

School Name University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA  
Course Name Elementary Italian II  
Course Format Face-to-face

**Key Results** There was a positive correlation between MyItalianLab homework completion scores and overall course grade earned in Spring 2015. The data suggest that students who complete more MyItalianLab homework also perform better in the course.

**Submitted by**  
Francesca Italiano and Ashley Roccamo

**Course Materials**  
*Percorsi* by Italiano; MyItalianLab

### Setting

The University of Southern California (USC) is a private, not-for-profit, research institution with 19,000 undergraduates and 24,000 graduate and professional students. In 2014-15, 14 percent of freshmen were first-generation college students.<sup>1</sup> In fall 2014, the average incoming GPA was 3.73, and the six-year graduation rate for the class of 2014 was 91 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Housed in the Department of French and Italian, Elementary Italian I and II (4 credit hours) have an annual enrollment of 150 students. Most sections meet for 50 minutes four times a week. The semester runs 15–16 weeks. Sections are capped at 19 students and are no smaller than eight students. Most of the students are taking Italian to fulfill a language requirement rather than to major or minor in the language. The College of Arts and Sciences requires three semesters of language courses.

Elementary Italian is an introduction to contemporary Italian language and culture through thematic, task-based instruction. Students actively engage in authentic and relevant communicative and interactive activities through role-playing, and pair or group work. Listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills are integrated into all activities. Students learn basic grammar structures, and class is conducted in Italian only.

### Challenges and Goals

At USC, the goals of elementary Italian instruction are for students to develop the following abilities:

1. To communicate in Italian (communication);

2. To appreciate and understand Italian cultural products, perspectives, and practices (cultures);
3. To connect the study of Italian to other fields of knowledge, so that students can deepen their understanding of those disciplines and appreciate their specific features (connections);
4. To better understand how language and culture work by contrasting one's own culture to Italian culture (comparisons);
5. To use Italian and the knowledge gained in the course beyond the university setting, in society at large (communities).

A considerable amount of students' language acquisition is expected to happen outside of the classroom. Ideally, students should spend two hours a day practicing Italian outside of class time. In a language program with a large enrollment, correcting basic grammar and vocabulary drills is time-consuming for instructors. Therefore, it can be a better use of instructor time to evaluate open-ended work rather than mechanical exercises. Computer-graded grammar and vocabulary activities are assigned as homework in MyItalianLab to address this challenge. MyItalianLab provides students with many chances to practice and provides the daily preparation that is crucial to the success of learning during class time.

### Implementation

Elementary Italian I covers the Preliminary Chapter through Chapter 7 in *Percorsi*; Elementary Italian II covers Chapters 8 through 14.

Homework, assigned after class time, is intended to reinforce grammar and vocabulary and to help students practice their listening and writing skills. Unlimited attempts are allowed. MyItalianLab homework is graded for completion, not for accuracy, although students are expected to self-correct their work to get full credit for Student Activity Manual (SAM)

<sup>1</sup> <http://about.usc.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://about.usc.edu/facts/>

*I use MyItalianLab to inform my teaching by taking note of the exercises that are most difficult for my students and discussing them in class.*

activities. It is essential that students learn from their mistakes and identify challenging areas in their homework to prepare for similar tasks or exercises that will appear in tests. In most cases, students realize easily why an answer is not correct. If they have questions, I encourage them to make an appointment with me during office hours. Due dates for MyItalianLab homework are set in the calendar and are also posted in Blackboard, and late homework is not accepted.

About 95 percent of the MyItalianLab homework is computer-graded. I assign almost everything from the Student Activity Manual—especially vocabulary practice. I also assign the Italian grammar tutorials and all listening comprehension exercises. These are not gradable, but I explain that they are important for students to complete. I encourage students to seek out additional practice opportunities. For exams, I frequently use the testing audio from MyItalianLab but write my own questions.

Students are given their MyItalianLab grade every two weeks for a total of five “checkpoints.” At the end of the semester, they have five grades displayed in their MyItalianLab score. Frequent assessment of students’ work allows students and the instructor to know what’s going on, potentially leading to dialogue and beneficial discussion. It also allows me to be more in tune with my students: I look at the MyItalianLab gradebook on a regular basis. Every day I spend a few minutes taking note of exercises that are most difficult for students. I then use this information to discuss that particular activity or topic in class. It’s a great way to inform my teaching. I can also see when students don’t spend enough time on their homework.

In addition to MyItalianLab homework, I have students practice speaking and writing every day. I assign short paragraphs and compositions for homework outside of MyItalianLab. Students also have five major compositions to help develop their writing skills. They submit a first draft and a final draft (one to two double-spaced pages) and may increase their score if they make corrections.

*MyItalianLab is a useful review tool for transfer students who may have had a different textbook or need to get up to speed on their grammar and vocabulary.*

#### Assessments

20 percent	Exams (4)
20 percent	Written final exam
15 percent	Written midterm exam
15 percent	Daily class participation
10 percent	Oral final exam
5 percent	Oral midterm exam
5 percent	MyItalianLab homework
5 percent	Written homework
5 percent	Writing assignments (5)

#### Results and Data

The success rate (students receiving a final grade of A, B, or C) in spring 2015 was 85 percent. There was a positive relationship between MyItalianLab homework completion scores and the final course grade achieved (Figure 1). There was also a strong correlation between MyItalianLab homework completion scores and the final course grade,  $r = .76, p < .01$  (Figure 2). The data suggest that students who complete more MyItalianLab homework also perform better in the course. It should be noted that MyItalianLab homework completion scores made up 5 percent of the final course grade, influencing this relationship.

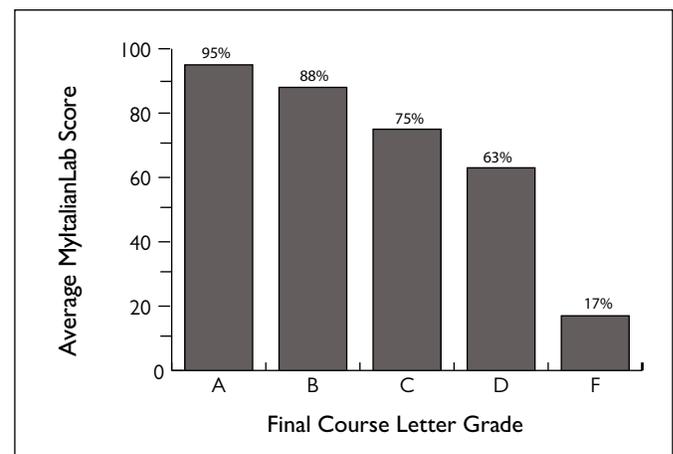


Figure 1. Average MyItalianLab Homework Completion Score for Each Final Course Letter Grade, Elementary Italian II, Spring 2015 ( $n = 52$ ); A ( $n = 13$ ); B ( $n = 18$ ); C ( $n = 13$ ); D ( $n = 4$ ); F ( $n = 4$ )

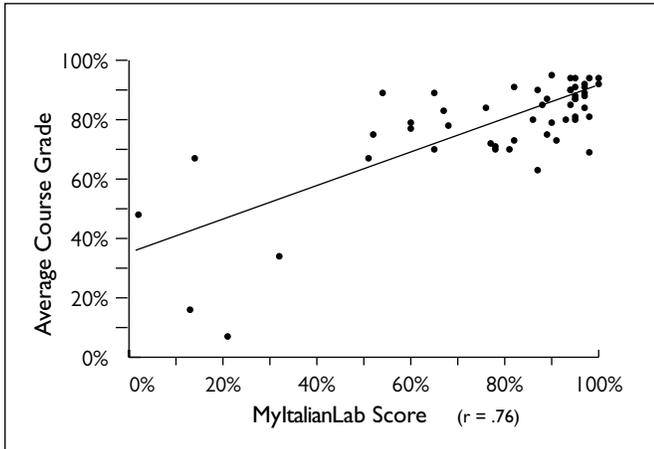


Figure 2. Correlation of MytalianLab Homework Completion Score to Final Course Grade: Elementary Italian II, Spring 2015 ( $n = 52$ )

## Conclusion

Acquiring another language requires a steady, constant, commitment on a daily basis. MytalianLab provides students with a low-stakes opportunity to practice language acquisition outside of the classroom. It also saves instructors from having to grade countless grammar and vocabulary drill exercises. The Italian program at USC has been using MytalianLab since it first launched in 2008, and will continue to use it in Elementary Italian courses.

## The Student Experience

Many students transfer to USC and end up placing into Elementary Italian II. To help these students be successful, I frequently recommend they work on the activities from Elementary Italian I in MytalianLab as a refresher. It is a useful review for transfer students who may have had a different textbook or need to get up to speed on their grammar and vocabulary.

Implementation and results case studies share actual implementation practices and evaluate possible relationships between program implementation and student performance. The findings are not meant to imply causality or generalizability within or beyond these instances. Rather, they can begin to provide informed considerations for implementation and adaptation decisions in other user contexts. For this case study, mixed-methods designs were applied, and the data collected included qualitative data from interviews, quantitative program usage analytics, and performance data. Open-ended interviews were used to guide data collection.