

## THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE TEACHER: A PROFILE

This document contains a list of points describing the premises, objectives, tasks, and opportunities as well as duties and challenges involved in teaching Italian (and foreign languages in general) at the high school level.

This profile was developed collaboratively among three AATI California members in order to provide a set of information useful to current and prospective teachers.

Its primary goal is to offer high school and university faculty a further tool for promoting the study of Italian. The list is designed to better inform students about an interesting professional career, once they complete a BA in Italian and the single-subject teaching credential (or, even better, a credential in two languages).

Its related goal is to respond to the pressing need for credentialed teachers in our field, especially as Italian continues to grow.

The list can be expanded at will. This one also contains specific references to the California setting (see items with an asterisk) that may be adapted to other locales.

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### **Premises and objectives**

1. Open new worlds to young students (exploration of foreign countries, future studies in the field)
2. Introduce all students to the rich Italian cultural heritage (visual and performing arts, etc.)
3. Teach American students a Romance language that helps them to improve their English vocabulary
4. Help Italian-Americans re-discover their roots
5. Encourage Latino students who already know Spanish to become tri-lingual
6. Contribute to cultural exchanges and understanding across languages
7. Work with young people over a long period of time (Italian allows teachers to stay with the same group from level 1 to 4, set expectations on learning, and create a bond)\*
8. Integrate technology by using email pen pals in Italy; creating videos for Youtube; using iPods to listen to music and watch movie clips; etc.

### **Specific approaches, tasks and projects**

1. Create Italian and/or Opera Clubs that can interact with other Italian and/or Opera Clubs (plan friendly yearly competition to encourage meetings and exchange)

2. Encourage level 2 and beyond students to be part of the National Italian Honors Society, which motivates them to take leadership positions and communicate in Italian.
3. Create a local/ state Italian contest in which diverse concepts are studied and tested in a local competition (Italian Literature, Food, Art, Sports and Daily life)
4. Create a partnership with local Opera House in which Italian programs can get discount prices or free dress rehearsal shows
5. Create a partnership with the local Italian or International Film festival so that students can interact with the directors/actors that present their movies

### **Opportunities**

1. Work in connection with other high school teachers (exchange of materials and experiences; promotion of foreign languages at large)
2. Work in connection with middle school teachers (encourage nearby institutions and especially feeder schools, to start after-school Italian classes that could become part of the regular program so students can have 5 years of Italian before taking the AP exam)
3. Work in connection with university faculty to provide concrete information on post-secondary studies (visit local universities that have Italian programs so students can see how their studies parallel those in college: they really enjoy these visits)
4. Work in connection with elementary schools to start Language Academies with dual language programs, thus encouraging foreign languages studies at early stages
5. Develop contacts with local universities and Italian and American institutions for educational and cultural projects (scholarships, grants, and events)
6. Interact with local and national Italian-American organizations that encourage the study of Italian (NIAF, OSIA, etc.) (scholarships, grants, and events)
7. Offer/participate in study abroad programs/international trips with students

### **Professional development and career opportunities**

1. Attend workshops and seminars (College Board for AP, Education Offices at Italian Consulates, local universities, language acquisition centers)
2. Attend local and national conference in order to be up to date on materials and methods as well as share best practices with other instructors (AATI, AAIS, ACTFL, NEMLA, CLTA\*, etc.)
3. Develop teaching materials that can be published by specialized presses
4. Embrace administrative career paths at later stages, such as principal, head of FL dept., etc. (administrators sensitive to foreign languages allow for programs to grow)
5. Work for College Board as a consultant (exam writer, reader, workshop leader), also to have a more direct knowledge of, and impact on, the exam

### **Job contract specifics**

1. Salaries range from \$42,000 for entry-level teachers to \$74,000 for teachers with 10 years experience and 102 credits above their BA degree\*
2. Worker rights are protected by public schools teachers unions
3. Medical premiums are paid as part of benefits programs, also covering dental and

glasses\*

4. After 2 years, a probationary teacher becomes permanent\*
5. Vacations usually include three weeks for Christmas, one week for Spring break, and approximately nine weeks during the summer.

### **Duties**

1. Be responsible for four preparations (usually the number of students taking Italian is just adequate to open levels 1 to 4 or AP but not large enough to have more than six sections).
2. Write weekly lesson plans that reflect the World Language Standards for the state of CA\*
3. Give regular assessments with timely feedback
4. Keep up-to-date and accurate records of all student work
5. Contact parents to give both positive feedback as well as inquire why a student is not attending class or is not doing his/her work
6. Post homework and other assignments on the school's website
7. Attend bi-monthly faculty meetings (one hour after school)
8. Attend bi-monthly professional development meetings (shortened day for students)
9. Be available for teacher/parent conferences twice a year (minimum day for students)

### **Challenges**

1. Teaching large number of students (an average of 150 – 180)
2. Involvement of administrators in daily running of classes
3. Limited textbooks and materials for high-school classes
4. Limited models in teaching (methods, practices, etc.)
5. Unclear articulation of threshold and achievements across levels
6. Limited space/equipment for language acquisition and testing (labs, exam rooms)

### **Present needs in the field according to current teachers**

1. Evening classes for teachers attending certification programs while working
2. National Certification of Italian to be introduced in order to allow for higher salaries (an additional 7 % monthly and extra 7% annually)
3. Targeted materials and more opportunities for exchange about teaching practices
4. More funds available from local districts to attend national conferences such as ACTFL or AATI
5. Definition of levels and thresholds
6. Assessment through standard testing
7. Consistency and articulation between SAT II Italian and AP Italian to encourage students to take the exams