



INTREPID ITALIAN

HOW TO TELL THE TIME



Ciao ciao!

Grazie! Thank you for downloading this cheat-sheet to learn how to tell the time in Italian. This guide includes essential vocabulary and grammar, word lists, and example sentences.

Got a trip to Italy coming up? Remember, you don't need to be fluent in Italian to have meaningful interactions with the locals and create memories that will last a lifetime, but you can be **fluent enough for travel**.

Learning to use just a few words can do wonders for enhancing your travel experiences. Plus, it's a great way to show respect and make a good first impression. This is why I not only write detailed destination guides and create informative videos, I also created a [free travel phrase guide](#) and [online language courses](#) to help smart and savvy travellers like you get the most out of their travel experiences through the power of language.



Hi! I'm Michele, an Australian travel blogger and language educator and 'guide' behind [The Intrepid Guide](#). I help my readers and students enrich their travels with beautiful and [detailed destinations guides](#), [free travel phrase guides](#), and effective [online language courses](#) that follow my 80/20 method so they can enjoy meaningful interactions with the locals and avoid being treated like a tourist. Over the past few years, I've travelled the world and learned several foreign languages using my unique building-block method which is the basis of all my language courses. Keep in touch with me via Instagram [@intrepiditalian](#) where I share daily Italian lessons.

Talking about the time in Italian

Italians don't just have one word for "time" like in English. They have five main ones, each with its own meaning. Understanding their differences is key for using them right:

- **Tempo**: this versatile term encompasses the broad concept of time itself, such as in the phrase **Il tempo guarisce tutte le ferite** (Time heals all wounds). Moreover, it also denotes duration, as in **Quanto tempo starai via?** (How long will you be away?), and it extends to describing weather conditions, but we'll save that for another guide.
- **Ora**: this is your go-to word when you need to pinpoint a specific time, like **A che ora ci vediamo?** (What time do we meet? literally, at what time do we meet?) or to talk about what's happening right this moment, as in **Vengo appena posso, ora sono al lavoro** (I'll be there as soon as I can, I'm at work right now). Plus, fixed expressions like **non vedo l'ora** (I can't wait, literally, I can't see the hour) or **è ora di... fare qualcosa** (it's time to... do something) are also commonly used in Italian.
- **Orario**: coming from **ora** (time), this term refers to the specific time of something, or to a timetable. For example: **Mi dai l'orario di settimana prossima?** (Can you give me next week's timetable?)
- **Volte**: this term is used to describe how often something occurs, as in **Vado in palestra tre volte a settimana** (I go to the gym three times a week). It's similar to the English word, *times*.
- **Momento**: this is the appropriate term when you want to talk about a specific point in time, for example: **È un buon momento per parlare?** (Is it a good time to talk?). It's similar to the English word, *moment*.

How to ask what time it is in Italian?

If you're in Italy and need to check the time, the first thing you'll want to know is how to ask what time it is in Italian, right? Well, here are some key ways to do just that, depending on the context and how formal you want to sound. Remember to begin by saying **Scusa** (Excuse me, informal) or **Scusi** (Excuse me, formal) to be polite.

- **Che ora è?/Che ore sono?**: These are the two basic questions for asking the time in Italian. Both mean "What time is it?" and are interchangeable. The only difference lies in their literal meaning: **Che ora è** is singular (What hour is it?), while **Che ore sono** is plural (What hours are they?). These questions are suitable for both formal and informal situations.



- **Potrebbe/Potresti dirmi l'ora?:** translating to “Could you (formal/informal) tell me the time?”, this phrase adds a touch of elegance, perfect for moments when you want to keep it classy!
- **Mi sa/Mi sai dire l'ora?:** This is another polite way to ask for the time in Italian, this time using the verb **sapere** (to know). Similar to the previous phrase, this question translates to "Can you tell me the time?", literally, “Do you know to tell me the time?”.
- **Sai l'ora?/Sa l'ora?:** literally translating to “Do you know the time?”, this is a more relaxed approach, ideal for casual conversations where you don't want to interrupt the flow but still need a quick time check.
- **A che ora è...? /A che ora comincia...?:** these questions translate to “At what time is...” and “At what time does... start?” respectively and come in handy for planning things while you're in Italy. For example, **A che ora è il prossimo treno per Bari?** (What time is the next train to Bari?).
- **Fino a che ora...?:** this translates to “Until what time...?” and is super useful for finding out how long something is going to last. For instance, **Fino a che ora c'è sciopero dei mezzi?** (Until what time is the transport strike?) - alas, a key sentence to add to your repertoire of [Italian travel phrases](#).

How to tell the time in Italian

In Italian, hours are feminine and are always preceded by the definite article **le** (the). The structure for expressing them revolves around three main elements: the verb **essere** (to be), the article, and the numbers:

Sono + le + the corresponding number on the clock

For example:

A: **Scusi, potrebbe dirmi l'ora per favore?** (Excuse me, could you tell me the time, please?)

B: **Certo, sono le quattro** (Sure, it's four o'clock).

This structure applies to all hours, except 1 o'clock, which is singular: **È l'una** (It's one o'clock).

When specifying a particular hour, you must use the preposition alle (at), as in the sentence **Le lezioni cominciano alle 8 del mattino** (Classes start at 8 in the morning).



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Again, if it's 1 o'clock, you need to switch to the singular, as in: **La riunione è all'una** (The meeting is at one o'clock).

Now, let's explore the two main standards for expressing time in Italian:

The 12-hour time format

The 12-hour time format uses numbers 1 to 12 and is the most commonly used for everyday conversations. Essentially, after twelve, the count restarts - one, two, three, etc. Here's how time is expressed using this system:

The 12-hour system in Italian		
Time	English	Italian
1:00	It's one o'clock / At one o'clock	È l'una / All'una
2:00	It's two o'clock / At two o'clock	Sono le due / Alle due
3:00	It's three o'clock / At three o'clock	Sono le tre / Alle tre
4:00	It's four o'clock / At four o'clock	Sono le quattro / Alle quattro
5:00	It's five o'clock / At five o'clock	Sono le cinque / Alle cinque
6:00	It's six o'clock / At six o'clock	Sono le sei / Alle sei
7:00	It's seven o'clock / At seven o'clock	Sono le sette / Alle sette
8:00	It's eight o'clock / At eight o'clock	Sono le otto / Alle otto
9:00	It's nine o'clock / At nine o'clock	Sono le nove / Alle nove
10:00	It's ten o'clock / At ten o'clock	Sono le dieci / Alle dieci
11:00	It's eleven o'clock / At eleven o'clock	Sono le undici / Alle undici
12:00	It's twelve o'clock / At twelve o'clock	Sono le dodici / Alle dodici**

** Note: at 12:00 pm, Italians also say **mezzogiorno** (noon), while at 12:00 am, you can also say **mezzanotte** (midnight).



Unlike English, which distinguishes between "am" (from the Latin "ante meridiem," meaning before noon) and "pm" (from the Latin "post meridiem," meaning after noon), in Italian, when using the 12-hour clock, it's common to provide additional context to specify the exact time of day being referred to, as it may not always be immediately clear.

These are the main times of day in Italian:

- **di mattina** (in the morning), between 6:00am and 12:00pm
- **del pomeriggio** (in the afternoon), between 1:00pm and 6:00pm
- **di sera** (in the evening), between 7:00pm and 12:00am
- **di notte** (at night), between 1:00am and 5:00am

Examples:

- **Devo vedermi con Paola a mezzogiorno** - I have to meet with Paola at noon.
- **Ho sentito un forte rumore all'1 di notte, pensavo fosse un ladro!** - I heard a loud noise at 1 in the morning, I thought it was a thief!
- **Fino a che ora resta aperta la discoteca? Fino alle 3 del mattino** - Until what time does the club stay open? Until 3 in the morning.

The 24-hour time format

The 24-hour time format uses numbers ranging from 1 to 24 and is regarded as more formal. It's typically used in professional environments or schedules such as for transportation, theatre and cinema to avoid any potential ambiguity. Having already covered the hours from 1 to 12 in the previous table, let's now focus on the range of 13 to 23:

The 24-hour system in Italian		
Time	English	Italian
1:00	It's one am / At one am	È l'una / All'una
2:00	It's two am / At two am	Sono le due / Alle due
3:00	It's three am / At three am	Sono le tre / Alle tre
4:00	It's your am / At four am	Sono le quattro / Alle quattro



5:00	It's five am / At five am	Sono le cinque / Alle cinque
6:00	It's six am / At six am	Sono le sei / Alle sei
7:00	It's seven am / At seven am	Sono le sette / Alle sette
8:00	It's eight am / At eight am	Sono le otto / Alle otto
9:00	It's nine am / At nine am	Sono le nove / Alle nove
10:00	It's ten am / At ten am	Sono le dieci / Alle dieci
11:00	It's eleven am / At eleven am	Sono le undici / Alle undici
12:00	It's twelve am / At twelve am	Sono le dodici / Alle dodici
13:00	It's one pm / At one pm	Sono le tredici / Alle tredici
14:00	It's two pm / At two pm	Sono le quattordici / Alle quattordici
15:00	It's three pm / At three pm	Sono le quindici / Alle quindici
16:00	It's four pm / At four pm	Sono le sedici / Alle sedici
17:00	It's five pm / At five pm	Sono le diciassette / Alle diciassette
18:00	It's six pm / At six pm	Sono le diciotto / Alle diciotto
19:00	It's seven pm / At seven pm	Sono le diciannove / Alle diciannove
20:00	It's eight pm / At eight pm	Sono le venti / Alle venti
21:00	It's nine pm / At nine pm	Sono le ventuno / Alle ventuno
22:00	It's ten pm / At ten pm	Sono le ventidue / Alle ventidue
23:00	It's eleven pm / At eleven pm	Sono le ventitré / Alle ventitré
24:00	It's twelve pm / At twelve pm	È mezzanotte / A mezzanotte

Examples:

- **Lo studio del medico è aperto dal lunedì al venerdì, fino alle venti** - The doctor's office is open Monday through Friday, until eight pm.
- **Il supermercato è aperto tutti i giorni fino a mezzanotte** - The supermarket is open every day until midnight.



- **La chiamo per confermarle l'appuntamento con l'Avvocato Bianchi domani alle 17:00** - I'm calling to confirm your appointment with Lawyer Bianchi tomorrow at 5:00 pm.

How to say "o'clock" in Italian

In Italian, there isn't a direct equivalent for the English "o'clock." Instead, you simply state the time. For added precision, you can use the expression **in punto** (sharp) to denote exactness. This is typically employed when emphasizing that the time is precisely as stated. In casual conversations, you can also hear Italians say **spaccate** (sharp).

Examples:

- **Oh, ci vediamo alle tre spaccate, non un minuto più tardi!** - Hey, see you at three pm sharp, not a minute later!
- **Mi raccomando, ricordati che il tour guidato inizia alle 9:00 in punto domani mattina!** - Please remember, the guided tour starts at 9:00 sharp tomorrow morning!
- **Il prossimo autobus per Pisa parte alle 14:00 in punto!** - The next bus to Pisa departs at 2:00 pm sharp!

Now learn how to tell the minutes in Italian

In Italian, the minutes following the hour are indicated by the numbers from one to sixty, without explicitly saying the word **minuti** (minutes). To express time with the hour and minutes, Italians use the following structures:

Minutes past the hour

Sono le / È l' + the hour + e + the number of minutes

Examples:

- **Sono le diciannove e trentacinque** - It's seven thirty-five
- **È l'una e dieci** - It's ten past one
- **L'appuntamento è alle quindici e venti** - The meeting is at three twenty pm

Minutes to the hour



Up to 39 minutes past the hour, you can use the structure above that adds minutes after the hour. However, from 40 minutes past, it's common in Italian to count down the minutes to the next hour. So, if the clock shows 7:55; in this case, you might hear Italians express this time in the following ways:

- **Sono le otto meno cinque** - It's 8 minus 5
- **Mancano cinque minuti alle otto** - There are 5 minutes missing to 8
- **Sono le sette e cinquantacinque** - It's 7:55 (equally correct, but slightly less common and more formal)

Let's consider another example. The time 8:40 can be expressed in three ways:

- **Sono le nove meno venti** - It's 9 minus 20
- **Mancano venti minuti alle undici** - It's twenty to eleven
- **Sono le dieci e quaranta** - It's ten forty

Rounding up minutes

Remember that, similar to English, Italian doesn't always specify exact minutes in everyday contexts and instead expresses time as follows:

- 18:03: **Sono le sei passate** - It's past six
- 18:23: **Sono le sei e venti passate** - It's past six twenty
- 18:57: **Sono quasi le sette** - It's almost seven

How to say half past, quarter past, and quarter to in Italian

Similar to other languages, Italian also tends to round up the minutes to halves, quarters, and three quarters. There are only two new words to keep in mind in this case: **mezza / mezzo** (half past) and **quarto** (quarter):

- 8:15: **Sono le otto e un quarto** - It's a quarter past eight
- 8:30: **Sono le otto e mezza** or **Sono le otto e mezzo** (both mezza and mezzo are correct) – It's half past eight



- 5:45: **Sono le sei meno un quarto** or **Manca un quarto alle sei** or **Sono le cinque e tre quarti** - These three expressions are interchangeable and mean "It's a quarter to six."

Note: In Italian youth slang, you might come across expressions like **Ci vediamo alla mezza** (literally, "We'll see each other at the half"), where **la mezza** (the half) refers to either 12:30 pm or 12:30 am. It may also indicate half-past any hour more in general.

Time-related vocabulary in Italian

Time-related vocabulary in Italian		
Italian	English	Example
Oggi	Today	La mostra inaugura oggi alle quindici (The exhibition opens today at 3 pm)
Domani	Tomorrow	Domani i negozi chiuderanno alle tredici (Shops will close at 1 pm tomorrow)
Dopodomani	The day after tomorrow	Ho una visita medica dopodomani alle tre meno un quarto (I have a doctor's appointment the day after tomorrow at a quarter to three)
Ieri	Yesterday	L'ho visto ieri intorno alle dieci di mattina (I saw him yesterday around 10 in the morning)
L'altro ieri	The day before yesterday	Sono partita l'altro ieri con il treno delle otto meno un quarto di sera (I left the day before yesterday on the seven forty-five pm train)
Giorno	Day	Il giorno della mia laurea darò una festa, vi aspetto tutti da me alle ventuno! (On my graduation day, I'm throwing a party. I look forward to seeing you all at my place at 9:00 pm!)
Prima	Before	Se venite prima delle sette di mattina, si fanno gli affari migliori! (If you come before 7 am, you'll get the best deals!)
Dopo	After	Sono rimasti posti disponibili solo dopo le quindici (There are some seats available only after 3 pm)



Presto	Early	Mi alzo sempre presto, prima delle sei (I always wake up early, before 6 am)
Tardi	Late	Sono arrivati tardi, alle dieci passate (They arrived late, past 10 o'clock)
Sempre	Always	Pranzo sempre a mezzogiorno in punto (I always have lunch at midday sharp)
Mai	Never	Non mi alzo mai prima delle otto (I never wake up before 8 am)
Di tanto in tanto	From time to time	Di tanto in tanto, mi piace andare all'ultimo spettacolo delle dieci e un quarto (From time to time, I like to go to the last show at 10:15 pm)
Durata	Duration	Lo spettacolo inizia alle cinque e mezza e ha una durata di circa 2 ore (The show starts at half past five and lasts about 2 hours)
Essere in anticipo	To be early	Il treno è in anticipo di dieci minuti, arriverà alle due meno venti (The train is ten minutes early, it will arrive at 1:40)
Essere in ritardo	To be late	Sono in ritardo di mezz'ora, iniziate senza di me (I'm running thirty minutes late, start without me)
Essere puntuali	To be on time	Laura è puntuale, arriva sempre in ufficio alle otto spaccate (Laura is on time, she always gets to the office right at 8 o'clock sharp)
Fine settimana	Weekend	Nel fine settimana il centro commerciale chiude alle venti e trenta (On weekends, the shopping center closes at 8:30 pm)
Orologio	Clock	L'orologio segna le diciotto in punto (The clock shows 6:00 pm sharp)
Tra un pò	In a while	Il museo apre tra un pò, verso le sedici (The museum will open in a little while, around 4:00 pm)



Italian expressions about time

The Italian language is rich with sayings and idiomatic expressions revolving around time. Here are some you might hear in everyday conversations:

Italian expressions about time	
Italian	English
Il tempo vola	Time flies
Tempo scaduto	Time is over
Il tempo è testimone	Time will tell
Dare tempo al tempo	Let time run its course
Ogni cosa al suo tempo	Everything in its own time
Perdere tempo	To waste time
Ora di punta	Peak time
A tempo debito	In due time
Da tempo immemore	In ages
Tempo permettendo	Time permitting
Il tempo è denaro	Time is money
Fare le ore piccole	To stay up late
Meglio tardi che mai	Better late than never
Uccidere il tempo	To kill the time
Darsi tempo	To give oneself time
Il tempo cura tutto	Time heals everything
Dopo la pioggia viene il bel tempo	After the rain, good weather will come



Grazie!

I hope you enjoyed this cheat-sheet and learned something new. Remember, don't worry about not being able to remember it all, you're learning more than most other people do so you should be very proud of yourself. I know I am!

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If you have any feedback on this guide or want to share any suggestions for future material you'd love me to create, feel free to get in touch at michele@theintrepidguide.com

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With all the encouragement in the world, I wish you success! Happy learning! Michele

