

Learn Italian for Beginners Inside an Italian refrigerator is a playful way to remember that language learning can be found in everyday places. Here you will learn how to speak about the past in Italian using the **passato prossimo**, a key past tense used to describe recent actions. The explanations are in English, with clear Italian examples and translations to help you internalise the structure.

What is the passato prossimo?

The **passato prossimo** is the most common past tense for talking about actions that happened in a recent or clearly defined past. Think of things you did yesterday, last week, or last year. In English it often corresponds to the present perfect or simple past depending on context, but in Italian it has its own form built with an auxiliary verb plus a past participle.

Simple definition

- **Formula:** subject + auxiliary (avere or essere) in present + past participle
- Example: *Cosa hai fatto ieri? — Ieri ho mangiato il gelato.* (What did you do yesterday? — Yesterday I ate ice cream.)

How to form the passato prossimo

Follow these steps to build a correct sentence in the passato prossimo.

1. Choose the subject: io, tu, lui/lei, noi, voi, loro.
2. Select the correct auxiliary: **avere** or **essere**, conjugated in the present tense.
3. Use the past participle of the main verb.

Examples:

- *Ho giocato a tennis.* — I played tennis. (io + avere + giocato)
- *Sei andato al cinema?* — Did you go to the cinema? (tu + essere + andato)

Remember the phrase **Learn Italian for Beginners Inside an Italian refrigerator** as a fun mnemonic: even simple everyday images can help you recall grammar rules when you practise.

Auxiliary: avere or essere?

Most verbs use **avere** as the auxiliary. Verbs of movement, change of state, and all reflexive verbs use **essere**. With *essere*, the past participle must agree in gender and number with the subject.

- *Sono stato al mare.* — I have been to the sea. (male speaker)
- *Ieri sono stata in montagna.* — Yesterday I was in the mountains. (female speaker)
- *Siamo stati a Venezia.* — We were in Venice. (group with at least one male)
- *Siamo state in Giappone.* — We were in Japan. (group all female)

Agreement examples: stato (m. sing.), stata (f. sing.), stati (m. pl.), state (f. pl.).

Making negatives and questions

Negation: place **non** before the auxiliary.

- *Ieri non ho cenato.* — Yesterday I did not have dinner.

Questions: typically use rising intonation and the same word order as a statement. You can add question words like *cosa* or simply change intonation.

- *Cosa hai fatto ieri?* — What did you do yesterday?

Common time expressions to use with passato prossimo

- **Ieri** — yesterday
- **L'anno scorso** — last year
- **La scorsa settimana** — last week
- **Ieri pomeriggio** — yesterday afternoon

These expressions signal that the action is in the recent past and are perfect triggers for the *passato prossimo*. Keep using the sentence pattern and the right auxiliary.

Practice exercises

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verb in passato prossimo. Answers are below.

1. Cosa _____ (fare) ieri? — *Cosa _____ ieri?*
2. Ieri io _____ (mangiare) una pizza.
3. Noi _____ (andare) al mercato la scorsa settimana.
4. Loro non _____ (venire) alla festa.

Answers:

hai fatto — Cosa hai fatto ieri?

ho mangiato — Ieri io ho mangiato una pizza.

siamo andati / siamo andate — Siamo andati al mercato (agreement depends on group gender).

sono venuti / sono venute — Loro non sono venuti alla festa (agreement depends on group gender).

Final tips

Speak out loud and make short sentences about your day to practise. Use time expressions like *ieri* or *la scorsa settimana* to help choose the passato prossimo. Keep the formula in mind: subject + auxiliary + past participle, and remember agreement with **essere**.

Reinforce learning with small daily practice and recall the quirky image: **Learn Italian for Beginners Inside an Italian refrigerator** to make grammar feel friendly and memorable.

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