi</b>	two months
	<b>un francese</b>	a Frenchman
	<b>due francesi</b>	two Frenchmen

- Change the *-a* ending of feminine nouns to *-e*.
 

<b>una settimana</b>	one week
<b>due settimane</b>	two weeks
<b>una ragazza</b>	one girl
<b>due ragazze</b>	two girls
- Change the *-e* ending of feminine nouns to *-i*.
 

<b>un'inglese</b>	an Englishwoman
<b>due inglesi</b>	two Englishwomen
<b>la vite</b>	the vine
<b>le viti</b>	the vines

### Nouns you do not change in the plural

- You do not change feminine nouns ending in *-à*. You show that they are plural by using the plural word for *the*, adjectives in the plural, and so on.
 

<b>la città</b>	the city
<b>le città</b>	the cities
<b>grandi città</b>	great cities
<b>la loro università</b>	their university
<b>le loro università</b>	their universities

↔ For more information on **Articles** and **Adjectives**, see pages 14 and 24.

## 10 NOUNS

- You do not change words ending in a consonant, which are often words borrowed from English and other languages.

<b>il film</b>	the film
<b>i film</b>	the films
<b>il manager</b>	the manager
<b>i manager</b>	the managers
<b>il computer</b>	the computer
<b>i computer</b>	the computers
<b>la jeep</b>	the jeep
<b>le jeep</b>	the jeeps

### Nouns with irregular plurals

- A small number of common masculine nouns take the ending **-a** in the plural.

<b>il dito</b>	the finger
<b>le dita</b>	the fingers
<b>un uovo</b>	an egg
<b>le uova</b>	the eggs
<b>il lenzuolo</b>	the sheet
<b>le lenzuola</b>	the sheets

- Note that the plural of **uomo** (meaning *man*) is **uomini**. The plural of **la mano** (meaning *hand*) is **le mani**.

- All nouns ending in **-ca** and **-ga** add an **h** before the plural ending.

Singular		Plural	
<b>amica</b>	(female) friend	<b>amiche</b>	(female) friends
<b>buca</b>	hole	<b>buche</b>	holes
<b>riga</b>	line	<b>righe</b>	lines
<b>casalinga</b>	housewife	<b>casalinghe</b>	housewives

- Some nouns ending in **-co** and **-go** also add an **h** before the plural ending.

Singular		Plural	
<b>gioco</b>	game	<b>giochi</b>	games
<b>fuoco</b>	fire	<b>fuochi</b>	fires
<b>luogo</b>	place	<b>luoghi</b>	places
<b>borgo</b>	district	<b>borghi</b>	districts

- Note that there are many exceptions: the plurals of **amico** (meaning *friend*) and **psicologo** (meaning *psychologist*) are **amici** and **psicologi**.

↪ For more information on **Italian spelling rules**, see page 247.

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

## Plural or singular?

- Bear in mind that some words are plural in Italian but singular in English.

<b>i miei capelli</b>	my hair
<b>gli affari</b>	business
<b>le notizie</b>	the news
<b>consigli</b>	advice
<b>i mobili</b>	the furniture
<b>sciocchezze</b>	nonsense

- ❓ Note that you use the singular of some of these words to refer to *a piece of* something.

<b>un mobile</b>	a piece of furniture
<b>un consiglio</b>	a piece of advice
<b>una notizia</b>	a piece of news

### Tip

An important word that is singular in Italian but plural in English is **la gente** (meaning *people*). Remember to use a singular verb with **la gente**.

**È gente molto simpatica.** They're very nice people.

### Grammar Extra!

When nouns are made by combining two words, such as **pescespada** (meaning *swordfish*), **capolavoro** (meaning *masterpiece*), or **apriscatola** (meaning *tin opener*) the plural is often not formed according to the usual rules. You can check by looking in a dictionary.

#### KEY POINTS

- ✓ You can make most Italian nouns plural by changing their ending from one vowel to another.
- ✓ Some nouns are the same in the plural as in the singular.
- ✓ Some nouns which are singular in English are plural in Italian.

## Test yourself

### 6 Give the plural form of the noun after the number.

- a 2 ..... (mese)
- b 2 ..... (ragazzo)
- c 2 ..... (gatto)
- d 2 ..... (donna)
- e 2 ..... (francese)
- f 2 ..... (settimana)
- g 2 ..... (regola)
- h 2 ..... (treno)
- i 2 ..... (mela)
- j 2 ..... (giorno)

### 7 Cross out the noun which the article(s) cannot refer to.

- a **i** film/giorni/luogo/giochi
- b **le** righe/ragazze/città/italiani
- c **il** manager/ciclisti/problema
- d **la** pittore/settimana/ragazza/buca
- e **la** rivoluzione/radio/topo/versione
- f **il** supermercato/toro/moto/film
- g **un** gioco/dita/fuoco/borgo
- h **una** jeep/notizia/mobile/macchina
- i **il/la** dentista/amiche/turista/collega
- j **un/una** cantante/nipote/problemi/giornalista

# Test yourself

**8 Write 1 in the gap if the noun is singular, and 2 if it is plural.**

- a ..... righe
- b ..... dita
- c ..... uovo
- d ..... fuoco
- e ..... ragazze
- f ..... problemi
- g ..... inglese
- h ..... macchine
- i ..... colleghi
- j ..... studentessa

**9 Match the nouns on the left with their translations on the right.**

- |                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| a i capelli    | the news          |
| b i mobili     | hair              |
| c un consiglio | the eggs          |
| d le notizie   | furniture         |
| e le uova      | a piece of advice |

## Solutions

- 1 a una mela **a fruit**;  
**feminine noun**  
b la notte **opposite of day**;  
**feminine noun**  
c un armadio **a piece of furniture**; **masculine noun**  
d un delfino **a marine mammal**; **masculine noun**  
e l'acqua **a liquid**;  
**feminine noun**
- 2 a una  
b un  
c una  
d un  
e un  
f una  
g un  
h una  
i una  
j un
- 3 a una gatta  
b un'attrice  
c una cuoca  
d una fotografa  
e una ragazza  
f una scrittrice  
g un'italiana  
h una professoressa  
i una pittrice  
j una leonessa
- 4 a la nipote  
b un'italiana  
c una leonessa  
d la giornalista  
e la professoressa  
f una gatta  
g una collega  
h la dentista  
i una turista  
j una ragazza
- 5 a la fine **the end**  
b il programma **the programme**  
c la mano **the hand**  
d l'occasione **the opportunity**  
e il mare **the sea**
- 6 a mesi  
b ragazzi  
c gatti  
d donne  
e francesi  
f settimane
- 7 a luogo  
b italiani  
c ciclisti  
d pittore  
e topo  
f moto  
g dita  
h mobile  
i amiche  
j problemi
- 8 a 2  
b 2  
c 1  
d 1  
e 2  
f 2  
g 1  
h 2  
i 2  
j 1
- 9 a i capelli **hair**  
b i mobili **furniture**  
c un consiglio **a piece of advice**  
d le notizie **the news**  
e le uova **the eggs**
- 10 a l'  
b i  
c lo  
d le  
e gli  
f la  
g il  
h l'  
i gli  
j le
- 11 a nell'albergo  
b alla stazione  
c sul pavimento  
d dal concerto  
e agli stadi  
f sulle strade  
g del ragazzo  
h al cinema  
i dall'aeroporto  
j sulla spiaggia
- 12 a della  
b delle  
c dello  
d del
- e dei  
f dell'  
g degli  
h del  
i dei  
j delle
- 13 a le  
b il  
c all'  
d la  
e il  
f le  
g la  
h i  
i alle  
j nel
- 14 a una  
b uno  
c un  
d un'  
e un  
f un  
g uno  
h una  
i un'  
j un
- 15 a Che lavoro fa tuo fratello? **Fa l'avvocato.**  
b Hai fratelli? **Ho un fratello e una sorella.**  
c Perché non vieni al cinema? **Non ho soldi.**  
d Quanto costa il divano? **Costa mille sterline.**  
e Tuo padre è professore? **No, è medico.**
- 16 a Non ho macchina.  
b C'è pane?  
c È ingegnere./Fa l'ingegnere.  
d Non ha computer.  
e Vendono gelati, uova e frutta.  
f Che sorpresa!  
g Mio fratello ha molti soldi.  
h Che bello!  
i Ci sono cento bambini nella scuola.  
j Non ci sono posti liberi.
- 17 a italiana  
b simpatico  
c bianche  
d blu  
e veloci