

Sapere and Conoscere

Context

Ciao! In this lesson we're going to talk about the verbs *sapere* and *conoscere*. As you probably remember, they both mean "to know." Is that a little foggy for you? Don't worry. It's really simple and straightforward. Actually, once you get the concept, you'll find it very useful. You'll also see that having two verbs can introduce basic subtleties of meaning that are not as evident in English.

Let's look at the forms of the two verbs and then talk about the differences between them.
Information

1. *Sapere* has irregular forms in the present indicative.
io so, tu sai, lui/lei sa, noi sappiamo, voi sapete, loro sanno
2. *Conoscere* is regular in the present indicative, but listen, however, to the changes in pronunciation between the "sh" and "sk" sounds: io conosco, tu conosci, lui/lei conosce, noi conosciamo, voi conoscete, loro conoscono
3. So, nothing extremely difficult there, but you will need to memorize these forms. We're cruising. Now, let's talk about the differences between the two verbs.

Sapere means to know basic information or information about something, or to know how to do something. If I know someone's telephone number or the answer to a question, that's *sapere*. If I know how to play tennis, that's *sapere*. When I'm talking about knowing how to do something, I use *sapere* with the infinitive form of another verb. "Do you know how to dance?" would be *Sai ballare? Ripeti. Sai ballare? Sai dove sta la biblioteca?*

4. *Conoscere* on the other hand, means to be acquainted with a person or a place. It's about knowing people and having actually visited places. So, when I want to say that I know the student, I use *conoscere*. *Conosco lo studente*. If I want to ask someone if they "know" or are familiar with a particular neighborhood, I use *conoscere*. *Conoscete questo quartiere?*

5. Special uses. If used in the past tense, "conoscere" acquires the meaning of "to meet (for the first time)". So, to say that you met Carla for the first time last year, you would say: *Ho conosciuto Carla l'anno scorso*. Note the past participle "conosciuto" which is irregular.

6. Special uses. Finally, note that the difference in meaning in the following two sentences:

Sapevo che Maria stava male.

I knew that Maria was sick.

Ho saputo che Maria sta/stava male.

I found out that Maria is/was sick.

When used in the “passato prossimo”, “sapere” acquires the meaning of “to find out”.

Notice also the following expressions:

Lo so.

I know.

Viene anche Luigi, sai.

Luigi is also coming, you know.

7. Okay, let’s take it out for a test drive. How would you say “I know Paul”?

Conosco Paul. How about “We know how to sing”? *Sappiamo cantare.* “She knows the name of the school.” *Conosce il nome della scuola.* Finally, how would you say “I’ve been to Rome (I am familiar with the city)”? *Conosco Roma.*

Review – Things to Remember

So, as you can see, *sapere* means to know information or to know how to do something. *Conoscere* means to be acquainted with people or places. Remember that *sapere* is irregular in its present indicative. If you know this, you’ve got it going on. “*Sapere*” e “*conoscere*” non sono difficili, sai? *Imparerai a conoscere bene questi verbi. Ciao.*