

ITALIAN GRAMMAR UNLOCKED — SERIES

Italian Grammar Unlocked

Vol. 2 — Intermediate Edition

Level A2 → B1

Go beyond the basics. Master the tenses, moods, and structures that unlock real Italian fluency — with clear explanations, rich examples, and progressive exercises.

Vega Publishing | 2026

Book 2 of 3 · Continues from: Italian Grammar Unlocked Vol. 1 (A1–A2)

Italian Grammar Unlocked: Vol. 2 — Intermediate Edition

Part of the Italian Grammar Unlocked series · Book 2 of 3

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The Italian language examples, vocabulary, and grammar rules presented in this book are provided solely for educational purposes. All example sentences are original and created for instructional clarity.

CEFR level designations follow the framework established by the Council of Europe. Level assessments in this book are approximate guides for self-study learners.

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How to Use This Book

This is the second volume of the **Italian Grammar Unlocked** series, designed for learners who have completed A1–A2 grammar or its equivalent. Each chapter builds directly on Vol. 1 foundations — look for the **Building on Vol. 1** boxes that connect new material to what you already know.

How to Study

- Work through the seven blocks in order — later blocks assume earlier ones
- Do the exercises before checking the Answer Key
- Chapters marked **B1** are the most challenging — take your time
- Use the 300 Phrases section and the B1 Writing Frames for real-life application

Book Structure

Each chapter includes:

- **Grammar Explanation** — Clear, direct rules written the way a teacher would explain them
- **Formation Tables** — Visual conjugation and pattern overviews
- **Examples** — Italian sentences with English translations in context
- **Consiglio (Tip) boxes** — Shortcuts, memory tricks, and key insights
- **Attenzione! (Warning) boxes** — Common traps for English speakers
- **Building on Vol. 1 boxes** — Connects new material to prior learning
- **Exercises** — Controlled practice, graded by difficulty

Consiglio — The two hardest topics for English speakers are **Passato Prossimo vs. Imperfetto** (Chapter 2) and the **Subjunctive** (Chapters 16–18). Budget extra time for those chapters and revisit the examples often.

Reference Material

At the back of the book you will find: a complete Conjugation Reference covering all tenses taught in Volumes 1 and 2, a bridge quick reference for the jump to upper-intermediate Italian, 300 Essential Phrases organized by topic, an expanded Irregular Verb Master Table, reusable B1 Writing Frames, and the Answer Key for all exercises.

The Imperfetto

Ongoing, habitual, and descriptive past

A2

Building on Vol. 1 — You already know the *passato prossimo* for completed past actions (Vol. 1, Ch. 18). The imperfetto covers everything else in the past — background, habits, states, and ongoing actions.

The **imperfetto** (imperfect) is used for:

- **Habitual/repeated past actions:** things you used to do
- **Ongoing actions in progress:** what was happening when something else occurred
- **Descriptions and states in the past:** weather, feelings, appearance, age
- **Two simultaneous ongoing actions**

Formation — Regular Verbs

Drop the infinitive ending entirely, then add the imperfetto endings:

| Subject | -ARE (parl-) | -ERE (scriv-) | -IRE (dorm-) |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <i>io</i> | parlavo | scrivevo | dormivo |
| <i>tu</i> | parlavi | scrivevi | dormivi |
| <i>lui/lei</i> | parlava | scriveva | dormiva |
| <i>noi</i> | parlavamo | scrivevamo | dormivamo |
| <i>voi</i> | parlavate | scrivevate | dormivate |
| <i>loro</i> | parlavano | scrivevano | dormivano |

Key Irregular Imperfetti

| Verb | io | tu | lui/lei | noi | voi | loro |
|---------------|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>essere</i> | ero | eri | era | eravamo | eravate | erano |
| <i>fare</i> | facevo | facevi | faceva | facevamo | facevate | facevano |
| <i>dire</i> | dicevo | dicevi | diceva | dicevamo | dicevate | dicevano |
| <i>bere</i> | bevevo | bevevi | beveva | bevevamo | bevevate | bevevano |

Examples

Da bambino, giocavo ogni pomeriggio.

As a child, I used to play every afternoon.

Pioveva forte quella notte.

It was raining hard that night.

Avevo vent'anni quando ho iniziato.

I was twenty when I started.

Mentre mangiavo, leggevo il giornale.

While I was eating, I was reading the newspaper.

Era tardi e tutti dormivano.

It was late and everyone was sleeping.

Consiglio — Signal words for the imperfetto: *sempre* (always), *di solito* (usually), *ogni giorno* (every day), *da bambino/a* (as a child), *mentre* (while), *quando ero* (when I was).

Exercises — Chapter 1

A. CONJUGATE IN THE IMPERFETTO:

1. Io ____ (lavorare) in centro ogni giorno.
2. Tu ____ (leggere) molto da piccolo?
3. Lei ____ (essere) molto timida da bambina.
4. Noi ____ (fare) lunghe passeggiate la domenica.
5. Loro ____ (dormire) fino a tardi il sabato.

B. TRANSLATE USING THE IMPERFETTO:

1. When I was young, I used to speak Italian with my grandmother.
2. It was cold and the streets were empty.
3. She always ate at the same restaurant.

Passato Prossimo vs. Imperfetto

The most important distinction in Italian

A2

This is the chapter most learners find hardest — and the most rewarding to master. The key is understanding *how the speaker views the action*, not just when it happened.

The Core Rule

PASSATO PROSSIMO

A **completed, single, bounded** action. It happened, it finished. *Ieri ho mangiato la pizza.*

IMPERFETTO

A **continuous, repeated, or background** state/action. The clock was running. *Da bambino mangiavo sempre la pizza.*

Side-by-Side Comparison

| Passato Prossimo | Imperfetto |
|---|--|
| Specific completed event | Background, description, state |
| Counted number of times | Habitual / repeated (no fixed count) |
| Sudden interrupting action | Ongoing action being interrupted |
| <i>ieri, stamattina, una volta, improvvisamente</i> | <i>sempre, di solito, mentre, ogni, da bambino</i> |

The Classic Pattern: Interrupted Action

Imperfetto (background) + **quando/mentre** + **Passato Prossimo** (interrupting event):

Dormivo quando è squillato il telefono.

I was sleeping when the phone rang.

Mentre leggevo, è entrata Maria.

While I was reading, Maria came in.

Guardavamo la TV quando si è spenta la luce.

We were watching TV when the lights went out.

Verbs That Change Meaning

| Verb | Imperfetto (state) | Passato Prossimo (event) |
|------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>sapere</i> | <i>sapevo</i> = I knew | <i>ho saputo</i> = I found out |
| <i>conoscere</i> | <i>conoscevo</i> = I knew (them) | <i>ho conosciuto</i> = I met (for first time) |
| <i>volere</i> | <i>volevo</i> = I wanted | <i>ho voluto</i> = I insisted/decided to |
| <i>potere</i> | <i>potevo</i> = I was able to | <i>ho potuto</i> = I managed to |

Exercises – Chapter 2

A. CHOOSE PASSATO PROSSIMO OR IMPERFETTO:

1. Ogni estate (andavamo / siamo andati) al mare.
2. Ieri (mangiavo / ho mangiato) una pizza buonissima.
3. Mentre (parlavo / ho parlato), lui (dormiva / ha dormito).
4. All'improvviso (pioveva / ha cominciato a piovere).
5. Da piccola (aveva / ha avuto) i capelli biondi.

B. TRANSLATE (CHOOSE THE CORRECT PAST TENSE):

1. I met Marco three years ago. (use *conoscere*)
2. She was tired and wanted to sleep.
3. I found out the news this morning. (use *sapere*)

Consiglio — When two past actions coexist in the same sentence, ask: which was the ongoing background (imperfetto) and which was the specific event (passato prossimo)? The background sets the scene; the event interrupts or completes it.

The Trapassato Prossimo

The past-before-the-past

A2

The **trapassato prossimo** (past perfect) expresses an action that was completed *before* another past action. In English: “had done.”

Formation: Imperfetto of *essere/avere* + past participle

| with <i>avere</i> — <i>parlare</i> | with <i>essere</i> — <i>andare</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| avevo parlato | ero andato/a |
| avevi parlato | eri andato/a |
| aveva parlato | era andato/a |
| avevamo parlato | eravamo andati/e |
| avevate parlato | eravate andati/e |
| avevano parlato | erano andati/e |

Consiglio — Same rule as *passato prossimo*: use *essere* for motion/intransitive/reflexive verbs (with agreement), *avere* for all others.

Quando sono arrivato, Maria era già partita.

When I arrived, Maria had already left.

Non avevo mai mangiato il tiramisù prima di quel giorno.

I had never eaten tiramisù before that day.

Gli ho dato il libro che avevo comprato la settimana scorsa.

I gave him the book I had bought the week before.

A. FORM THE TRAPASSATO PROSSIMO:

- Quando sono arrivata, loro ___ già ___ (mangiare).
- Non sapevo che tu ___ già ___ (partire) per Roma.
- Ha comprato la macchina che ___ ___ (vedere) la settimana prima.
- Eravamo stanchi perché ___ ___ (camminare) tutto il giorno.

B. TRANSLATE:

- She had never been to Italy before last summer.
- He didn't come because he had already eaten.

The Passato Remoto

Literary past & Southern Italian speech

A2

The **passato remoto** (remote past) expresses completed past actions — the same meaning as the *passato prossimo*. The difference is regional and stylistic, not grammatical.

Northern Italy: Use *passato prossimo* for everything in speech.

Southern Italy + Sicily: Use *passato remoto* even for recent events.

Written Italian / Literature / History: *Passato remoto* throughout.

Formation — Regular Verbs

| Subject | parlare | scrivere | dormire |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>io</i> | parlai | scrissi | dormii |
| <i>tu</i> | parlasti | scrivesti | dormisti |
| <i>lui/lei</i> | parlò | scrisse | dormì |
| <i>noi</i> | parlammo | scrivemmo | dormimmo |
| <i>voi</i> | parlaste | scriveste | dormiste |
| <i>loro</i> | parlarono | scrissero | dormirono |

Key Irregular Forms (for Recognition)

| Verb | io | lui/lei | loro |
|-----------------|-------|---------|----------|
| <i>essere</i> | fui | fu | furono |
| <i>avere</i> | ebbi | ebbe | ebbero |
| <i>fare</i> | feci | fece | fecero |
| <i>venire</i> | venni | venne | vennero |
| <i>vedere</i> | vidi | vide | viderono |
| <i>dire</i> | dissi | disse | dissero |
| <i>prendere</i> | presi | prese | presero |

Consiglio — Focus on **recognizing** the *passato remoto* in reading. You only need to produce it actively if you plan to live in southern Italy or write formal/literary Italian.

Passato Remoto in Literature – Examples

Dante scrisse la Divina Commedia nel Trecento.

Dante wrote the Divine Comedy in the 14th century.

I Romani costruirono strade in tutta Europa.

The Romans built roads throughout Europe.

Garibaldi unificò l'Italia nel 1861.

Garibaldi unified Italy in 1861.

Michelangelo dipinse la Cappella Sistina.

Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel.

Attenzione! – Do not use the passato remoto and passato prossimo interchangeably in the same passage. Written Italian chooses one style and sticks to it throughout. In everyday speech, the passato prossimo is always safe in northern and central Italy.

Exercises – Chapter 4

A. IDENTIFY THE VERB AND TRANSLATE EACH PASSATO REMOTO FORM:

1. *Dante scrisse la Divina Commedia.* ____
2. *I Romani costruirono molte strade.* ____
3. *Columbus arrivò in America nel 1492.* ____
4. *Garibaldi unificò l'Italia.* ____

B. REWRITE USING PASSATO PROSSIMO (NORTHERN ITALIAN STYLE):

1. *Ieri andai al mercato.* → ____
2. *Stamattina bevvi un caffè.* → ____