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Parliamo Italiano!

Il Quaderno di Sandrino



USING GENDER AND NUMBER FOR ITALIAN NOUNS

BY SANDRO CUCCIA

Here's a fun fact: **Everything in Italian must agree in gender and number.** All nouns in Italian have a gender; that is, they are either masculine or feminine, even those nouns that refer to things, qualities, or ideas.

Now... *how cool is that?!*

Then again, you students who speak Español, Português, or even Français – plus quite a few more languages – are already familiar with the concept of **grammatical genders**.

To native English speakers, this can be quite unnerving; cars (**la macchina, le macchine**) are not often thought of as being feminine (except to car aficionados, of course), and dogs (*il cane, i cani*) are not thought of as being strictly masculine, as in Italian.

Here are your go-to rules:

SINGULAR nouns ending in ' - o ' are usually masculine; those ending in ' - a ' are usually feminine.
PLURAL nouns ending in ' - i ' are usually masculine; those ending in ' - e ' are usually feminine.

As with everything in the life of a grammar student... there are a number of exceptions. Two such instances are: **il poeta** – the poet as masculine; **la mano** – the hand as feminine. When in doubt, you'll be just fine if you stick to the general rules above. It's not the end of the world if you mis-handle those relatively few examples, though - like *la mano* - some are quite important and should be committed to memory.

TIP: Most Italian nouns end in a vowel. Nouns that end in a consonant are of foreign origin, and to complicate matters, nowadays many words of foreign origin - particularly English words - are used in spoken and written Italian, especially in the business and tech sectors.

Let's examine some examples of Italian masculine and feminine nouns.

Masculine Nouns		Feminine Nouns	
<i>amico</i>	male friend	<i>amica</i>	female friend
<i>letto</i>	bed	<i>nave</i>	ship
<i>dollaro</i>	dollar	<i>torta</i>	cake
<i>panino</i>	sandwich	<i>dottore<u>ssa</u></i>	female doctor

The most important element to look for in order to determine the gender is the **definite article**, but you'll notice that nouns ending in ' - e ' may be masculine or feminine, and like many of the fun and exciting things you need to learn, the gender of these nouns must be memorized.

EXAMPLES OF MASCULINE AND FEMININE NOUNS THAT BREAK THE RULES (I.E.; MEMORIZE!)

Masculine Nouns		Feminine Nouns	
<i>stud<u>ente</u></i>	student	<i>autom<u>obile</u></i>	car, automobile
<i>ristor<u>ante</u></i>	restaurant	<i>not<u>te</u></i>	night
<i>caff<u>e</u></i>	coffee	<i>art<u>e</u></i>	art

As you'll see in the next table, nouns ending ' - **ione** ' are generally feminine, while nouns ending in ' - **ore** ' are almost always masculine.



Continua...



<i>televisione</i> (f)	television	<i>attore</i> (m)	actor
<i>nazione</i> (f)	nation	<i>autore</i> (m)	author
<i>opinione</i> (f)	opinion	<i>professore</i> (m)	professor

What about the words like “**bar**” (coffee-bar) that end in a consonant? These nouns are usually masculine, like **autobus** (bus), **film** (movie), or **sport** (sport or sports).

WHY IS “CINEMA” (MOVIE THEATER) MASCULINE?

You’ll start to notice that there are some words like this that would appear to be feminine since they end in an ‘ - a ’, but are actually masculine. WHY?? Because abbreviated nouns retain the gender of the words from which they are derived. In the example above, “**cinema**” comes from “**cinematografo**” (cinematographer), making it a masculine noun.

Other common words this affects are:

- **foto** (f) (from **fotografia**): photo/photograph [note that there is NO ‘ph’ in Italian!]
- **moto** (f) (from **motocicletta**): motorcycle
- **auto** (f) (from **automobile**): auto/automobile
- **bici** (f) (from **bicicletta**): bike/bicycle

Isn’t Italian beautiful? This is why it is called, *La Bella Lingua!*

IS IT SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

Similar to English, Italian has a different ending when a noun is singular or plural. You’ll be pleased to learn that there are *four possible endings* for Italian nouns, as opposed to only one for English.

SINGOLARE		PLURALE	
nouns ending in:	- o	change to:	- i
	- a		- e
	- ca		- che
	- e		- i

- amico** (m): friend → **amici**: friends – – **amica** (f): friend → **amiche**: friends
- studentessa** (f): student → **studentesse**: students – – **studente** (m): student → **studenti**: students

TIP: Nouns ending with an accented vowel or a consonant do not change in the plural, nor do abbreviated words.

- un caffè**: one coffee = **due caffè**: two coffees
- un film**: one movie = **due film**: two movies
- una foto**: one photo = **due foto**: two photos

CONCLUSION

As with everything else while mastering a language, learning the gender and number of each Italian noun takes **lots of practice**, so don’t stress if you still make mistakes. As I always preach to my students, the important thing is that, in almost all cases, Italians will still be able to understand you! Just focus on expressing yourself, and don’t obsess about having perfect grammar.

**THE GOAL OF LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
WILL ALWAYS BE CONNECTION INSTEAD OF PERFECTION!**