

# Appendix A Spelling and pronunciation

## The alphabet

In Italian there are 21 letters in the alphabet plus five letters, **j, k, w, x, and y**, which are used only in foreign words.

|                  |   |   |
|------------------|---|---|
| <b>j k w x y</b> | il jolly <i>joker</i> (in cards) il kimono <i>kimono</i><br>il weekend lo xilofono <i>xylophone</i> lo yoga<br><b>But w pronounced as v:</b> il walzer <i>waltz</i><br>Walter <i>Walter</i> | These are mostly pronounced as in English, but in a few words of German origin <b>w</b> is pronounced like the English <b>v</b> . |
|------------------|---|---|

## Spelling and pronunciation

Italian spelling is fairly simple because the relationship between the letters and the sounds is consistent. On the whole there is no variation from one word to another. (Compare this with the English *comb, tomb, bomb*, etc.) However, some combinations of letters are pronounced and spelt differently from the English. The main ones are given here.

| Spelling         | Approximate English sound               | Examples   |
|------------------|---|--|
| <b>ce ci</b>     | English <b>ch</b>                       | cento (like <i>cherry</i> ) Cina (like <i>cheese</i> )                                       |
| <b>che chi</b>   | English hard <b>k</b>                   | anche ( <i>monkey</i> ) chilo ( <i>keen</i> )  |
| <b>ge gi</b>     | English <b>j</b>                        | geloso ( <i>jet/generous</i> ) magico ( <i>tragic/jilt</i> )                                 |
| <b>ghe ghi</b>   | English hard <b>g</b>                   | lunghe ( <i>get</i> ) larghi ( <i>geezer</i> )   |
| <b>sce sci</b>   | English <b>sh</b>                       | scende ( <i>shed</i> ) scippo ( <i>sheep</i> )   |
| <b>sche schi</b> | English hard <b>sk</b>                  | pesche ( <i>sceptic/schedule</i> ) boschi ( <i>skip/skill</i> )                              |
| <b>gli</b>       | no exact English equivalent             | figlio, famiglia (the closest equivalent is <i>million</i> )                                 |
| <b>gn</b>        | no exact English equivalent             | lasagne gnocchi signore (the closest equivalents are <i>canyon, cognac</i> or <i>onion</i> ) |
| <b>h</b>         | not pronounced at the beginning of word | ho/hobby ( <i>honour</i> )   |

## Accents

|                                    |  |  |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Grave accents:<br><b>à è ì ò ù</b> | la città il caffè così<br>dormirò più<br><br>dà <i>gives</i> da <i>from</i><br>è <i>is</i> e <i>and</i><br>sì <i>yes</i> sì <i>one, you, him/herself</i> | They are used to indicate that the stress falls on the final vowel.<br><br>They also distinguish between words with the same spelling but different meanings.  |
| Acute accents:<br><b>é</b>         | perché <i>because</i><br>benché <i>although</i><br>né <i>neither</i> ne <i>of it, of them</i>  | Used to indicate a 'closed' <i>e</i> sound (like <i>Jill</i> ) as opposed to an 'open' <i>e</i> (like <i>bed</i> ). They also distinguish between words with the same spelling but different meanings. |
| With capitals                      | È/E' un mistero <i>It's a mystery</i>  | When used, accents are also required on capital letters but may also be written as an apostrophe.  |

## Spelling conventions

### Capital letters

In Italian, capitals are less used than in English.

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| With names but not titles       | Daniela Giacomo la signora Cerioli il dottor Carfagnini<br>l'ingegnere Andrisani il re Vittorio Emanuele II |
| With titles in a formal context | La Repubblica Italiana il Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | (but informally: il ministero dell'economia e delle finanze)   |
| Geographical names but not the related inhabitants, languages or adjectives   | L'Europa il Regno Unito gli Stati Uniti la Sicilia Roma<br><b>But:</b> gli italiani gli americani ; parlare italiano capire il siciliano; migrante italiano un paese europeo   |
| With addresses but not the word for road, piazza etc.   | via Daniele Manin via del Corso piazza del Duomo <b>But:</b> Corso Vittorio Emanuele   |
| Months, weekdays - no capitals  | Ci vediamo lunedì Sono nato in gennaio   |
| Book titles – first word only   | Il Signore degli anelli <i>The Lord of the Rings</i><br>Sogno di una notte d'estate <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>   |
| Newspaper titles - capitals   | La Repubblica Il Corriere della Sera   |
| Personal pronouns: <b>io</b> no capital, but in formal correspondence the formal <i>you</i> pronouns and their related adjectives are capitalised * | Lo faccio <b>io</b><br><b>La</b> ringrazio della <b>Sua</b> attenzione<br>In attesa di sentir <b>La, Le</b> porgo i miei più cordiali saluti<br>Vorrei sottoporre alla cortese attenzione della <b>Vostra</b> ditta ...**. |

- \* The tendency is increasingly to use lower case but not with complete strangers in a professional context.
- \*\***Voi/vostro** is both informal and formal (people addressed individually as **Lei** are addressed in the plural as **voi**). However, in a letter of application the addressee (e.g. the representative of a firm) may be seen as plural.

### Dropping the final vowel

In informal Italian the final vowel of the verb may be dropped. This is also permissible in written Italian where the vowel could produce an awkward sound, e.g. with **bene** or the infinitives of **avere, fare, lasciare** or **stare**.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Dropping the final –o ( <b>sono, erano</b> etc.)                          | Lasciali stare, <b>son</b> solo bambini<br><b>C'er</b> an tanti poliziotti in piazza  |
| Dropping the final –e ( <b>avere, fare, lasciare, stare, volere</b> etc.) | Non <b>aver</b> paura; Vorrei <b>star</b> meglio; Deve <b>lasciar</b> passare il camion; Può <b>far</b> entrare il cliente? Cosa <b>vuol</b> dire? È <b>ben</b> diverso |

### Spelling out loud

When spelling out loud, the convention is to use the names of towns where possible. Otherwise the letters are spelt using their proper names in the alphabet. These are also shown below.

|          |                         |                                   |          |                          |                                  |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> | <b>a</b> [ <i>ah</i> ]  | Ancona                            | <b>N</b> | <b>enne</b>              | Napoli                           |
| <b>B</b> | <b>bi</b>               | Bologna (or Bari)                 | <b>O</b> | <b>o</b> [ <i>hot</i> ]  | Otranto                          |
| <b>C</b> | <b>ci</b>               | Como                              | <b>P</b> | <b>pi</b>                | Padova (or Parma)                |
| <b>D</b> | <b>di</b>               | Domodossola                       | <b>Q</b> | <b>cu</b>                | <b>cu</b> (or <i>quaranta</i> )  |
| <b>E</b> | <b>e</b> [ <i>egg</i> ] | Empoli                            | <b>R</b> | <b>erre</b>              | Roma                             |
| <b>F</b> | <b>effe</b>             | Forlì                             | <b>S</b> | <b>esse</b>              | Savona (or Salerno)              |
| <b>G</b> | <b>gi</b>               | Genova                            | <b>T</b> | <b>ti</b>                | Torino                           |
| <b>H</b> | <b>acca</b>             | <b>Hotel</b> (or <i>acca</i> )    | <b>U</b> | <b>u</b> [ <i>cool</i> ] | Udine                            |
| <b>I</b> | <b>i</b> [ <i>eat</i> ] | Imola                             | <b>V</b> | <b>vu</b>                | Venezia (or Vicenza)             |
| <b>J</b> | <b>i lunga</b>          | <b>i lunga</b> (or <i>jolly</i> ) | <b>W</b> | <b>doppio vu</b>         | <b>doppio vu</b> (or Washington) |
| <b>K</b> | <b>cappa</b>            | <b>cappa</b>                      | <b>X</b> | <b>ics</b>               | <b>ics</b>                       |
| <b>L</b> | <b>elle</b>             | Livorno                           | <b>Y</b> | <b>ipsilon</b>           | <b>ipsilon/i greca</b>           |
| <b>M</b> | <b>emme</b>             | Milano                            | <b>Z</b> | <b>zeta</b>              | <b>zeta</b> (or Zara)            |