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Impariamo Mangiando!

La Pronuncia



LA PASTA CI AIUTA CON LA PRONUNCIA ITALIANA!

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In several of my Italian classes, I have used the myriad of pasta shapes to help teach Italian pronunciation - not so much to learn about pasta. There are over 600 official pasta shapes in Italy; most are exclusive to the peninsula. However, the names of these often-elaborate shapes are both beautiful and actually mean something, as they relate to the shapes' physical characteristics.

Practicing by speaking the names of pasta shapes is a great way to learn the fundamentals of proper pronunciation of all Italian vowels and their combinations. It's also one of the best ways I know to practice understanding and pronouncing the differences between **single-** vs **double-consonants**.

Below is a list of common pasta shapes – ones commonly found in the U.S. – along with their translations. See if you can answer the questions, and by all means... practice your Italian pronunciation. Remember to pronounce every letter, go slow, and watch those double-consonants!

CAPELLINI: From the Latin *capelli* [meaning _____ [a]]. *Capellini* pasta consists of very thin round pasta strands. It is very similar, but slightly thicker than, *capelli d'angelo*, meaning _____ [b]. This is Italy's thinnest long pasta. What other Italian word do you know that sounds very similar to *capello* (singular) and *capelli* (plural)? _____ ; _____ [c]

FETTUCCINE: In English, this tasty word means "little ribbons". However, it's more than just the physical description of this pasta shape – one of Sandrino's favorites. The word *fettuccine* originates from *fetta* [meaning _____ [d]] but also meaning "piece" or "wedge". Additionally, the word *fettucce* is the plural of *fettuccia*, which means "tape" or "ribbon". By the way, this shape originated in Roma. They are long, flat and wide pasta strands made in egg and egg-free, durum wheat varieties.

LINGUINE: [NOT "linguini"!]. Look closely at the word. Can you figure out what Italian word is embedded within it? Write it here: _____ [e]. Most likely you wrote that as a singular, feminine noun. The English translation would be _____ [f]. We want the plural AND the diminutive (for example, *Sandro* → *Sandrino*.) This is one of the most iconic pasta shapes, next to *spaghetti*. It's a long, flat-ish shape; a specialty of southern Italy.



Continua...



SPAGHETTI: By the way, have you noticed that all these pasta shape words turn out to be in the plural? After all, you don't just eat one *fettuccina*, one *linguina*, or one *spaghetto*! Serving pasta that way would be considered a cruel and severe form of torture! OK, so... let's see if you know this: *spaghetti* comes from the word *spago* or *spagi* in the plural. The translation in English is _____ [g]; giving this very common pasta, the shape consisting of long, round strands.

VERMICELLI: This one is going to give you *l'acquolina in bocca* [will make your mouth water]! This word comes from the Latin "*verme*" for... can you guess? _____ [h], (in the singular) giving *vermicelli* the shape of long, round and thin pasta strands, like *spaghetti* but a bit thinner. So... *vermicelli* (-elli being a diminutive form, is translated to mean (two words) _____ [i]. In case you're wondering, the thinnest long pasta is *capelli d'angelo*, followed by *cappelletti*, *vermicelli* and *spaghetti*. There are shapes that are even thicker, like *bucatini*... but that's for another article.

CAVATAPPI (often confused with **ROTINI**): This fun shape is named after an implement used when serving a bottle of wine. Any ideas? _____ [j] It comes from a verb/action "*cavare i tappi*" meaning, "to pull up or dig out a bottle cap or cork". This one's shaped as a spiral about 1-inch long. It is native to southern Italy. By the way, *rotini* comes from *rotolo* meaning "roll" or "coil". The name *rotini* is the name for this coil shape usually found in the U.S. I used to prepare **San Giorgio** brand **Rotini** for my college roommates and me ... back in the day when I didn't know any better!

FARFALLE: This is the plural form of the Italian word _____ [k]. In English, this shape would be called _____ [l]; it's a medium-sized pasta with a crimped center and serrated edges. It's a great pasta shape to be used in soups. This pasta shape is often, and incorrectly, called "bowtie" pasta because it does indeed also resemble a bowtie.

GEMELLI: Again, a plural noun, which translates to _____ [m]. This medium-sized shape resembles two short pieces of tubular spaghetti twisted together. It's often served with a *pesto genovese* sauce. (*Genova* being from where *pesto* originates).

PENNE: From ancient Latin meaning _____ [n] in the plural. The meaning evolved to indicate "a pen" or "pens". These are short diagonally cut tubular shapes that also come with ridged or scored surfaces (*penne rigate*). The *penne* shape is reminiscent of old-fashioned quill pens. When ordering a plate of *penne* in Italy, please be sure to pronounce *penne* properly, being sure to emphasize the **double-n**. If you pronounce it as a single-n, it will mean something completely different, and you may get some odd reactions from the restaurant's wait staff.... 'nuff said'!



Continua...



RADIATORE: This is another curious but fun shape. For some reason, the word is in the singular. However, it should be instantly recognizable to mean _____ [o].”

Radiatore pasta is a short, chunky and ruffled shape; ideal for holding sauces.

ZITI: This is a classic tubular-shaped “**maccheroni**” pasta generally cut into short pieces, and originates from southern Italy. But linguistically, what are this word’s origins? **Ziti** is a southern dialect word (**Napoli** and **Sicilia**), and is the plural of both **zita** (an unmarried woman or bride) and **zito** (a bachelor or bridegroom) – so, together as a couple, they are **ziti**. *How cool is that?*

Do you have any idea as to what these meanings have to do with the pasta itself?

Hint: think wedding celebrations: _____ [p]

MANICOTTI: The name of this larger, tubular shaped pasta – used in baked pasta dishes – comes from the Latin “**manica**”. My question to you is this: what does “**la manica**” translate to? _____ [q] [hint: has to do with clothing]. Related to this is the word **manicotto** - the singular form of **manicotti**. A **manicotto** translated to English is also a “**sleeve**”, however it’s a term used in mechanics and engineering. For example: a coupling or hose, like a radiator hose. And... that’s what this pasta shape looks like ... *a length of radiator hose!* Here’s an idea: cook **manicotti** along with **radiatore** pasta for an interesting conversation at the dinner table! Oh... in case you were wondering, **manicotti** does NOT mean “cooked hands!”

DITALINI: This is another plural form of a vowel; in this case derived from the singular version **il ditale**. If you sew or mend clothing, you should know it’s meaning...

_____ [r]. This shape resembles its namesake, but both ends are open. It’s a very small tubular shape, ideal for soups. By the way, there also exists a larger version simply called **ditale** or **ditali**. But, it doesn’t stop there! There is an even larger version called **ditalone** or **ditaloni**!

PASTINA: What do you think the English translation is? “Tiny” what?

_____ [s]. It’s generally considered to be the smallest pasta shape, and it’s a big hit with young children and adult teachers of Italian. Interesting fact: if you look closely at the **pastina**, you’ll notice that they’re in the shape of five-pointed stars!



Well, I think that is enough for now ... but I could go on and on and on!!! Maybe we’ll revisit the topic and go over other fascinating shapes and work on our pronunciation!



It’s your turn! Can you think of any other pasta shapes that have a clear meaning with respect to the actual shape? Write down your answers below.

LE SOLUZIONI

