



19 May
2022

Scuola di Italiano at OLLI



COURSE CONTENT: FALL 2022 SANDRO CUCCIA, INSTRUCTOR

COURSE TITLE: ***ITALIAN: OVERCOME YOUR FEAR OF SPEAKING***
UD OLLI ONLINE – ZOOM ONLY

DURATION: **ELEVEN WEEKS**

PREPARATION: **ONE TO TWO HOURS PER WEEK**

“I can read and understand Italian fairly well, but my real fear is when I have to SPEAK Italian!”.

Have you ever thought these words or spoken them to yourself? Perhaps you are aware of them and what message they imply, but you block it out of your mind.

This is also something that many of my students tell me privately. Additionally, I observe the fear of speaking when students are asked to volunteer answering questions in Italian. Reading Italian out-loud is not the issue - it's *speaking* and (gasp) *conversing*.

Studying a language is comparatively “easy” when it comes to memorizing vocabulary, nailing down pronunciation, learning rules of grammar and usage, practicing listening, or reading pieces of text in class. You can do it all when you are relaxed, when there is no pressure of time or anxiety, and you're not challenged by being put “on the spot”.

But things are really different when it comes to *speaking*, right? As you speak, you don't have much time to think about sentences and words. Let's face it; you have to put together a response or statement in a reasonable amount of time. Of course, in a conversation, this usually happens with someone near you waiting for you to say something. (Using filler words and sounds as stalling tactics can give you that second or two of time to come up with the correct gender to use, or if you need to use the subjunctive mood, but this method can only be used so-much. *Ask me how I know!*)

I know this can be scary - particularly nowadays when we may prefer to remain in our comfort zone (or, ‘safe space’ as is common to say these days). Even though many people - even beginners - have no problems speaking on-demand, others can find it rather unnerving. This is because, when you are standing in front of one or more people, and want to say something, but nothing comes out of your mouth, you start “feeling dumb,” and your anxiety levels go up, making things even more difficult for you.

As I have said many times in class, the only way to improve your speaking skills in *any* language is by *speaking* that language. There is no other way. Simply reading and practicing pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are not necessarily going to help you



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during conversations in that language. You must do what you can to overcome your fear – to get out of that comfort zone – and start speaking. Are you the type of person who worries about what others may think? Stop that! Let those mellifluous words and expressions of ‘*La Bella Lingua*’ flow from your mouth!

Will some of those words be wrong? Perhaps. *Who cares?! If the people you are talking to make things difficult for you, it’s their problem, definitely not yours. Besides, lots of native Italians make mistakes all the time! I may make one mistake per year 😊*, but I still make them! Relax... in Italy, you are not likely to encounter rude people who won't help you communicate. However, should you ever encounter this, don't allow others to deprive you of the great experience of communicating in a foreign language. You are doing something amazing... learning a foreign language is an awesome accomplishment. Always keep that in mind.

Alas, problems of self-confidence aside, practicing spoken Italian is not very easy if you don't *live* in Italy. You are not immersed in the language and culture and, most importantly, you are not forced to use the language in your daily life. As opportunities for travel increase, you may find yourself in Italy without the skills to handle a simple conversation, even if you have been studying the language for a while back home.

In this course, we will get started with this concept of **conversing**. We'll venture in with baby steps and see where this takes us, where the challenges are, and make necessary adjustments to our approaches online or in the classroom.

Allora... if you weren't already, I expect that now you are keenly aware of the challenges of learning and practicing speaking skills while also intellectually understanding the importance of this activity.

As I prepare and submit this new course proposal, I haven't yet formed a solid curriculum, so stay tuned for that. In the meantime, you can monitor updates on this course, and throughout the semester, by going to our *Scuola di Italiano* website:

LearnFromSandro.com

PREREQUISITES: ***Must have at least completed beginner-level courses***

REQUIRED TEXT: ***No text required (all materials provided)***

PREPARATION: ***One to Two Hours per Week***

For More Information
Visit ***LearnFromSandro.com***
or Email to ***sandro.cuccia@gmail.com***