**Guide to Italian Pronunciation**

**for Singers**

**by Cliff Lamere Jan 1999, revised Mar 2010**

**This guide is meant to help singers pronounce Italian words in Italian songs, opera solos and opera choruses. A simplified version of this guide was originally constructed as a handout for use by the Octavo Singers of Schenectady, NY in January 1999. This expanded revision presents the information in a format that is easier to use and that is compatible in style with my Guide to** [**German**](http://www.clifflamere.com/Lang/German/GermanPronunciation.htm) **Pronunciation for Singers.**

**Caution: This is written for American singers in the United States. If you find written information online about how to pronounce Italian, it will often be written by someone who speaks British English. Those descriptions of how to pronounce this language will confuse American singers.**

**Unless they are at the beginning of a sentence, all words in Italian begin with a lower case letter except the names of 1) people, 2) locations, and 3) countries. The vast majority of Italian words end in a vowel, except those of foreign origin (like sport and yogurt).**

**Understanding the Sound Descriptions Used in this Webpage**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **American English**  **Description I Use** | **Sounds Like** |
|  |  |
| **ah** | **like o in Hot** |
| **aw** | **as in Saw** |
| **ai** | **as in Main** |
| **ee** | **as in Seen** |
| **eh** | **as in Set** |
| **ih** | **as in Sit** |
| **oh** | **as in Hope** |
| **oo** | **as in Soon** |
| **ow** | **as in Cow** |
| **oy** | **as in Toy** |
| **uh** | **as in But** |

**I T A L I A N V O W E L S**

**Vowels**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Vowel** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Example**  **(English Word)** | **Italian Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **A** | **ah** | **as in Father** | **cantare - madre - animale**  **(to sing - mother - animal)**  ***feminine words end in A.*** | **Cahn-TAHR-eh ~ MAH-dreh ~ ah-nee-MAH-leh** |
| **A**  **(last letter of a word)** | **ah, uh** | **Should sound like ah, but usually said like**  **A in Ago.** | **ama - banana**  **(loves - banana)** | **AH-muh ~ bah-NAH-nuh** |
| **E**  **long** | **ai** | **like ai in Paid** | **me - fede**  **(me - faith)** | **mai ~ FAI-deh** |
| **E**  **short** | **eh** | **as in Get** | **lento - cinque**  **(slow - five)** | **LEN-toh ~ CHEEN-kweh** |
| **I** | **ee** | **as in Machine** | **libro - idea**  **(book - idea)** | **LEE-broh ~ EE-dai-uh ~** |
| **O**  **long** | **oh** | **as in Cone** | **vino - dono**  **(wine - gift)**  ***masculine words most often*** ***end in O.*** | **VEE-noh ~ DOH-noh** |
| **O**  **short** | **aw** | **as in Cost** | **notte - gomma**  **(night - rubber)** | **NAW-teh ~ GAW-muh** |
| **U** | **oo** | **as in Rude** | **luna - uva**  **(moon - grapes)** | **LOO-nuh ~ OO-vuh** |
|  | | | |  |
| **Most Italian words end in a vowel.** | | | | |
| **In double vowels, each vowel is pronounced separately.**  **Due sounds like DOO-eh. Grazie sounds like GRAHT-see-eh.** | | | | |

I T A L I A N C O N S O N A N T S

The following consonants have about the same sound as in English.

B D F L M N P Q T V

The following English letters are missing from the Italian alphabet (but may appear in foreign words like yogurt).

J K W X Y

Consonants Which May Sound Different in Italian

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Single Consonant** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Italian Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **C** | **K** | **as in Cat**  ***(before a, o, u and before consonants)*** | **cane - cantante - capo**  **(dog - singer - head)** | **CAH-neh ~ cahn-TAHN-teh ~ KAH-poh** |
| **CH** | **as in Cello**  ***(before i or e)*** | **croce - cucina - dieci**  **(cross - kitchen - ten)** | **CROH-cheh ~ koo-CHEE-nuh ~ dee-EH-chee** |
| **G** | **G** | **as in Go**  ***(before a, o, u)*** | **gatto - grosso**  **(cat - large)** | **GAH-toh ~ GRAW-soh** |
| **J** | **as in Gin, Gem**  ***(before i or e)*** | **gioco - giorno**  **(game - day)** | **JAW-coh ~ JOR-noh** |
| **H** | **silent** | **as in Hour**  ***(99% of words containing H are of foreign origin)*** | **hotel - hobby**  **(hotel - hobby)** | **oh-TEL ~ AW-bee** |
| **R** | **R, but rolled** | **---** | **---** | **---** |
| **S** | **S** | **as in Soprano** | **si - sempre**  **(yes - always)** | **see ~ SEM-preh** |
| **Z** | **as in Rose or Easy**  ***(when it is between two vowels or when it precedes B, D, G, L, M, N, R, V)*** | **musica - rosa**  **(music - rose)** | **MOO-zee-kuh ~ ROH-zuh** |
| **Z** | **DS** | **like ds in Beds**  **and Kids** | **zebra - pranzo**  **(zebra - lunch)** | **DSEHB-ruh ~ PRAHN-dsoh** |
| **TS** | **like ts in Cats**  **and Tsunami** | **grazie - pizza**  **(thank you - pizza)** | **GRAH-tsee-uh ~ PEE-tsuh** |
| **Z** | **seldom this sound** | **Vincenzo** | **vin-CHEHN-zoh** |

**Multiple Letters**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Multiple Letters** | **American**  **English**  **Sound** | **Comment** | **Italian Example**  **(Meaning)** | **In American English,**  **Sounds Like:** |
| **In the letter combinations below, the I and H are silent, but they allow the preceding letter(s) in the combination to have a sound not possible otherwise (due to the vowel that follows the combination).** | | | | |
| **CH** | **K**  **as in Character** | **CH is always *before e or i*. H is silent, but allows K instead of CH sound (as in cello).** | **chianti - chiaro (Chianti - clear)** | **kee-AHN-tee ~ kee-AH-roh** |
| **CI** | **CH** | **I is silent,**  **but allows a CH instead of K sound**  ***before a, o, and u*** | **ciambella - ciao**  **(ring - hello)** | **chahm-BELL-uh ~ CHAH-oh**  **(said quickly, ciao sounds like chow, as in cow)** |
| **GH** | **G (hard)**  **as in Ghost** | **GH is always**  ***before an e or i.***  **H is silent, but allows G instead of J sound .** | **spaghetti - ghetto**  **(spaghetti - ghetto)** | **spah-GET-ee ~ GEHT-oh** |
| **GI** | **J** | **I is silent,**  **but allows a J instead of G sound**  ***before a, o, and u*** | **giorno - Giovanni**  **(day - John)** | **JOR-noh ~ jo-VAH-nee** |
| **GGI** | **J** | **I is silent,**  **but allows a J instead of G sound**  ***before a, o, and u*** | **viaggio - viaggiare**  **(I travel - to travel)** | **vee-AH-joh ~ vee-ah-JAH-reh** |
| **GLI** | **sounds like LI in million** |  | **figlio - aglio - famiglia (son - garlic - family)** | **FEEL-yoh ~ AHL-yoh ~ fam-EEL-yuh** |
| **GN** | **NY as in Lasagne** | **sounds like NY in Canyon** | **agnello - bagno - legno (lamb - bath - wood)** | **AHN-yell-oh ~ BAHN-yoh ~ LEHN-yoh** |
| **SC** | **SK** | **as in Skunk**  ***before a, o, and u*** | **scusi - scuola**  **(excuse me - school)** | **SKOO-zee**  **skoo-AW-luh**  **(quickly, SKWAW-luh)** |
| **SH** | **like SH in Ship *before e or i*** | **uscita**  **(exit)** | **oo-SHEE-tuh** |
| **SCH** | **SK** | **as in School *before e or i***  **(H is silent)** | **moschea (mosque)** | **maw-SKAI-uh** |
| **SCI** | **SH** | **I is silent, but allows an SH instead of SK sound *before a, o, and u*** | **lasciare - scienza (to leave - science)** | **lah-SHAH-reh ~ SHEHN-tsu** |

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