

Typing and Spell-checking in Italian

Did you know that the computer keyboards that Italians use are different from the ones used in Australia? There are extra keys for the common letters that have accents on them, and this makes typing for those who are used to these keyboards much quicker. Unfortunately, if you are used to an Australian keyboard and you touch-type, then using an Italian keyboard is frustrating. I have great difficulty finding the “@” key on their keyboards – it is to the right of the letter “L” and one must press ALT + “ò”.



It is possible to use our normal keyboard to type accented letters. It is a bit tedious, but with practice, it becomes quite simple. My instructions are for how to make accented letters using Microsoft Word; however, it is similar for other word processors as well. The most intuitive way to insert accented characters is to click on the “Insert” tab at the top of the page and then click on “Symbol”. Within the list of symbols available for use are a plethora of mathematical symbols, those for foreign currencies etc. but the list also contains accented characters. You just click on the letter that you want and then click on “Insert” and the letter is inserted in to your text.

A much quicker way to insert accented characters is to use a combination of keystrokes, which has the same effect. For PCs, if you want to insert a letter with a grave accent (such as: à, è, ì, ò or ù) then you need to hold the CTRL key and the “`” key at the same time, release them, and then type the letter that you want accented. [The “`” character is on the left of the keyboard, above the TAB key.] For example, if you want to type “è” the hold down the CTRL key and the “`” key at the same time, release them and then type the letter “e”. The letter “è” should now appear on the screen. You can do this for all of the vowels.

If you are wanting to type letters with an acute accent (such as: á, é, í, ó or ú) then it is a similar process, but the keys you need are CTRL + “^”, release them and then press the vowel that you want accented. The character “^” is two keys to the right of the letter “L”.

For capital letters, the process is similar for both types of accents, you just need to press CTRL + “`” or “^”, release them and then SHIFT + the letter that you want accented.

For those users who use a Mac computer, the process is similar, but the keystrokes for grave accents are: OPTION + “`” and the letter and for acute accents, the keystrokes are: OPTION + “e” and then the letter. The process for accented capital letters is the similar but you need to press SHIFT and the letter that you want accented.

For those advanced users who know how to use “autocorrect” in their word processor, you can assign certain keystrokes or words to replace automatically the text that you have typed with the appropriate Italian word or letter. Because of the multitude of accented words, this is not practical to do for a lot words, but is ideal for common words. For example, I have put in an autocorrect entry so that when I type the word “perche” the computer automatically changes this to “perché”. Similarly, I have assigned the keystrokes “ex “ to be replaced by the word “è “.

Spellchecking:

Did you know that you can install foreign dictionaries in to Microsoft Word? For the earlier versions, these were able to be downloaded for free, but for the newer versions, you need to pay.

The Italian Language Pack for Microsoft Office 2010 costs \$24.95 and can be downloaded from the site: http://www.microsoftstore.com/store/msusa/en_US/pdp/productID.253665800?cdid=en-us

After you have installed the language pack, you can use is to spellcheck and do a grammar check of your work, use it to translate your work or to use the Thesaurus function. Just like using the spellchecker in English, it is certainly not infallible, but it is a great adjunct. You can spellcheck and grammar check without the need to be connected to the internet, but you must be connected to the internet for it to perform its translation function.

With regard to using Word to assist with translation, I find it of limited value, as it is restricted to a few hundred characters of text to be translated and often the translations are not quite correct. For example, negated sentences are often not negated when translated and it sometimes seem to have trouble in determining who the subject is in the sentence.

I find that Google Translate better for translation. There is no restriction to the number of characters used and it seems to be more accurate. The site is: <http://translate.google.com/>. When you open the site, there are two large text boxes. Copy the text that want to translate and insert it in to the left textbox. The translated text will appear in the right text box. When you see errors in what you have typed, you can correct them in the left textbox and the corrected text will immediately appear in the right text box. You can then select the text in either the left or right text boxes and copy them back in to your work.

On-line dictionaries:

If you have ready access to the internet, then you may wish to consider the use of an on-line dictionary. They are quick; in fact, I find them much quicker than using a conventional dictionary.

There are several on-line dictionaries, but a free one that is my favourite is:

<http://www.wordreference.com/iten/>. You can enter either Italian words and look for their English meaning, or vice versa. For verbs, there is an on-line conjugator that gives you both simple and complex verb forms, past participles etc.

I trust that these tips will be helpful to you in typing in Italian.