



Tu or Lei: How to Say You in Italian

Italian Lesson

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Video transcript

Hey there and welcome to Ablas! In this video, we'll look at the difference between "tu", which is the informal you, and "Lei", which is the formal you, along with their plural equivalents. We'll go through all the scenarios you'll need to speak Italian confidently, and there's a quick quiz to test your understanding at the end of the video. Be sure to download the PDF of today's lesson from the link in the description!

When to use 'tu'

Let's start by seeing when "tu" can be used in everyday life, before looking at some examples.

Tu is used in the following situations:

- With family members, friends, and romantic partners.
- It's also used with peers - this could be fellow students, colleagues you know well, or even people at a party - and those in a similar age bracket to you. Teenagers, for example, would often use this form when speaking to other teenagers.
- It's also used when speaking to anyone younger than you, especially children, regardless of your relationship to them.
- And lastly, it's used when addressing animals like pets, praying to God, and towards inanimate objects, either affectionately, or in frustration.

English	Italian
Bro, you took my car again without asking? You're really pushing it!	Fra, ti sei preso ancora la mia macchina senza chiedere? Ma stai esagerando davvero!
Kitty, you've torn the curtains again! But I love you anyway.	Micio, hai strappato ancora le tende! Ma ti voglio bene lo stesso.
Would you like me to help you find your mum, little one?	Vuoi che ti aiuti a ritrovare la tua mamma, piccolo?

The first speaker was talking to his brother, which explains the use of the informal you. He starts by calling him "fra" which is short for "fratello".

The second person was talking to their cat – she said: "Micio, hai strappato ancora le tende!"

And lastly, we heard someone talk to a child, which is why the informal tu vuoi was used.

When to use 'Lei'

We've seen where "tu" can be used, so let's take a look at "Lei".

Lei is used in other situations, such as the following.

- With strangers or people you don't know well - this could be a shopkeeper or a waiter in a restaurant.
- It's also used if you're speaking to those a lot older than you, as a way of showing respect.
- This also extends out to anyone else you should show respect to, be it teachers, employers, or officials, and in professional or formal settings.

English	Italian
Excuse me, could you tell me where the nearest pharmacy is?	Scusi, potrebbe dirmi dov'è la farmacia più vicina?
Madam Director, I would like to speak with you about our marketing project.	Signora Direttrice, vorrei parlarle del nostro progetto di marketing.
It's been a pleasure having dinner with you.	È stato un piacere cenare con Lei.

In the first example, we heard someone asking for directions to the nearest pharmacy. Because he was asking a stranger, instead of saying, "Scusa, potresti dirmi..." he said, "Scusi, potrebbe dirmi..."

The next example was spoken in a business context, hence the more formal tone.

And the last one was a man speaking to his partner's parent. He opted for a more polite tone; perhaps this is the first time they've met. Notice that Lei is capitalised here to differentiate it from the other lei meaning "her". The parent could then invite him to use tu by saying: "Dammi del tu!"

The plural you

We've covered how to speak to one person so far, but what if we're referring to multiple people?

- For informal situations like with friends, we use voi to refer to multiple people, which is pretty straightforward.
- For formal situations, we could use Loro, but that's often seen as too formal nowadays. Instead, we use voi again. Let's look at a couple of examples.

English	Italian
How can I help you, gentlemen?	Come posso aiutarvi, signori?
Guys, you finally arrived!	Ragazzi, siete finalmente arrivati!

Conversation

Now it's time to step into a real-life conversation!

	English	Italian
	Sofia is looking forward to celebrating her birthday party tonight. She is a marketing executive in Milan, and is currently talking with her boss.	Sofia non vede l'ora di festeggiare il suo compleanno questa sera. È responsabile marketing a Milano e sta parlando in questo momento con la sua capo.
Sofia:	Good morning, Mrs. Conti, would you like me to prepare the files for this afternoon's meeting?	Buongiorno, Signora Conti, vuole che prepari i documenti per la riunione di questo pomeriggio?
Mrs. Conti:	Yes please, Sofia. And could you call the client to confirm they're still available? We need to be certain about the time.	Sì, grazie Sofia. E potrebbe chiamare il cliente per confermare che è ancora disponibile? Dobbiamo essere certi dell'orario.
	Just as Sofia begins working on the files, her younger brother Tommaso calls her.	Proprio mentre Sofia inizia a lavorare sui documenti, il suo fratello minore Tommaso la chiama.
Sofia:	Hi Tommaso! What are you doing calling me at work? You know I'm busy in the mornings.	Ciao Tommaso! Perché mi chiami al lavoro? Sai che sono impegnatissima la mattina.
Tommaso:	Hey sis, I need to borrow your car this evening. Mine's at the garage again.	Ehi sorella, ho bisogno di prendere in prestito la tua macchina stasera. La mia è ancora in officina.

	English	Italian
	During her lunch break, Sofia finds herself lost while doing some errands.	Durante la pausa pranzo, Sofia si ritrova persa mentre fa alcune commissioni.
Sofia:	Excuse me sir, could you tell me where the nearest post office is? I think I've taken a wrong turn.	Scusi signore, mi saprebbe dire dov'è l'ufficio postale più vicino? Credo di aver sbagliato strada.
Stranger:	Of course, it's just around the corner on Via Manzoni. You can't miss it.	Certo, è proprio dietro l'angolo in Via Manzoni. Non può sbagliare.
	Finally home after a long day at work, Sofia is greeted by her cat before getting ready to host her birthday dinner.	Finalmente a casa dopo una lunga giornata di lavoro, Sofia viene accolta dal suo gatto prima di prepararsi ad ospitare la sua cena di compleanno.
Sofia:	Come here, Misty! Have you been waiting for me all day, sweetheart?	Vieni qui, Misty! Mi hai aspettata tutto il giorno, tesoro mio?
	Later that evening, her guests arrive for dinner.	Più tardi quella sera, i suoi ospiti arrivano per la cena.
Sofia:	Hello everyone! I'm so happy you could all make it! Please, make yourselves comfortable.	Benvenuti a tutti! Sono così felice che siate riusciti a venire! Accomodatevi pure.
Sofia's Friend:	Happy birthday, you!	Tanti auguri a te!

It's quiz time!

So, did you understand the different scenarios in that conversation? Feel free to leave us a comment with any questions. But we're not done yet – it's quiz time!

How should you address a group of your closest friends at a party?

- A. Use voi
- B. Use tu
- C. Use Lei

The correct answer is voi, because it's a group of people.

Your family cat has knocked over a vase. What do you say?

- A. Avete rotto il vaso!
- B. Ha rotto il vaso!
- C. Hai rotto il vaso!

The correct answer is... Hai rotto il vaso! This is because we always use tu when speaking to animals.

How should you invite someone to use tu with you?

- A. Ti voglio dare tu
- B. Puoi tu con me
- C. Dammi del tu

The correct answer is... Dammi del tu.

Your task

Well done for getting this far!

Now your task is to create a short dialogue between two strangers that eventually become friends. Think how they might change between Lei and tu.

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