

## MAINTAINING YOUR ITALIAN BETWEEN SEMESTERS

BY SANDRO CUCCIA

**Salve!** The semester at Osher is done, you've survived about thirteen weeks of grueling work in Italian class, and you've had about all you can take of your pedantic Italian instructor. OK, so you've worked hard at learning *La Bella Lingua*, and now you think you need a break... to recover from all the angst and frustration.

Not so fast! I've said this many times to you: if you truly want to learn Italian – or any language – you *must, must, MUST* listen to the spoken language, read it and practice speaking *on a daily basis!* This is particularly important for anyone learning a foreign language while living in the U.S. where English is all around us. It is well understood that the full-immersion approach of attending formal language instruction classes within the foreign country is the best way to truly learn a language. Living here in the States, you don't have the opportunity to speak and hear Italian within your environment as you go about your daily activities. So, it is totally up to you to engage in certain activities to maintain and develop your proficiency in the Italian language.

Thanks to the Internet, and all of the available resources like websites, podcasts, videos, news sources, movies and TV, language exchanges, apps and more, it's easier than ever to maintain proficiency and even to learn a language independently at home for those who can't or prefer not to learn in a classroom environment. Between semesters – particularly during the Summer break – your goal must be to surround yourself with spoken Italian as much as possible. You can achieve this goal by seeking out and utilizing the resources recommended below.

### READING: SHORT STORIES + ITALIAN = FASTER LEARNING!

Reading stories may seem like a dated method and is often forgotten about, but reading is a super beneficial and easily accessible way to help you maintain your Italian at home. I have found that one of the best ways to do so is by reading a good anthology of short stories published specifically for beginning and intermediate adult students (equivalent to A1, A2, B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference). It's fairly easy to fully incorporate the essentials of a language once you frame that learning into a certain context. Short stories permit you to put what you've learned so far into practice, allowing you to expand your vocabulary quickly, make sense of ideas, understand new concepts, and overall get a better grasp of the Italian language. The Italian "readers" I recommend below have English text interspersed with the Italian so that you can translate any words you don't understand as you go.

Below are some books that I have reviewed (and own), and I recommend for your use. For these first two, please be sure to read the introductory and preface materials for important information on how to best use the books. The affiliate links included will take you to the product page on **Amazon.com**.

**Italian: Short Stories for Beginners: Improve your reading and listening skills in Italian. Learn Italian with Stories** Published by CreateSpace (soft-cover book, audio version via Audible.com, and Kindle edition). New Second Edition (2017). The audio version is free for those who do not have an audible.com account, or at a discount for those who already have an account.

Amazon link: [bit.ly/sandrinol5](https://bit.ly/sandrinol5)

**Italian Short Stories For Beginners: 8 Unconventional Short Stories to Grow Your Vocabulary and Learn Italian the Fun Way!** (Italian Edition) by Olly Richards (soft-cover book, audio version via Audible.com, and Kindle edition). I've been using stories from this book in my advanced course at Osher: *Impariamo, Parlando L'Italiano!* Amazon link: [j.mp/sandrinol1](https://j.mp/sandrinol1)

For more advanced students, I always recommend the two books listed below. I (and many children in Italy) grew up reading from these wonderful books. My mother made sure that I read these daily with discussion to follow. I am forever grateful to her for home-schooling me in Italian while growing up here in the States.

**Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca** by Luigi Bertelli (paperback, audio version via Audible.com, and Kindle edition). Description: " *Il Giornalino di Gian Burrasca* è il romanzo per ragazzi più divertente e più avvincente di tutta la letteratura italiana. Come nel "Pinocchio", il protagonista, Giannino Stoppani, rappresenta l'indipendenza e l'originalità di giudizio e di pensiero, ma in un modo più radicale ed originale." Amazon link: [j.mp/sandrinol3](https://j.mp/sandrinol3)

Italian  
Short Stories  
for Beginners



+ AUDIO DOWNLOAD

By Talk in Italian

ITALIAN  
SHORT STORIES  
FOR BEGINNERS



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Gian Burrasca





**Cuore** by Edmondo De Amicis (paperback, audio version via Audible.com, and Kindle edition).  
Description: “*Pubblicato a Milano nel 1886, è, dopo Pinocchio, il più celebre libro per ragazzi scritto in Italia e uno dei più famosi al mondo. Il libro si compone di una successione di aneddoti e bozzetti di vita scolastica, da cui risulta soprattutto una serie di ritratti di compagni, appartenenti a diverse classi sociali, e dai caratteri più vari.*” Amazon link: [j.mp/sandrino14](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Cuore&ref=ast_srp)

## READING ONLINE

You may be asking, “What about reading from sources on the Internet?” In my view, the problem for you as a beginner is that you might feel like you don’t know where to start, or you may feel lost trying to read whatever pops up on the internet. Online news articles and magazines are easy to find and are readily available. However, keep in mind that reading journalism-based Italian can be frustrating even to native Speakers! You can search for articles on anything you want to read about in the Italian language, and you’re all set. I suggest that you specifically go to **google.it** (notice the .it for domains located in Italy). This will help in a big way to get to Italian content directly. Bookmark it. Then, enter search terms; preferably in Italian. For example, if you are interested in learning about Milano before traveling to Italy, simply google “Milano”. For the words you come across that you don’t know, you can look them up and add them to a list of new words and gradually try and build them into your vocabulary. This is a great way to find lots of topic-specific words and access more formal vocabulary. If you want to read something a little more lighthearted you can find magazines either online or in print, and follow bloggers who post in your target language too. I have read, and heard from others, that reading online comics (or comic books) in a language helps learning a great deal. As of yet, I have no resources to recommend, but let’s keep that in mind. **Late breaking news! ... I did find this:**

**corrierino-giornalino.blogspot.com** – This is a twenty-five year compilation of comic strip/comic book archives from three now-defunct publications for children (that I remember fondly): *Il Corriere Dei Piccoli, Il Corriere Dei Ragazzi,* and *Il Giornalino*.

Here are a few other important websites you may want to take a look at:

**rainews.it** – **RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana)** is the national public broadcasting company of Italy. This site is the outlet for all things news and sports; both in written and in multimedia formats.

**www.raitalia.it** – **RAI Italia** – Go to this site to see Italian television programming. Click on the tab titled “*I Video Di Rai Italia*” at the top of the home page.

**corriere.it** – **Corriere Della Sera** is one of Italy’s oldest newspapers

## YOUTUBE (VIDEO PROGRAMS)

I LOVE **YouTube**. If I ever get stuck on an deserted island, all I need is coffee and my iPad with access to YouTube!! There are lots of great instructional videos to view there, not the least of which is Italian. There are so many programs, but here are my favorites:

**Learn Italian with Lucrezia** – My friend, Lucrezia Oddone, is from Rome. I have personally learned a lot from her. She’s really good, smart, fun and pretty! I use her material quite a bit in my Italian classes.

YouTube link: [youtube.com/user/lucreziaoddone](https://www.youtube.com/user/lucreziaoddone)

**Learn Italian with ItalianPod 101.com** – New videos are posted twice per week. This Youtube channel offers a fun, easy and fast way to learn Italian. The levels vary from polite to informal Italian. You only need a couple of minutes per day to learn new phrases. YouTube link: [youtube.com/user/italianpod101](https://www.youtube.com/user/italianpod101)

**One World Italiano** – Led by Veronica from Cagliari, the heart of the island Sardegna. You will find her videos really interesting and engaging because she uses costumes and visuals. Mostly advanced tutorials.

YouTube link: [v](#)

**Italy Made Easy** – If you are a beginner in learning Italian this is the perfect choice for you. On this channel you can enjoy the unique humour presented by the Italian teacher Manù.

YouTube link: [youtube.com/user/manula2006](https://www.youtube.com/user/manula2006)



## PODCASTS

Podcasts are wonderful audio (and some video) resources available for free via Internet. These are like short weekly or monthly programs - similar to radio shows but on the internet. To listen to these, you need iTunes on Mac or Windows PCs and the Podcast app on iPhones and iPads. The podcasts are also compatible with Android devices. Mac computers have iTunes already installed. Windows users can download and install iTunes for free from [apple.com](http://apple.com). I love listening to podcasts on my iPhone and iPad while out walking, driving, bungee-jumping, or simply sitting at home in my favorite chair. There are podcasts for thousands of subjects and interests, and Italian is no exception. Here are the ones I recommend you check out. The podcast links provided will use your browser to let you access the podcasts, listen to them online, and/or subscribe to them. On your smart device podcast apps, simply search for the podcast names:

**Coffee Break Italian** – Learn Italian with Mark, Francesca and Katie in regular lesson from the Radio Lingua Network. In each lesson they focus on the Italian you need to know and before long you'll be making yourself understood with native Italian speakers. iTunes podcast link: [j.mp/sandrino01](https://j.mp/sandrino01)

**News In Slow Italian** – The podcast gives you access to all episodes aired in our weekly program News in Slow Italian. You can also listen to the episodes online and you can download audio files and flashcards to your mobile device so you could have access to them offline. I periodically use News In Slow Italian in my advanced Italian class. iTunes podcast link: [j.mp/sandrino02](https://j.mp/sandrino02)

**Maxmondo Incontro Italiano** – Learn Italian with Maxmondo. All about Italy in Italian! For intermediate to advanced learners interested in all things Italian. I also use Incontro Italiano in my classes. iTunes podcast link: [j.mp/sandrino03](https://j.mp/sandrino03)

**ItalianPod101** – The [ItalianPod101.com](http://ItalianPod101.com) site and podcast offers a language training system that consists of free daily podcast audio lessons, video lessons, Italian Word of the Day, a premium learning center, and a vibrant user community. iTunes podcast link: [j.mp/sandrino04](https://j.mp/sandrino04)

**Italian by SBS Radio** – This podcast service delivers tailor-made versions of SBS Radio programs which include current affairs, interviews and regular segments from Italy and around the world. iTunes podcast link: [j.mp/sandrino05](https://j.mp/sandrino05)

**Parole di Storie: Fiabe** – (*fiabe* = fairy tales) The reading of famous children's stories. The idea is that you already know these stories - for example, *Pinocchio*, *The Beauty and the Beast*, and others - and now you get to hear them in Italian. iTunes podcast link: [bit.ly/sandrino06](https://bit.ly/sandrino06)

**Ad Alta Voce** – (means "out-loud") In these podcast episodes, you can listen to classics of Italian literature narrated by well-known Italian actors. iTunes podcast link: [bit.ly/sandrino07](https://bit.ly/sandrino07)

**Digitalia** – In this weekly podcast, the hosts discuss technology and social media and how these affect society, politics, education and lifestyle. These guys are talking a mile a minute, so be warned! iTunes podcast link: [bit.ly/sandrino08](https://bit.ly/sandrino08)

**Radio Feltrinelli** – This is basically the radio station owned by the major Italian book publisher, *Feltrinelli*. In this podcast, you can listen to many spoken topics in Italian, such as author interviews discussing their books, current affairs, politics and other matters. iTunes podcast link: [bit.ly/sandrino09](https://bit.ly/sandrino09)

**Pausa Caffè** – (means "coffee break") This is about how Italians use social media, blogs and new technology. This has been discontinued but all the episodes are available for downloading and listening. iTunes podcast link: [bit.ly/sandrino10](https://bit.ly/sandrino10)

## APPS

I recommend a couple of great Italian language-learning apps for iPhone, iPad and Android devices. You can review these by searching for their titles in Apple's App Store app on your iPhone/iPad and the Google Play Store for your Android device.

> **Language Learning: FlashAcademy** by Learning Labs, Ltd. ... Free for a three-lesson evaluation. Subscription tiers available. See also their website [flashsticks.com/app](http://flashsticks.com/app). I really like this app, and plan to demo it in the Fall. *Note: When searching the app stores, search for "FlashAcademy."*



CoffeeBreak  
Italian





> **WordUp! The Italian Word Game** also by FlashSticks/Learning Labs, Ltd....Free. Just a simple but fun Italian-English word game to help you stay sharp! Be sure you are downloading the correct one... look for the developer listed as “by FlashSticks” and/or “by Learning Labs, Ltd”.

> **MosaLingua - Learn to Speak Italian Quickly With MosaLingua** by MosaCrea Limited ... \$4.99 gives you a lot. Additionally, there are some low-cost add-on expansion packs available. Be sure to read the full description and visit [mosalingua.com](http://mosalingua.com) for a video demo. Additionally, Mac and Windows versions of the app are available via the website. *Note: When when visiting the website, you are initially prompted to select the website’s display language, be sure to select English, then you can pick Italian for the language you are interested in working with.*

> **Italian – Molto Bene** by Online Language Help. Free but with in-app purchases... A couple of my students have recommended this one. This award-winning app makes learning Italian simple and fun! Quickly learn essential vocabulary, phrases, and grammar concepts.

> **Duolingo** by Duolingo. Free but with in-app purchases. Another app recommended by several students. Twenty-three languages available, but stick to Italian, ok? With Duolingo, you learn a language completely for free. You have fun while you learn, leveling up and competing with friends.

### IN CONCLUSION...

This has been a painful document to put together because there are SO. MANY. RESOURCES. out there!!! And, lots of good ones. So ... this is an evergreen document (a ‘corporate-speak’ term I learned back in the DuPont days!)... constantly changing with periodic updates. Also, I plan to demo all these and more in all of my Italian classes for the coming semester.

Please don’t hesitate to email me ([sandro.cuccia@gmail.com](mailto:sandro.cuccia@gmail.com)) if you have used any Italian resources that you really like and have no trouble recommending. *Grazie!!*

Finally, it’s easy to get discouraged if you feel it’s slow-going for you to learn Italian. *Don’t!* Perhaps you are wondering if you’re ever going to start picking it up! Remember, *piccoli passi!* ... baby steps! And, the reality is – the big secret is that you **MUST** practice and find any opportunity you can to listen constantly to the spoken Italian language. You’ve come a long way in your Italian studies. You’ve done very well. *Keep going!!* So... to purposely be repetitious about this: practice as much as you can over the break, listen to lots of spoken Italian – even if you don’t yet understand everything – and perhaps by the next semester break, you will be able to actually start *thinking* in Italian!!

***Buona Pausa... Buon Divertimento... e Arrivederci!! A Presto!!!***

