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# Which Italian Exam Do You Actually Need for Citizenship?

If you're applying for Italian citizenship by marriage or residency, you have to prove your Italian is at level B1. But there are four different exams, dozens of confusing acronyms, and a lot of bad advice online. This guide cuts through it in plain English.

Written by native Italian instructors · Last updated 2026

## The 30-second answer

If you're applying through **marriage or residency**, you must prove Italian at **level B1** with one of four accepted certificates. **CILS B1 Cittadinanza** (from the University for Foreigners of Siena) is the one most people take — it's the most widely available and purpose-built for citizenship. CELI 2, PLIDA B1 and the Roma Tre IT certificate are all accepted too. If you're applying through **descent (jure sanguinis)**, you do **not** need a language exam at all.

That's the headline. The rest of this guide explains how to choose between the four, what the exam actually tests, the scoring trap that fails well-prepared people, and how to register.

## First: do you even need the exam?

This is the question that saves people the most wasted effort. The language requirement depends entirely on *how* you're applying.

**You DO need a B1 certificate if you're applying by:**

- ✓ **Marriage / civil union** to an Italian citizen.
- ✓ **Residency** (naturalisation after living legally in Italy for the required number of years).

## You do NOT need a language exam if you're applying by:

- × **Descent (jure sanguinis)** — citizenship through an Italian-born ancestor.

**Why this matters more than it used to.** Italy tightened the rules on citizenship by descent in 2025. As the descent route narrows, more people are being funnelled toward the marriage and residency routes — and those are exactly the ones that require the B1 exam. If your descent application has stalled, the language exam may now be part of your path.

## The four accepted certificates, compared

Any of these four B1 certificates is legally accepted for citizenship. They test the same level; they differ in availability, format, and price. Here's how they stack up.

Certificate	Issued by	Notes
<b>CILS B1 Cittadinanza</b>	Univ. for Foreigners of Siena	The most popular. A shorter, everyday/administrative version built specifically for citizenship. Widely available worldwide.
<b>CELI 2 (Cittadinanza)</b>	Univ. for Foreigners of Perugia	Equivalent B1 level. Has a dedicated immigrant/citizenship version whose oral focuses on civic and social life in Italy.
<b>PLIDA B1</b>	Società Dante Alighieri	Accepted for citizenship. Run through Dante Alighieri centres, which exist in many countries.
<b>IT (CERT.IT) B1</b>	Roma Tre University	Computer-delivered and usually the cheapest. Fewer test centres, so availability can be limited.

**Our recommendation for most people: CILS B1 Cittadinanza.** It's purpose-built for citizenship, the most widely offered (so you can actually find a seat near you), and results for the Cittadinanza module are published relatively quickly.

Pick a different one only if it's far easier for you to physically sit it, or if a centre near you offers a session sooner.

## What the CILS B1 Cittadinanza exam actually tests

The exam has **four sections**, sat the same day. The written part runs roughly two hours plus a short break; the oral is about ten minutes, taken right after.

Section	What you do	Time
<b>Listening (Ascolto)</b>	Short dialogues and longer recordings, answered with multiple choice and "present / not stated" items. Audio is played twice.	~30 min
<b>Reading + grammar</b>	Real-world texts (notices, announcements, short articles) plus a gap-fill that tests grammar in context.	~40 min
<b>Writing (Produzione scritta)</b>	Two tasks: a short functional message, and a longer connected text (around 100 words).	~40 min
<b>Speaking (Produzione orale)</b>	Two tasks with an examiner: a guided description, and an interactive task such as a role-play or giving your opinion.	~10 min

## The scoring trap that fails prepared candidates

This is the single most important thing to understand before you walk in.

**Each of the four sections is scored out of 12 (48 total). To pass, you need at least 7/12 in every section, and at least 28/48 overall — all in one sitting.**

The trap: you can have a strong overall score and still **fail the whole exam on one weak section**. Score 11s across the board but a 6 in listening, and you fail — there are no partial retakes. Fail one section and you re-sit the entire exam.

For most English speakers, the two sections that quietly sink applications are **listening** (the audio only plays twice and moves fast) and **speaking** (nerves plus limited live

practice). The lesson isn't "study harder" — it's "don't leave any section untested." Track your weakest section and practise it deliberately.

## How and where to register

- **When:** CILS sessions typically run several times a year (commonly around February, April, June, July, October and December). Sittings fill up — book early.
- **Where:** at an authorised exam centre. Many Italian Cultural Institutes, Dante Alighieri Society branches, and partner universities worldwide host CILS sessions. Check the official Siena (CILS) site for the current centre list and calendar.
- **Cost:** the exam fee is roughly €100, paid to the centre.
- **Results:** for the Cittadinanza module, results are usually published faster than standard CILS (in the region of 45 days).
- **Certificate validity:** once you pass, the certificate is valid indefinitely for citizenship purposes.

Exact dates, fees and centre availability change each year and vary by country — always confirm against the official exam board before booking.

## Five mistakes to avoid

- **Assuming you need the exam at all.** Descent applicants don't. Confirm your route first.
- **Practising "general Italian" instead of the exam.** Apps that teach conversational Italian don't prepare you for this specific format, register, and scoring.
- **Ignoring your weakest section.** The one-section-fail trap is the most common cause of a failed sitting.
- **Skipping the oral until the last minute.** It's short, examiner-led, and the part people most underprepare.
- **Leaving registration too late.** Sessions sell out, especially near consulate and application deadlines.

## Want to actually pass it?

We're building exam-specific prep for the CILS B1 Cittadinanza: full-length mock exams in the real format with instant scoring and per-section diagnostics, native-audio practice, AI feedback on your writing, and a 24/7 AI speaking partner that simulates the oral exam — the section people fear most.

[Join the waitlist for early access →](#)

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