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ARTICOLI, AVANZATO, CULTURA, GRAMMATICA, INTERMEDIO, PRINCIPIANTE,
TECNICHE, VOCABOLARIO

Essential Italian Reads for Beginners to Advanced Learners

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*Disclaimer: This article was lovingly written by me truly, with **no AI involved in the writing process!***



12 minuti

Ciao e benvenuto/a nel mio blog ! 🙌

Learning Italian is an exciting journey, though it can sometimes feel challenging. Luckily, there are plenty of ways to boost your skills, and one of the **best methods is reading Italian books.**

Not only does **reading in Italian** help you **pick up new vocabulary**, but it also **sharpens your grammar** and **enhances your fluency**, making you more comfortable expressing yourself in the language. Plus, it's a **fun way to immerse yourself** in Italian culture and language at the same time!

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Six tips

I will provide you with reading recommendations suitable for all levels, from beginner to advanced. But before we start..I would like to give you **some small advices!**

What to Avoid as a Beginner

✗ Children's fairy tales: They might seem easy, but they're often packed with **verbs in complex tenses** (B2-C1 level) and fantasy-related vocabulary that won't be useful in everyday conversations.

✗ Italian adolescent classics (like Italo Calvino): These can be challenging for beginners due to the **advanced vocabulary and themes**.

✗ Italian literary classics from the late 1800s or early 1900s: The **older Italian language** used in these books can be tricky to understand and not particularly helpful for modern-day learners.

What to Choose Instead

✓ Revisit a Favorite Book to Learn Italian Effortlessly

One of the best ways to improve your Italian without even realizing it?

Read a book you've already enjoyed in your native language, but this time in Italian! Since you're already familiar with the plot and characters, **you can focus solely on the Italian words and expressions**. This lets you absorb **new vocabulary and get a better grasp of grammar naturally**, all while enjoying a story you love.

✓ Bilingual books: These are an excellent option because they present the Italian text alongside your native language, allowing you **to compare and learn more efficiently**.

✓ Reading Translated Books: A Winning Strategy!

What do I mean by this? You might think it's similar to the advice of **reading a book you're already familiar with**, but there's an important difference. Before, I suggested re-reading a

familiar story, but now I invite you to discover something completely new: **a book translated from another language**.

Why? It's simple! When a foreign book is translated into Italian, the language is often **more accessible** than a text written directly by an Italian author. One of my students made me think about this: **reading a translated novel by Ken Follett**, for example, exposes you to a simpler vocabulary compared to what an Italian author might use.

If the idea of **reading books in Italian** still seems too challenging, this can be **a perfect solution**. This way, you can immerse yourself in the **real language** without immediately facing the complexities of native Italian. It's **an intermediate step** that allows you to learn useful expressions and gradually improve.

Remember, **small steps lead to big progress!** 😊

Books for Beginners

Io non ho paura – Niccolò Ammaniti

"Io non ho paura" by Niccolò Ammaniti is the gripping story of a 9-year-old boy who uncovers a horrifying crime while exploring an abandoned farmhouse in his fictional town in southern Italy.

Set during the turbulent "*Anni di piombo*" (Years of Lead), a time of political terrorism and kidnappings in the 1970s, the plot is relatively simple, and the vocabulary is basic enough for **beginners** to follow. Once you finish the book, you can also enjoy the **2003 film adaptation** for an immersive experience.

This detective novel is skillfully narrated, taking readers through the eyes of young Michele, who stumbles upon a terrible secret he's too afraid to share. The story unfolds on two levels: the innocent world seen by the boy and the dark tragedy that grips the adults of this isolated community.

Though aimed at a **young adult audience**, its **simple prose** makes it **accessible to learners at a beginner or intermediate level**, while the **suspenseful plot** and **nostalgic atmosphere**, reminiscent of Tom Sawyer and Stephen King's *Stand By Me*, will captivate readers of all ages.

La chimera – Sebastiano Vassalli

This historical novel transports readers to a fictional **seventeenth-century village** in Piedmont, following the life of a peasant. The **simple language** makes it an ideal choice for **beginners** looking to improve their Italian.

Set in 1610, Zardino is a small village nestled among the mists and rice fields south of Monte Rosa. It appears to be just an ordinary village, but hidden within its quiet streets is the **remarkable story of Antonia**, a foundling raised in the Pia Casa di Novara. Chosen by two farmers, she is brought to Zardino, where she tries to live with **faith and simplicity**, just as the nuns taught her.

But Antonia stands out. People whisper about her dark eyes, her dark skin, her striking beauty, and her independent spirit. They suspect something strange—maybe even **something devilish**. After fainting in the presence of **Bishop Bascapè**, the villagers become convinced that she harbors something sinister.

Vassalli masterfully brings to life the **tragic story of Antonia**, known as the “**Strega (witch) of Zardino**,” uncovering the superstitions and fears that plagued this isolated community in a century “**without God and without Providence**.”

Ma le stelle quante sono – Giulia Carcasi

This unique **romance novel** follows the lives of Carlo, an honest but socially awkward boy, and Alice, a dreamy and unconventional girl. Both characters find themselves entering relationships with people who are nothing like them—more **easygoing** and **intriguing**!

What makes this novel stand out is its **two-sided story**. You can experience the unfolding events from **Carlo's perspective** or **Alice's point of view**, depending on how you choose to read it. The book has **two covers**, allowing readers to dive into either character's journey first.

With its **simple writing style** and the use of **verbs in the present and passato prossimo tense**, the novel is an enjoyable and **easy read** for Italian learners, making it perfect for beginners or anyone looking for a light, engaging story with a creative twist.

Tre Cavalli – Erri De Luca

This **109-page book** is written in a **clear and simple style**, with verbs mostly conjugated in the **simple present** and **passato prossimo**, making it an easy and enjoyable read for Italian learners.

The story follows a man who **moves to Argentina for love**, but after the tragic death of his partner, he chooses to join the fight against the dictatorship. The novel delves into powerful and ever-relevant themes like **solitude**, **immigration**, and **willpower**, teaching readers an important lesson: **no matter what happens, never lose hope, and never stop fighting**.

Books for Intermediate

La vita che volevo – Lorenzo Licalzi

The plot of this book weaves together **multiple stories**, each centered on people facing **different challenges**. These personal struggles will leave readers reflecting on their own lives, the **decisions they've made**, and the **regrets they carry**.

Beyond this, the book invites readers to consider the role of **fate** or **coincidence** in shaping our lives. Ultimately, this novel will **make you reflect on who you are**, who you once wanted to be, and—most importantly—help you decide **who you want to become in the future**.

Bianca come il latte, Rossa come il sangue – Alessandro d'Avenia

In this touching book, the author explores the theme of **adolescent love** through the story of Leo, a 16-year-old boy full of the typical dreams and passions of youth. Encouraged by his **history and philosophy teacher**, Leo is driven to pursue his dream, symbolized by the **color red**—his love for

Beatrice, a red-haired girl.

However, Beatrice suffers from an illness associated with the **color white**, which brings both her and Leo deep emotional pain. Through it all, Leo can rely on his loyal friend, Silvia, for support.

This book is a must-read for everyone, as it will surely **touch your heart** and leave a lasting impression.

Novecento – Alessandro Baricco

This is a compelling **one-act play monologue** by Alessandro Baricco that tells the story of a boy abandoned on a steamship, who is later adopted by the ship's engineer. After disappearing for a time, the boy reemerges with an incredible talent: **he can play the piano perfectly**.

The language used in the play is **quite colloquial**, making it an excellent choice for **intermediate-level readers**.

Additionally, this captivating story inspired a film in 1998 titled *“La leggenda del pianista sull'oceano”* (In english *‘The legend of 1900’*)

La Solitudine dei Numeri Primi – Paolo Giordano

Giordano's debut novel has become one of the **best-selling Italian books** of the past decade, captivating readers with its poignant narrative set in the **elegant and charming city of Turin**.

The story revolves around two friends, **Alice and Mattia**, whose lives run parallel for decades. From their **high school days to adulthood**, their journey explores the complexities of friendship, love, and the challenges that shape their lives.

This beloved Italian novel not only resonates with readers but also inspired a **film adaptation released in 2010**, bringing the emotional depth of Alice and Mattia's story to the big screen.

Whether you're drawn to the rich backdrop of Turin or the heartfelt exploration of friendship, this novel is a must-read that continues to touch hearts around the world.

Books for Advanced

L'amica geniale – Elena Ferrante

In this captivating novel by Elena Ferrante, we delve into the childhoods of two inseparable friends, **Lila and Elena**, who grow up in a **neighborhood in Naples** where opportunities for higher education are scarce.

As the girls strive to escape their challenging environment in search of better prospects, they face setbacks and obstacles that test their bond. Ferrante's vivid portrayal of their **intriguing friendship**, the struggles of their social surroundings, and a rich cast of colorful characters make for an engaging read.

The narrative expertly reflects on past events, allowing readers to familiarize themselves with **Italian past tenses** and explore some **challenging vocabulary** along the way.

"L'amica geniale" is the first book in Ferrante's acclaimed **Neapolitan quartet**, chronicling the lives of these two remarkable women from childhood through their 60s. This powerful story of friendship and resilience is not to be missed!

Se questo è un uomo – Primo Levi

Written by **Primo Levi**, this profound book is grounded in the **horrors he experienced during World War II**. Having endured life in the **Auschwitz concentration camp** until its liberation in 1945, Levi crafted this work as a poignant testament for **future generations** to reflect on the past and its lessons.

The title, "*Se questo è un uomo (If This is a Man)*", poses a haunting question: at what point does one lose their humanity amidst the **brutality and inhumanity of war**? Levi's powerful narrative invites readers to confront these unsettling themes and consider **the depths of human experience** during one of history's darkest chapters.

This essential read serves as both a historical account and a philosophical inquiry, ensuring that the lessons of the past are never forgotten.

Volevo i pantaloni – Lara Cardella

“Volevo i pantaloni” is a **poignant and thought-provoking** coming-of-age novel that delves into **the challenges of adolescence amidst societal expectations**. Written by Lara Cardella at just 19, this debut has resonated with readers worldwide, and it’s clear why.

Set in Sicily, the story follows a young girl grappling with the **restrictive norms of gender conformity** in her small village. **Her desire for pants** symbolizes her yearning for freedom—a simple wish that embodies her rebellion against traditional roles imposed by family and society.

Cardella’s writing is both **lyrical and accessible**, pulling readers into the emotional journey of her protagonist. With vivid descriptions and relatable inner thoughts, she captures the essence of **teenage rebellion** and the quest for identity. The novel skillfully explores themes of **independence, societal pressure**, and the complexities of growing up in a conservative environment.

The characters are **well-developed and complex**, especially the protagonist, who reflects the struggles of many young women striving to assert their individuality in a world that often silences them. The contrast between her desires and societal expectations creates a **compelling narrative** that keeps readers engaged from start to finish.

Cardella’s exploration of **gender roles** and the longing for **self-expression** remains incredibly relevant today. This novel serves as both a reflection of its time and a timeless commentary on the ongoing fight for **equality and personal freedom**.

Una storia semplice – Leonardo Sciascia

This short novel by Leonardo Sciascia may be titled simply, but it is far from a straightforward story. It intricately weaves a **murder investigation** in Sicily, delving into a police department riddled with **Mafia ties** and **corruption**.

As you read, you'll encounter a wealth of **crime-related vocabulary** while gaining insights into the Mafia's pervasive influence on society. The book's depth makes it a compelling read, and it was adapted into a 1991 film that garnered several awards—definitely worth watching after you finish the novel!

As we conclude this first guide to books for learning Italian, I hope it inspires you to explore the richness of **Italian modern literature**!

Here we are at the end of my **list of books** that I recommend for **independent Italian learners** to read. I'll definitely be updating it in the future (so check back occasionally!).

Alla prossima!! 🙌

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