



What are Italian Pronominal Verbs?

Italian Lesson

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Video transcript

Hey there and welcome to Ablas! Today we're going to cover Italian pronominal verbs. We'll explore what they are, how to conjugate them, and look at some examples. Be sure to download the PDF of today's lesson from the link in the description!

What is a pronominal verb?

So what exactly is a pronominal verb in Italian?

Pronominal verbs are a special kind of verb that include one or two pronouns, like ce, ne and la. They're slightly different to reflexive verbs because they often change the meaning of the original verb. For example, if we change the verb to go, andare, to andarsene, it now means to go away or to leave. They're common in both formal and informal Italian, so it's important to master them to sound more authentic.

Conjugation

Let's see how we can conjugate some pronominal verbs.

We'll take the verb farcela as an example. We first take the original verb, fare. Then we drop the letter E on the end, and add on the pronouns ce and la. And so we're left with a verb that means "to manage".

The conjugation of farcela is quite straightforward.

Notice that the pronouns used here don't change in the conjugation. However, if a verb contains the reflexive pronoun se, it would need to decline.

	farcela	andarsene
io	ce la faccio	me ne vado
tu	ce la fai	te ne vai
lui/lei	ce la fa	se ne va

noi	ce la facciamo	ce ne andiamo
voi	ce la fate	ve ne andate
loro	ce la fanno	se ne vanno

In compound tenses like the passato prossimo, pronominal verbs ending in ci, sela or sene, require the auxiliary verb, essere. This means that the past participle needs to agree with the gender in the sentence. For example: Lui se n'è andato, (he left). Lei se n'è andata, (she left).

And if we're referring to multiple people, we'd need to change the past participle again. For example: Io ci sono riuscito, (I succeeded). Loro ci sono riusciti, (they succeeded).

Common examples

We'll now cover some common pronominal verbs.

English	Italian
It's a difficult concept, but I finally understood it .	È un concetto difficile, ma alla fine ci sono arrivato .
How do we get out of this problem?	Come ne usciamo da questo problema?
We had a blast at the party!	Ci siamo spassati un mondo alla festa!
Why are you mad at me?	Perché ce l'hai con me?

Story

Now that we've covered what a pronominal verb is and how to conjugate it, let's put it all into practice with a short story.

English	Italian
Marco didn't expect Milan to be so lively.	Marco non se l'aspettava così vivace, Milano.
As soon as he arrived, he headed straight to the city centre, determined to enjoy it.	Appena arrivato, se ne è andato subito in centro, deciso a godersela.
He stopped in front of the Duomo and couldn't resist taking a photo.	Si è fermato davanti al Duomo e non ha potuto trattenersi dal fotografarlo.
"I need to remember this," he thought.	"Me lo devo ricordare," ha pensato.
Then he treated himself to a warm panzerotto from a nearby bakery.	Poi si è voluto concedere un panzerotto caldo preso in una panetteria vicina.
He savoured it slowly, sitting on a bench beneath the shade of a tree.	Se l'è gustato con calma, seduto su una panchina all'ombra di un albero.
He felt like exploring the Navigli, but first wanted to learn about some hidden gems of the city.	Gli è venuta voglia di esplorare i Navigli, ma prima si è voluto informare su qualche angolo nascosto della città.
In the afternoon, he stumbled upon a fashion show.	Nel pomeriggio, si è imbattuto in una sfilata di moda.
He didn't know much about it, but still had fun.	Non se ne intendeva, ma ci si è divertito lo stesso.
Towards the evening, he said: "I'll head back to the hotel, but tomorrow I'll take it slower."	Verso sera, si è detto: "Me ne torno in albergo, ma domani me la prendo con più calma."

English

Milan stayed in his heart.

He didn't want to leave, but in the end,
he had to accept it.

Italian

Milano gli è rimasta nel cuore.

Non se ne voleva andare, ma alla fine
ha dovuto farsene una ragione.

It's quiz time!

Did you spot the pronominal verbs in that story? You can always download the PDF of today's lesson which will include the full translation. But now it's quiz time!

What is the meaning of the pronominal verb 'farcela'?

- A. To manage
- B. To leave
- C. To care about something

The correct answer is... to manage.

Which of these is a pronominal verb?

- A. Andarsene
- B. Scrivere
- C. Parlare

The correct answer is... andarsene (meaning to go away or to leave).

Your task

Well done for getting this far!

Now your task is to extend the story from earlier so that Marco visits a friend in Milan. Try to throw in some examples of pronominal verbs where possible.

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