

IPA Symbols for Italian Diction

Ordinary Spelling	IPA	English Example	Italian Example
Vowels			
a	[a]	father	casa, amor
e ¹	[ɛ]	bed	vento, vecchio
e	[e]	chaotic	era, cine
i	[i]	beat	mi
o	[ɔ]	more (without diphthong glide)	cosa
o	[o]	boat (without	voce
u	[u]	rule	uno

Glides

Glides are a combination of two vowels, where the first is short and weak, and the second is stronger. In a glide, the first, or weaker vowel will sound like a consonant. The two Italian glides are below. When these vowels are followed by vowels, they become glides.

i	[j]	yellow	ieri
u	[w]	we	nuovo

Consonants

Italian consonants are dryer than those of their English counterparts. In general, we say that they are *non-aspirated* or *unaspirated*. In dictionaries you rarely see this difference noted, but you can practice getting this sound by putting a lit candle in front of your mouth. Try not to make the candle flicker when you pronounce these consonants – you will be pronouncing them without aspiration.

¹ There are very specific rules for open and closed *e* and *o* in Italian which are beyond the scope of this handout. Most dictionaries provide accurate pronunciations now – look especially for Hippocrene or Cassels, which use IPA. For more information about this start with *Diction* by John Moriarity and *Diction for Singers* by Joan Wall.

b	[b]	boy	basso
c (before a,o,u,l,r)	[k]	kit	canto
c (before e,i)	[tʃ]	church	voce
cc (before a,o,u,l,r)	[k:k]	black-cat	bocca
cc (before e,i)	[t:tʃ]	eat - cheese	accento
ch (before e, i)	[k]	kit	che, chi
ci (before a,o,u)	[tʃ]	church	cielo
d	[d]	dog (with the tongue touching the upper front teeth)	dolce
f	[f]	fall	forte
g (before e,i)	[dʒ]	judge	gente
gi (before a,o,u)	[dʒ]	judge	magia
g (before a,o,u,l,r)	[g]	go	gusto
gh (before e,i)	[g]	go	laghi
gn	[ɲ]	No English equivalent. Is closest to the sound of <u>ñ</u> o in <i>onion</i> , or the <u>ñ</u> in the Spanish word <i>mañana</i> .	ogni
h	silent		ha, ho
j (used only in very old manuscripts)	[j]	yellow	baje
k (rarely used)	[k]		
l	[l]	lip (dental - tongue touches upper front teeth)	lento

Ordinary Spelling	IPA	English Example	Italian Example
m	[m]	met	mio
n	[n]	no	non
n (before [g] or [k])	[ŋ]	sung	anche
p	[p]	pet	pupilla
q (always followed by <i>u</i>)	[kw]	quit	questo
r (flipped when single between vowels or final in a word but followed by a vowel in a phrase).	[r]	No English equivalent. See notes on <i>r</i> .	core, caro
r (trilled when initial, preceding or following another consonant, or when double)	[r]	No English equivalent. See notes on <i>r</i> .	resto, carro
s (voiceless when initial and followed by a vowel or semi-consonant, following a consonant, when doubled or final)	[s]	sit	sempre
s (voiced when preceding a or when single voiced consonant between vowels)	[z]	zoo	casa
sc (before e,i)	[ʃ]	ship	scena
sci (before a,o,u)	[ʃ]	ship	sciame
t	[t]	toy (with tongue touching upper front teeth)	
v	[v]	voice	voce
z (voiceless, use a dictionary to determine proper usage)	[ts]	sits	zio

z (voiced, use a dictionary) [dz]

lids

zeta

A FEW NOTES ON ITALIAN DICTION

DIPHTHONGS

When two vowels appear consecutively within a word in Italian, each of them is pronounced, producing a diphthong. See *Diction* by John Moriarity and *Diction for Singers* by Joan Wall for more information.

TRIPHTHONGS

When three vowels appear consecutively within a word in Italian, each of them is pronounced, producing a triphthong. See *Diction* by John Moriarity and *Diction for Singers* by Joan Wall for more information.

DOUBLE CONSONANTS

In Italian, there is a big difference in sound between single consonants and double consonants. Double consonants generally fall in the middle of a word, but can also occur when a word ends with a consonant and is followed by a word beginning with the same consonant. The difference is basically this: in English, when speaking a word with a double consonant, the speaker will end the first syllable with the vowel, and begin the second syllable with the consonant. An Italian would end the first syllable with the consonant, and begin the next syllable with the consonant. So, for example, an English speaker would pronounce the word *pappa* /pa-pa/, an Italian would pronounce it /pap:pa/. Attention to this detail is crucial to making yourself understood.

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