Russian, Book 1

Russian Through Propaganda

by Mark R. Pettus, Ph.D.
Russian Through Propaganda...

- is a new series of Russian textbooks with a rigorous but rewarding approach to the language
- presupposes no prior knowledge of Russian, and begins with extensive work on the alphabet, pronunciation, and handwriting
- is intended for ambitious beginners, or for intermediate and even advanced students who are looking for a comprehensive and highly structured review of the language
- assumes its readers are interested in long-term mastery of the language, within the rich historical, cultural, and literary contexts that often draw students to Russian in the first place
- takes the time to explain challenging grammar topics (such as verb conjugation, verbal aspect, motion verbs, and subjectless constructions) in depth, striving to provide the full picture as clearly as possible
- carefully describes Russian idioms and what Russians “really say,” as well as the misconceptions that arise if we rely excessively on English translations
- is structured as a series of 50 daily lessons per volume, which build upon one another and give a clear sense of progress
- is richly illustrated by Soviet-era propaganda and advertising posters, whose slogans serve as examples of each lesson’s grammar, giving even beginning students glimpses of “real Russian”
- cultivates a familiarity with Soviet history, culture, and ideology that is essential for understanding Russia, both past and present
- is strewn with Russian proverbs and popular sayings, chosen to illustrate the grammar at hand
- features useful tables of all relevant forms (especially verb conjugations), and marks all stresses
- includes a number of conversation topics and daily exercises in each lesson, with answer key, along with additional worksheets and audio files available for free online

Each volume in the series is the equivalent of one semester of intensive Russian study at the college level. The series continues with Book 2 of Russian Through Propaganda, which culminates with a special chapter on practical, everyday Russian for those visiting the country, and a reading segment featuring carefully glossed selections of Soviet-era prose and poetry from the likes of Anna Akhmatova and Yevgeni Zamyatin, in the original Russian.

The series will continue with Books 3 and 4, Russian Through Poems and Paintings, which will turn to the Imperial Era, and to classical poems and prose by Pushkin and Lermontov, and end with a carefully abridged but otherwise unedited version of Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment. By that point, students will have all the tools they need to begin enjoying such masterpieces in the original, with a sound appreciation of their historical and cultural context.

About the author: Mark Pettus holds a Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures from Princeton University, where he is currently a Lecturer, teaching Russian, Polish, and Czech. He has lived, studied and worked in Russia for over five years in total.

For online resources, go to: http://www.russianthroughpropaganda.com.
This series is intended for students who are serious about learning Russian, and favors a thorough, grammar-centered, long-term approach over misleading “rules of thumb.” In my experience, many beginner’s textbooks strive to simplify Russian in order to make it seem more approachable. Of course, if the student’s goal is to “learn a bit of Russian,” simplification and shortcuts are well justified. However, for students whose long-term goal is real mastery of the language, early simplifications may result in lingering confusion. This series was designed for students who are looking for an in-depth knowledge of the language, and, eventually, genuine fluency.

Based on my own experience as a learner and teacher of Russian, I believe that the best approach to take with such students is to confront difficulties as thoroughly as possible from the very beginning. Examples include verbal aspect and verbs of motion. We will look at such topics in great depth, emphasizing an imaginative understanding of the Russian idiom. Often, we will contrast an “unpacking” of the Russian idiom (saying, in English, everything that the Russian really conveys) with a simple “translation” that often results in a loss of information.

This book is also meant to be practical — for one thing, it contains a large number of tables, including full tables of conjugated forms for all verbs, to help students as they drill the vocabulary and eliminate many “guessing games” regarding correct forms. All relevant grammatical information is included — for example, what case and/or preposition follows a given verb. All verbs are tagged by verb type, using a system (just slightly modified) that I learned from Prof. Charles Townsend at Princeton. Here again, becoming familiar with these “tags” and verb types requires a bit of extra effort at first, but is, in the long run, extremely profitable — particularly when we begin reading literary texts in the original and need to assimilate new vocabulary in an efficient and systematic manner.

Of course, this is neither a reference grammar nor a linguistics textbook, and presupposes no prior knowledge of Slavic languages or grammar in general. Grammatical and other technical terms are used, to the extent that they are all but unavoidable (examples include subject and object, predicate nouns and adjectives, determinacy and animacy, etc.), but such terms are explained carefully as they are introduced. All Russian words are grouped very carefully according to type.

The series consists of two first-year texts (Russian, Books 1 and 2: Russian through Propaganda) which focus on the Soviet era and feature a large number of Soviet posters, whose short, pithy slogans serve to illustrate points in each day’s grammar. Students generally find these posters very amusing and memorable, and they provide short but authentic bursts of Russian from the very beginning. Certainly, these posters present a triumphalist vision of Soviet life that is very one-sided, and, amidst the inevitable chuckles, students are encouraged to critique this vision and contrast it with what they know of the historical reality. In any case, Book 2 concludes with a selection of Soviet-era prose and poetry from the likes of Akhmatova and Shalamov that presents a much darker side of Soviet life.

The series continues with two second-year texts (Russian, Books 3 and 4: Russian through Poems and Paintings), whose focus is the Imperial era, including classical Russian poetry and prose. These books are illustrated with famous Russian paintings, many of them depicting important cultural phenomena and historical events. Meanwhile, some of the finest poems in the Russian canon are used to illustrate topics in the grammar. As we go, we’ll continue to develop our reading ability, and prepare ourselves for extended units on Pushkin and Lermontov (most importantly, Pushkin’s The Bronze Horseman), and, in the second half of Book 4, an abridged (but unadapted) version of Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment. It is hoped that immersion in a Russian novel of this caliber will serve as a genuine reward for students. All texts are marked up with vocabulary, including aspectual pairs for all new verbs, flagged according to type. At this point, the legwork done as early as Book 1 in terms of classifying nouns and verbs really begins to pay off. Book 3 pays special attention to such advanced “literary” forms as verbal adverbs, adjectives (participles), and nouns, and Book 4 has extensive word formation material to help students expand their vocabulary and approach new Russian words in a rigorous fashion.
Beginning students often ask for an honest assessment of how difficult Russian really is.

The answer: hard, but doable. Any student who sincerely wants to learn Russian should not be frightened off — least of all by the intimidating alphabet, which can be learned in a matter of days!

But, every student should set realistic expectations, and be prepared to put in plenty of work.

What makes Russian so much harder than, say, Spanish, French, or German? First, it is highly inflected (that is, it has many grammatical endings that change depending on a word’s role in the sentence). A good portion of first-year Russian (Books 1 and 2 in this series) will involve learning the endings for nouns, adjectives and verbs, and how to use them. This does involve its share of drudgery, since we have to know the endings in order to practice them, and vice versa!

In time, through a combination of memorization and practice, manipulating these endings will come more naturally, but they still account for much of the frustration felt by beginning students. Many have the feeling that despite excellent knowledge of the grammar, and solid passive knowledge of Russian (reading and even listening), they still have great difficulty actually speaking the language, since even relatively simple utterances may involve a number of cases and tricky verb forms. Moreover, simply learning Russian vocabulary will require a lot more work than learning Spanish, French or German vocabulary. Not only are we working with a new alphabet, but we have far fewer words that are cognate with words in English (such as the German “Haus”). It’s extremely important to spend time every day “drilling” your Russian vocabulary — particularly verb forms. Find what works for you. Writing out vocabulary and repeating verb conjugations can help you to develop a kind of “muscle memory” that, over time, will allow you to speak Russian more spontaneously.

What else makes Russian difficult? In terms of pronunciation, Russian has shifting stress. Not only must we grow accustomed to stressing just one syllable in each word, but we must also learn about the patterns by which stress may shift about in a given word, depending on how we manipulate its endings. Secondly, in terms of grammar, Russian has verbal aspect, a category that English lacks. Here and elsewhere, Russian idioms may be very different from their English counterparts. So, relying on translations will often be of little help; we’ll have to use our imagination, and even think about the world in new ways in order to talk about it in a distinctively Russian manner.

On the other hand, some features of Russian are simple, even compared to the “easy” languages we mentioned. For example, Russian has only three tenses, and no difficult subjunctive forms. Try to avoid the unrealistic expectations that may carry over from your previous study of an “easy” language. Be patient — but realize that by the end of this Book 4 you will have all the tools necessary to read Crime and Punishment in the original. Along the way, we’ll also read some outstanding pieces of Russian poetry and prose, from Akhmatova to Pushkin. The ability to work with these texts in the original is what draws many students to study Russian in the first place, and this series was written with that goal in mind. In short, achieving a solid reading ability in Russian within a year or two (or, by Book 4 in this series) is a very reasonable goal.

However, if your goal is to achieve advanced proficiency in spoken Russian, then, in my view, and based on my personal experience, you should make it a priority to spend time in Russia, I believe it is all but impossible to attain spoken proficiency in Russian in a classroom, no matter how good the instruction may be. Students are often nervous when they first go to Russia: they “don’t know how to say anything,” despite even a full year of study! This is a very common feeling (I felt the same way when I first arrived in Russia!). But students who take the plunge and spend a couple of months in Russia often find that their speaking ability begins to catch up surprisingly quickly with their knowledge of grammar. They know more than they often realize; they just need practice.

In many ways, the real goal of this series is to equip serious students with all of the grammar and cultural background they need to spend time in Russia productively. By the time you complete Book 4, you will be ready to deal with just about anything Russian can throw at you.
how to use this book

Each lesson (or, “day”) is presented in the form of a “lecture” — that is, a complete prose explanation of the day’s grammar topic, of the sort you might expect to hear in a classroom, along with all necessary tables and examples. When reviewing the material, students are advised to focus on the examples — if you are comfortable with them, move on; if not, try re-reading the prose explanations. These explanations take into account questions asked by past students, and carefully try to eliminate sources of confusion; if you have a question, chances are it is addressed somewhere!

As you study, try to dedicate as much time as possible to drilling the vocabulary and forms, especially verb conjugations. It will take time for these unfamiliar forms to sink in. Repetition, on a daily basis, is really the only way to master Russian vocabulary!

Pay particular attention to the method used to “tag” verbs by conjugation type. Learning this system will require more work at first, but will pay great dividends down the road. Every time you come across a new verb, note the “tag,” and drill yourself: can you conjugate it? A full table of verb types is provided in the back of the book for reference.

Stress is marked throughout the book — watch for the underlined vowels in each word. Paying attention to these stress marks is an essential part of learning Russian.

Watch for these symbols in the margins:

» points out material included in the lesson’s audio recording on the web site

« marks a grammar drill (fill-in-the-blank, translation, etc.);

б marks conversational material, typically consisting of questions for simple discussions;

The conversational materials also invite you to use the day’s grammar in more creative and practical ways — for example, to tell about yourself, answer simple questions, etc.

Watch for black boxes in the reference tables, which highlight forms that, for one reason or another, cause special problems for students. Often, these forms are not what we might expect based on general rules. So, focus on the “black boxes” as exceptions.

While the posters and proverbs have been carefully selected to illustrate the grammar at hand, you shouldn’t expect to understand every last nuance right away. See how much you can make of them. Down the road, when you come back to review old material, you may be surprised to find how much more you suddenly understand. These daily bits of “real Russian” will gradually help prepare you to read real prose and poetry in the original, beginning in Book 2.

Remember to bookmark the series web site at www.russianthroughpropaganda.com.

In addition to audio files and additional worksheets (for classroom use — therefore, with no answer key!), the site features a number of useful resources for Russian learners, from recommendations for online dictionaries to links to classic Soviet and Russian films.

As you learn, do your best to seek out real Russian wherever you can find it — movies, music, etc. Hearing Russian as often as possible, especially in ways that are meaningful for you, is essential to learning — even when you might think that you aren’t understanding a thing, your mind is learning, bit by bit, to make sense of unfamiliar sounds and structures. As you learn more grammar and vocabulary, what once seemed impenetrable will gradually begin to make sense, and Russian will become more and more enjoyable.

Удачи! (Good luck!)
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Chapter 4

going places

motion verbs and the prepositional case

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day 32  more on the prepositional
the mobile vowel and во; adjectival place names; declining foreign place names; the alternate “locative” prepositional ending

day 33  time expressions
time expressions with the accusative; time expressions with the genitive; days of the week; this, last and next

day 34  more time expressions; saying “for”
months; asking questions about time; summary of useful adverbs; prepositions meaning “for”

day 35  prepositions and locations
where, where to, and where from; где / куда / откуда with в nouns; introducing verbs of motion; где / куда / откуда with на nouns

day 36  introduction to verbs of motion
verbs with three infinitives; translating versus “unpacking”; indeterminate, determinate and perfective motion verbs; “breakdowns”

day 37  indeterminate verbs of motion
going “around”; five basic kinds of motion; taking vehicles and going by foot; round trips; moving within a space

day 38  determinate verbs of motion
being underway; being underway along a path; conjugating determinate verbs; an ongoing one-way trip; repeated determinate motion

day 39  perfective verbs of motion
conjugating perfective verbs; setting out; assumed arrival and one-way trips; describing single future trips; perfective sequences; summary

day 40  other verbs used with где / куда / откуда
other verbs describing motion; other verbs used with где / куда / откуда phrases; adverbs of place; imperative forms of motion verbs

### Chapter 5: Work, Study & Interests

**The Instrumental Case and Case Review**

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#### Day 43: Predicate Nouns and Adjectives
- the instrumental with predicate nouns and adjectives; becoming; seeming; turning out to be; being; the nominative and instrumental; “you and I” phrases

#### Day 44: Case Usage Review
- the nominative and the instrumental; the nominative and the genitive; the accusative and the genitive; the dative and the nominative

#### Day 45: Review of Prepositions
- prepositions with the prepositional, instrumental, dative, genitive, and accusative; prepositions with more than one case

#### Day 46: Case Endings by Noun Type
- feminine nouns; masculine nouns; neuter nouns; special soft nouns; short-form adjectives

#### Day 47: Declining Names
- Russian names; end-stressed last names; adjectival last names; other male and female names; casual short forms of first names

#### Day 48: Pronouns & Special Modifiers
- third-person pronouns; first- and second-person pronouns; the special modifiers весь, один, чей; forms of possessive pronouns

#### Day 49: Reflexive Pronouns
- the reflexive pronoun свой; omitting possessive pronouns; reflexive pronouns; doing things “all by yourself”; reciprocity with друг друга

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- more uses of the infinitive; чтобы; punctuation tips; review of clause types; clauses with так and так что; indirect questions with ли; clauses with если
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1947
everyday items
nouns and adjectives

In this chapter, we’ll learn how to pronounce, read, and write Russian and its Cyrillic alphabet. We’ll learn how to introduce ourselves. Finally, we’ll learn how to use nouns and adjectives in the nominative case to name basic everyday items, describe them, and tell whose they are.

1. the alphabet and basic pronunciation
2. pronunciation in detail
3. more on pronunciation
4. handwriting
5. learning names and getting acquainted
6. nouns and the nominative case
7. adjectives
8. adverbs, conjunctions, and the verb “to be”
9. possessive pronouns
10. demonstrative pronouns
1.1 Before we begin: a preview of stress and vowel purity

In Russian, any given word has only one stressed syllable. In this textbook, we’ll mark the stressed syllable by underlining its vowel. For example: the word студент (student) is stressed on the second syllable, whose vowel is “е.” Watch for the stress carefully, and be sure to “hit” the stressed syllable with extra force and emphasis.

To pronounce a Russian vowel correctly, we must first find the proper tongue position. But we must also resist the temptation to move our tongue (or any part of our mouth), to avoid introducing a second vowel sound. English vowels that are spelled using a single letter (a, e, i, o, u) may actually consist of more than one sound when pronounced, if we listen very closely. But a Russian vowel consists of one sound only. It is, so to speak, “pure.”

1.2 Our first three letters: two vowels (и, ы) and a consonant (й)

Instead of presenting the letters in alphabetical order, we’ll begin by grouping them for learning purposes. Let’s start out with three letters that are easily confused. The consonant й, like English “y,” often combines with vowels. Note the “hat” above the й, which distinguishes it from the vowel и. English has no vowel like ы, which is clearly distinct from и! Listen closely to your instructor or the recording as you begin to master this distinction.*
1.3 Four more vowels: а, у, э, о

When any Russian vowel is stressed, we will always hear its “true” sound. However, some vowels — notably “а” and “о” — will sound differently when unstressed, depending on their position with regard to the stressed syllable. This principle is called vowel reduction: we say that certain vowels are reduced when unstressed.

In order to practice reduction, we will sometimes transcribe Russian vowels using ah / oh / uh / eh — but keep in mind that these are only rough approximations, used for convenience only. As always, take careful note of the actual sound of each Russian vowel as noted below, without relying entirely on any English transcription.

1.4 Four “soft” vowels: я, ю, е, ё

As we mentioned, the Russian consonant ι (like English “y”) combines with vowels. If the ι sound comes after a vowel, Russian writes the resulting combination using two letters, such as ои (like the “oy” in “boy”).

However, if the ι sound precedes a vowel sound, Russian represents the resulting combination using one of the single letters shown below. Note how their pronunciation mirrors that of the four vowels above — just add the ι sound in front of the basic vowel to produce the so-called “soft” version, as in: ι + а = я, ι + у = ю, etc.

We will refer to these four letters, in addition to и, as Russian’s five soft vowels, in the sense that they mark a preceding consonant as soft. More on this in a moment!
1.5 The hard and soft signs

Most Russian consonant sounds come in two varieties: hard and soft. These sounds are very distinct, but the Russian alphabet uses the same letter for both: for example, the letter т can represent both hard т and soft т.

So, how do we know if a given consonant is soft? **By what follows it.** If a consonant is followed by a soft vowel (е, ё, у, я, и) or a soft sign (ъ), then we know the consonant itself is soft, and must be pronounced as soft!

Otherwise, however, we simply assume that consonants are hard. Before the spelling reforms of 1918, this assumption wasn’t made; instead, Russians wrote (quite superfluously, one might argue) a hard sign (ъ) after hard consonants. The hard sign is still in use today, but only to mark a consonant as hard despite being followed by a soft vowel — a combination that sometimes occurs when prefixes are added to words. This is relatively rare, especially in beginner’s Russian. One example is въехать (to drive into; that is, в + ехать).

So, our next two letters — the soft sign and hard sign — have no sound of their own. They simply tell us how to pronounce preceding consonants. Take careful note of the difference in these letters: the hard sign has a “hat.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>soft sign: marks a preceding consonant as soft</th>
<th>hard sign: marks a preceding consonant as hard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>мать</td>
<td>бать</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>РУСЬ</td>
<td>РУСЬ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>медведь</td>
<td>медведь</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ancient) Rus’</td>
<td>(ancient) Rus’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bear</td>
<td>bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ ехать</td>
<td>въехать</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to drive</td>
<td>to drive into</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stress and the hard/soft distinction** are essential for good Russian pronunciation. Ignore them at your peril!

| Compare: | |
| мать | mother |
| мат | vulgar language (!) |
| писать | to write |
| писать | to piss (!) |

1.6 Pronouncing soft consonants

How do we soften a consonant? Technically speaking, we palatalize it. That is, a soft (palatalized) consonant is pronounced with the front of our tongue raised up against the hard palate (or “roof”) of the mouth.

So, **tongue position** is key! The position required for softening is the same one used to pronounce и or й. Pin down this position by saying “и” several times, taking note of where your tongue is positioned while you say it. Now, **without letting your tongue drop** from this position, move it just enough to pronounce the given consonant. The result is a “soft” version of that consonant. This is not easy, and will take time to master!

Of course, a soft sound is related phonetically to its hard counterpart, but it must be thought of as a **distinct, single sound** — not as the “hard consonant” plus a separate “y” sound (that is, нет is not simply “n-yet”).

The orthographical reform of 1918

In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, the following four letters were eliminated from the official alphabet.

- Ь б: called ять; pronounced like е
- Ь Ь: pronounced like и
- Œ е: pronounced like ф
- Ω в: pronounced like и

The hard sign (ъ) was also written much more frequently. To the left, we have an Imperial-era advertisement for коньякъ (cognac / brandy); today, this word would be written коньяк. That is, we continue to write the soft sign to mark the н as soft,* but we simply assume that the final к is hard, and don’t write the hard sign.

Nowadays, you may on occasion see such archaic orthography in stylized “old-fashioned” store signs and the like (something along the lines of the English “Ye Olde Shoppe,” etc.). One good example is the name of a leading daily newspaper: Коммерсантъ, which often refers to itself as “Ъ” for short in its articles.

* In fact, this word involves a soft consonant (нь) followed by a soft vowel. We’ll discuss this combination tomorrow; it is relatively rare.
1.7 Consonants

Some Russian consonants can be grouped into pairs of “voiced” and “unvoiced” consonants. If a consonant is voiced, it means that your vocal cords must be moving in order to pronounce it. When pronouncing its unvoiced counterpart, they’ll remain motionless.

As we learn the consonants and read the examples below, notice that final voiced consonants in Russian are devoiced — that is, they are pronounced as their unvoiced counterpart (for example: народ is pronounced нарот). We’ll discuss this in detail in tomorrow’s lesson.

![Consonants Chart]

- **К к** like “к” in skit (no aspiration/breath)
- **М м** like “м” in mother
- **Т т** like “т” (tongue against upper teeth)
- **Д д** like “д” (tongue against upper teeth)
- **Н н** like “н” (tongue against upper teeth)
- **Л л** like “л” (tongue against upper teeth)
- **В в** like English “v”
- **Б б** like English “b”
- **Г г** like “г” in game
- **З з** like English “z”
- **Р р** trilled “r” (tongue should flap against teeth, as with “tt” in English “better”)
- **С с** like “s” (never like English “k”)
- **Ф ф** like English “ф”

* A colloquial term for мобильный телефон. You may also hear the adjective alone (мобильный), or simply телефон.
What's the Russian for bow-wow?

Ever wondered what animals say in Russia? Ask and answer, using the following model:

— Что говорит кошка? — What does a cat say?
— Кошка говорит “мяу-мяу”! — A cat says “meow!”

1. кошка (cat): “мяу-мяу”
2. собака (dog): “гав-гав”
3. лягушка (frog): “ква-ква”
4. петух (rooster): “ку-ка-ре-ку”
5. свинья (pig): “хрю-хрю”
6. корова (cow): “му-му”
7. лошадь (horse): “и-го-го”

Первый пассажир спутника — собака “Лайка”
The first satellite passenger (literally, “passenger of a satellite”) — “Laika” the dog.

The name Лайка is related to the verb лаять (to bark) and the noun лай (barking). So, its literal meaning is something like “barker!”
day 2: pronunciation in detail

more on vowel purity, stress, vowel reduction, and devoicing and softening of consonants

2.1 Five keys to good Russian pronunciation

Now that we have a general feel for the Russian alphabet, let’s revisit some of the points we introduced yesterday in greater detail. We will focus on five principles of Russian phonetics that are essential for good pronunciation: 1) vowel purity; 2) stress; 3) vowel reduction; 4) consonant devoicing; and 5) consonant softening.

2.2 Vowel purity

Russian vowels are “pure,” in the sense that they consist of one sound only. To avoid contaminating this pure sound with another, we have to avoid moving any part of our mouth while pronouncing a given vowel.

Take particular care when pronouncing the Russian vowels y (like the “oo” in shoot) and o (like the “o” in more), as English speakers tend to have the most trouble maintaining purity in these two vowels. For an exaggerated example, say “Ewww, gross!” as obnoxiously as you can. Listen carefully to the sounds you actually produce; if you pronounce a Russian y or o in this “impure” fashion (even a little!), it will really grate on a Russian ear!

2.3 Stress

In English, stress is relatively weak. Even native speakers can have trouble pinning it down, since longer words may have both primary and secondary stress. For example, where’s the stress in the English word independent?

In Russian, stress is strong and unambiguous, and falls on one syllable only in any given word. This textbook will mark a stressed syllable by underlining its vowel. Note that Russian words typically have as many syllables as they have vowels. There are no silent vowels in Russian! For example, ударение (“stress”) has 5 vowels and 5 syllables: у-да-ре-ни-е. The underlined vowel tells us that, in this word, the third syllable is stressed.

By the way, if a word has only one syllable, it is usually stressed (with certain exceptions, to be discussed later!).

Книги! Books! (detail from a very famous 1924 poster by Александр Родченко.)
Without question, knowing **where the stress falls** in Russian words presents one of the language’s greatest challenges for learners. In our textbook, stress will be **marked**, but in actual texts, it won’t be! It can be tempting to try to evade this difficulty by giving each syllable roughly equal emphasis and hoping no one will notice. But this is **always incorrect**, and ultimately disastrous for proper pronunciation! Better to stress the wrong syllable occasionally as you’re learning Russian than to overlook this principle altogether. By the way — being able to hear and pronounce stress is essential for appreciating Russian poetry, as we’ll begin to learn in Book 2.

As you practice, try “getting physical” when reading or speaking: nod your head or pump your first as you “hit” the stressed syllable — do whatever it takes to bring out a little more “umph.” Try it with these words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>группа</th>
<th>group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>студент</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>машина</td>
<td>car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>университет</td>
<td>university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**One way to practice stress**

One easy exercise for understanding how stress affects pronunciation is to imagine how a word would sound if the stress fell on another syllable. Mispronounce it in every possible way, and notice the difference!

**Incorrect:**

\[
\text{университет} \quad \text{университет}, \quad \text{университет} \]

**Correct:**

\[
\text{университет} \]

As we’ll see next, **stress and vowel reduction** are closely linked. This means that stressing the wrong syllable can cause a kind of cascading breakdown in the pronunciation of a given word!

**2.4 Vowel reduction**

Four Russian vowels (о, а, е, я) are pronounced differently (“reduced” to other vowel sounds) when they are **unstressed**; how they are pronounced depends on where they are **relative to the stressed syllable**. Remember, the transcriptions used here (“ah,” “oh,” “uh,” etc.) are rough approximations, provided for convenience only!

Here are some examples of words containing each vowel, broken down by syllable. Note each vowel’s position relative to the stressed syllable (in **black**). At first, this may seem like a lot to think about every time you say a word! In time, though, you will come to reduce vowels more intuitively. Continue to keep in mind: just because we see an “о” on the page, for example, we will not necessarily pronounce a pure “о” sound!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Аа</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“uh”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. да (yes):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. фраза (phrase):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. страна (country):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Канада (Canada):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. карандаш (a pencil):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Оо</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“uh”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. кот (cat):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. город (city):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. золото (gold):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. кольцо (ring):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. плохо (bad, badly):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. хорошо (good, well):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Станция метро “Университет” (a subway station in Moscow)
2.5 Voiced and unvoiced consonants

Recall from yesterday’s lesson the pairs of unvoiced/voiced consonants below. The two consonants in a given pair are formed similarly — the only difference is that the vocal cords vibrate when we pronounce the first (voiced) consonant, but not when we pronounce the second (unvoiced) consonant. Press a finger against your neck, near your voicebox: you should feel a slight vibration when pronouncing a voiced consonant.

2.6 Devoicing of final consonants

Devoicing is most noticeable at the end of Russian words: if a final consonant (that is, a consonant that is the final letter in the word) is itself a voiced consonant, it will actually be pronounced as its devoiced counterpart.

* The letter у is considered inherently hard; since there is no “soft” version, a soft sign does not affect its pronunciation.
2.7 Devoicing and voicing in consonant clusters

In consonant clusters, an initial consonant will assimilate to (that is, become similar to) the consonant that follows. That is, if a voiced consonant is followed by an unvoiced consonant, then the former is also devoiced:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>В</th>
<th>Ф</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>з</td>
<td>с</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ж</td>
<td>ш</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>б</td>
<td>п</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>г</td>
<td>к</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>д</td>
<td>т</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

автор → “афтор” author
сказка → “скаска” fairy tale
ложка → “лока” spoon

Likewise, three unvoiced consonants become voiced when followed by these voiced consonants: б г д з.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>с</th>
<th>з</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>т</td>
<td>д</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>к</td>
<td>г</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

сдача → “здача” change

Try some more words — and don’t forget to keep both vowel reduction and consonant devoicing in mind! Again, the transcriptions provided are for convenience only — don’t rely on them entirely!

| город | goh-ruht |
| Петербург | Pih-tihr-burk |
| союз | sah-yus |
| дуб | dup |
| ряд | nyah |
| сад | saht |
| Чехов | Cheh-khuhf |
| народ | nah-roht |
| вид | vit |
| вода | voht-kuh |
| лёд | lyohnt |
| снег | snyehk |
| город | goh-ruht |
| Петербург | Pih-tihr-burk |
| союз | sah-yus |
| дуб | dup |
| ряд | nyah |
| сад | saht |
| Чехов | Cheh-khuhf |
| народ | nah-roht |
| вид | vit |
| вода | voht-kuh |
| лёд | lyohnt |
| снег | snyehk |

2.8 Soft consonants (palatalization)

It should be emphasized that beginners typically have trouble both hearing and pronouncing Russian soft consonants. At first, it can be hard to distinguish them from their “normal” hard counterparts.

A detailed look at softness

The word нет begins with н. The following soft vowel, е, tells us that the н is soft.

We might unpack this a bit as follows: нь + (й) + эт. That is, [soft н] + [й] + [the vowel э].

The role of й here can lead to misunderstandings, especially regarding the nature of softness. It’s as if the й is lurking in between the soft consonant (pronounced with our tongue in the и/й position) and the soft vowel е (which we could break down into й + э).

Depending on how emphatically "Нет!" is said, the й sound itself may be more or less noticeable. We may even hear an и — something like "Ни-ет!" In any case, note well: the н is soft!

So, regardless of how prominent this “й” may or may not be, we can say very clearly: a soft н is not simply [hard “н”] + [й], as might be suggested by the English transliteration: "nyet." If we simply pronounce a hard English “н,” then follow it with a “y” sound, we won’t pronounce the Russian word properly. We must fully palatalize (soften) the consonant itself.

To put it another way, soft н (or “нь”) is a distinct sound that can’t be produced by “combining” other sounds. Remember: tongue position is the key.
Listen carefully for the difference in the following pairs of hard and soft consonants, and remember that the key to pronouncing palatalized consonants properly is to keep the tongue in the ы/i position, moving it just enough to pronounce the given consonant without first allowing the tongue to "drop" down from its palatalized position. With practice, you’ll soon be able to both hear and pronounce soft consonants more clearly.

Remember: according to spelling conventions, a consonant is soft when followed by: и, е, ё, ю, я or ь. Also, continue to watch out for devoicing. For example, the final д in сад will actually be pronounced as т.

We’ll begin with those soft sounds that are arguably the most conspicuous. Spend plenty of time practicing them!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Н</th>
<th>Нь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ноутбук</td>
<td>laptop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>народ</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>новый</td>
<td>new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>он</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>студент</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>день</td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>жизнь</td>
<td>life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>нет</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>они</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Япония</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Д</th>
<th>Дь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>сад</td>
<td>garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>народ</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>анекдот</td>
<td>story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ладно</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>мода</td>
<td>fashion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>день</td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>будильник</td>
<td>alarm clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>люди</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>студент</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дело</td>
<td>matter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Т</th>
<th>Ть</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>нет</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>привет</td>
<td>hi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>анекдот</td>
<td>funny story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>золото</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>билет</td>
<td>ticket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>мать</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>писать</td>
<td>to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>смерть</td>
<td>death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>эти</td>
<td>these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тема</td>
<td>topic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Л</th>
<th>Ль</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ладно</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>плохой</td>
<td>bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>осёл</td>
<td>donkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>журнал</td>
<td>magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>блог</td>
<td>blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>рубль</td>
<td>rouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>жаль!</td>
<td>what a pity!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>люди</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>неделя</td>
<td>week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>большой</td>
<td>big</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>С</th>
<th>Сь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>русский</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сон</td>
<td>dream/sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>стихи</td>
<td>poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>писать</td>
<td>to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Русь</td>
<td>Rus’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>осень</td>
<td>fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>лосось</td>
<td>salmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>месяц</td>
<td>month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Try these additional consonants as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>В</th>
<th>Вь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>лев</td>
<td>lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>вопрос</td>
<td>question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>давай</td>
<td>ok, let’s!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>любовь</td>
<td>love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>совет</td>
<td>advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>вид</td>
<td>view</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>П</th>
<th>Пь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>группа</td>
<td>group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>поле</td>
<td>field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>суп</td>
<td>soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>пить</td>
<td>to drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>пиво</td>
<td>beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>пять</td>
<td>five</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Д</th>
<th>Дь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>учебник</td>
<td>textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дуб</td>
<td>oak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>боль</td>
<td>pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>прорубь</td>
<td>hole cut in ice*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>билет</td>
<td>ticket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>семь</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>восемь</td>
<td>eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>медведь</td>
<td>bear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Р</th>
<th>Рь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>автор</td>
<td>author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>подарок</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>словарь</td>
<td>dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>царь</td>
<td>tsar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>газ</td>
<td>author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>золото</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>зать</td>
<td>son-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>зима</td>
<td>winter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>3ь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>матч</td>
<td>match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ночь</td>
<td>night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>борщ</td>
<td>borshch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>вещь</td>
<td>thing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: ж, ш, and ц are considered hard by definition, while ч and щ are considered soft. So, a soft sign following these letters cannot affect the pronunciation. It is written by convention, and often serves as a kind of visual marker for certain noun types and verb endings. We’ll get a better idea of what this means later. For now, note simply that there is no difference in the pronunciation of these final consonants, despite the difference in spelling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ч</th>
<th>Чь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>матч</td>
<td>match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ночь</td>
<td>night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>карандаш</td>
<td>pencil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>мышь</td>
<td>mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>читать</td>
<td>you read</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ж</th>
<th>Жь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>нож</td>
<td>knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ложь</td>
<td>falsehood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* for example, to go fishing (or swimming!) in winter.
day 3: more on pronunciation

special situations and exceptions to general rules of pronunciation; practice with pronouncing our chapter vocabulary

3.1 Russian “e” is never silent!

We’ve already noted that Russian, unlike English, has no silent vowels, and that a Russian word therefore has as many syllables as it has vowels. English speakers are especially prone to treating Russian e as a silent vowel, since English “e” is often silent, as in “toe” or “site.” But Russian “e” is always pronounced and always constitutes a full syllable — including at the end of words.

| поле | field  | море | sea  | занятие | activity  | сердце | heart* |

3.2 Adjectival endings

As we’ll soon learn, Russian adjectives change their endings depending on the grammatical gender of the noun they’re modifying (masculine, feminine, or neuter). For now, pay special attention to their pronunciation, as some endings feature multiple vowels. Remember: each vowel is a full syllable, and the “e” is never silent!

| новый | new (m) | старый | old (m) | хороший | good (m) | плохой | bad (m) |
| новая | new (f) | старая | old (f) | хорошая | good (f) | плохая | bad (f) |
| новое | new (n) | старое | old (n) | хорошее | good (n) | плохое | bad (n) |
| большой | big (m) | маленький | small (m) | скучный | boring (m) | лёгкий | easy (m) |
| большая | big (f) | маленькая | small (f) | скучная | boring (f) | лёгкая | easy (f) |
| большое | big (n) | маленькое | small (n) | скучное | boring (n) | лёгкое | easy (n) |

3.3 Russian “е” at the beginning of words

The soft vowels я, ю, е, ё begin with the sound й, especially at the beginning of words. In the case of “е” (and “ё”), this can take some getting used to. Take careful note of the difference between “е” and “э.”

| ещё | still  | еда | food  | ёж | hedgehog | экзамен | exam  |

* remember: after ц, е is pronounced as э: “сердц-э”
3.4 Russian has no silent letters — except for the exceptions!

Not only does Russian have no silent vowels; we can also say, generally, that it has no silent consonants either. In this sense, Russian spelling is much more straightforward than English; with Russian, “what you see is what you get,” as long as you allow for vowel reduction and consonant devoicing. Exceptions in which a letter is simply not pronounced at all are extremely rare in Russian. Here are a few common examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Здравствуйте</th>
<th>hello</th>
<th>Чувство</th>
<th>feeling</th>
<th>Солнце</th>
<th>sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“здравствуйте”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“чувство”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“солнце”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Счастливый</th>
<th>happy</th>
<th>Поздно</th>
<th>late</th>
<th>Пожалуйста</th>
<th>please</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“счастливый”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“поздно”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“пожалуйста”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Sometimes certain consonants are pronounced like others

You may have noticed that the word above for “happy” — счастливый — sounded more like щасливый. This is because the consonant cluster чч is typically pronounced like щ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Счастье</th>
<th>joy</th>
<th>Счастливый</th>
<th>happy</th>
<th>Счёт</th>
<th>bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“счастье”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“счастливый”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“счёт”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these two extremely common words, the ч sounds like ш.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Что</th>
<th>what?</th>
<th>Конечно</th>
<th>of course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“что”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“конечно”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“ч” sounds like “х” in front of “к” (as in the two adjectives below), and, often, when final in the word Бог (God).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Лёгкий</th>
<th>light, easy</th>
<th>Мягкий</th>
<th>soft</th>
<th>Бог</th>
<th>God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“лёгкий”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“мягкий”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“Бог”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Syllabic consonants

In general, Russian must have a vowel in order to have a syllable (for example: со-ба-ка = three syllables). Some Slavic languages (Czech and Serbian, for example) feature certain syllabic consonants that can themselves constitute a syllable when pronounced: to produce this syllable, an almost unnoticeable vowel sound (“у”) is inserted in front of the syllabic consonant.*

Strictly speaking (e.g. for purposes of counting syllables in poetry), Russian does not have such syllabic consonants, but in everyday pronunciation some letters may sound much like full syllables at the end of words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Театр</th>
<th>theater</th>
<th>Рубль</th>
<th>rouble</th>
<th>Жизнь</th>
<th>life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“театр”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“рубл”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“жизнь”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Семестр</th>
<th>semester</th>
<th>Кремль</th>
<th>Kremlin</th>
<th>Kommunism</th>
<th>communism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“семестр”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“Кремль”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“коммунизм”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 Difficult consonant clusters

Aside from the examples we’ve just seen, we must resist the urge to insert even the slightest vowel sound in order to break up consonant clusters that may strike us as difficult (if not impossible!) to pronounce otherwise. Fortunately, it must be said that those clusters found in Russian are not too hard, if we just practice a bit.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Птица</th>
<th>bird</th>
<th>Мгла</th>
<th>fog, mist</th>
<th>Тьма</th>
<th>darkness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“птица”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“мгла”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(“тьма”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note four such examples in the famously “vowel-less” Czech phrase, “Strč prst skrz krk!” (Stick your finger through your throat).

** If you think these are hard, compare them, for example, to Georgian clusters, as in: ოქროქ (gvprtskvin): “you peel us” (!)
3.8 Soft consonants plus soft vowels

Let’s look at one last (and relatively infrequent) combination that causes lingering confusion for many students: words in which a soft consonant (marked with the soft sign ь) is directly followed by a soft vowel. This is pronounced just as written — with what one might call “double softness.” So, first pronounce the soft consonant, then, as a separate sound, pronounce the soft vowel, beginning with the й sound. For beginners, it may help to pause, ever so slightly, after the soft consonant in order to “start over” with a full soft vowel.

It’s very important to note that the soft sign here is not merely ornamental or superfluous — this spelling is necessary to capture the actual pronunciation of the word. These words would indeed be pronounced differently if it weren’t there, as shown below. At the same time, it can be very difficult for beginners to hear this distinction!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Название</th>
<th>Определение</th>
<th>Пример</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>счастье</td>
<td>joy</td>
<td>= “щасьт + е” (not simply “щасте”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>платёж</td>
<td>dress</td>
<td>= “плать + е” (not simply “плат”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>семья</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>= “семь + я” (not simply “семя”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>статья</td>
<td>article</td>
<td>= “стать + я” (not simply “стата”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>скамья</td>
<td>bench</td>
<td>= “скамь + я” (not simply “скамя”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.9 Practice pronouncing this chapter’s vocabulary

For more practice, let’s look at this chapter’s vocabulary, beginning with nouns. As we do so, we’ll preview the concept of grammatical gender. Generally, we can determine a noun’s gender by looking at its ending.

Let’s begin with feminine nouns. Hard feminine nouns end in -а, while soft feminine nouns end in -я.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Название</th>
<th>Определение</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>книга</td>
<td>book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>комната</td>
<td>room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>одежда</td>
<td>clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>работа</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>картина</td>
<td>picture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next come neuter nouns. Hard neuter nouns end in -о, while soft neuter nouns end in -е (sometimes -ё).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Название</th>
<th>Определение</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>дело</td>
<td>matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>окно</td>
<td>window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>место</td>
<td>place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>платье</td>
<td>dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>полотенце</td>
<td>towel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, we have masculine nouns, which, strictly speaking, have no ending. Or, we might say that they end in a consonant: hard masculines end in a hard consonant, while soft masculines end in a soft consonant (with ь). Some soft masculines end in й (which, remember, is a consonant).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Название</th>
<th>Определение</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>стол</td>
<td>table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>стул</td>
<td>chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>велосипед</td>
<td>bicycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>телефон</td>
<td>phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>компьютер</td>
<td>computer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The term задача refers to an assignment or task — for example, a math or physics problem.  
** A special group of neuters end in -мя.
Now, let’s practice some of this chapter’s adjectives, in all three grammatical genders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>masculine</th>
<th>feminine</th>
<th>neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>новый</td>
<td>новая</td>
<td>новое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>старый</td>
<td>старая</td>
<td>старое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>чистый</td>
<td>чистая</td>
<td>чистое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>грязный</td>
<td>грязная</td>
<td>грязное</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дорогой</td>
<td>дорогая</td>
<td>дорогое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дешёвый</td>
<td>дешёвая</td>
<td>дешёвое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>трудный</td>
<td>трудная</td>
<td>трудное</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>лёгкий</td>
<td>лёгкая</td>
<td>лёгкое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new</td>
<td>clean</td>
<td>dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old</td>
<td>clean</td>
<td>dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clean</td>
<td>clean</td>
<td>dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dirty</td>
<td>dirty</td>
<td>dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dirty</td>
<td>dirty</td>
<td>dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expensive</td>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>русский</td>
<td>русская</td>
<td>русское</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>плохой</td>
<td>плохая</td>
<td>плохое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>хороший</td>
<td>хорошая</td>
<td>хорошее</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>большой</td>
<td>большая</td>
<td>большое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>маленький</td>
<td>маленькая</td>
<td>маленькое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>важный</td>
<td>важная</td>
<td>важное</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>любимый</td>
<td>любимая</td>
<td>любимое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ужасный</td>
<td>ужасная</td>
<td>ужасное</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>русский</td>
<td>русская</td>
<td>русское</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>плохой</td>
<td>плохая</td>
<td>плохое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>хороший</td>
<td>хорошая</td>
<td>хорошее</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>большой</td>
<td>большое</td>
<td>большое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>маленькое</td>
<td>маленькое</td>
<td>маленькое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>важное</td>
<td>важное</td>
<td>важное</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>любимое</td>
<td>любимое</td>
<td>любимое</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ужасное</td>
<td>ужасное</td>
<td>ужасное</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>бедный</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>много</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>важный</td>
<td>important</td>
<td>favorite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>любимый</td>
<td>favorite</td>
<td>favorite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ужасный</td>
<td>horrible</td>
<td>horrible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.10 The alphabet

Here is the full Russian alphabet, in alphabetical order. Pronouncing the letters themselves is easy enough — just add a vowel to the consonants (usually а, but note the а in ка, ха, ша, ща. Three letters — й and the hard and soft signs — are referred to by name (the Russian for “short н,” “hard sign,” and “soft sign,” respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Аа</th>
<th>Бб</th>
<th>Вв</th>
<th>Гг</th>
<th>Дд</th>
<th>Ее</th>
<th>Ёё</th>
<th>Жж</th>
<th>Зз</th>
<th>Ии</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“а”</td>
<td>“бэ”</td>
<td>“вэ”</td>
<td>“гэ”</td>
<td>“дэ”</td>
<td>“е”</td>
<td>“ё”</td>
<td>“жэ”</td>
<td>“зэ”</td>
<td>“и”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“й”</td>
<td>“йй”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Кк</th>
<th>Лл</th>
<th>Мм</th>
<th>Нн</th>
<th>Оо</th>
<th>Пп</th>
<th>Рр</th>
<th>Сс</th>
<th>Тт</th>
<th>Уу</th>
<th>Фф</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“ка”</td>
<td>“эл”</td>
<td>“эм”</td>
<td>“эн”</td>
<td>“о”</td>
<td>“пэ”</td>
<td>“эр”</td>
<td>“эс”</td>
<td>“тэ”</td>
<td>“у”</td>
<td>“эф”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“ы”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“ы”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Хх</th>
<th>Цц</th>
<th>Чч</th>
<th>Шш</th>
<th>Щщ</th>
<th>Ъъ</th>
<th>Ьь</th>
<th>Ээ</th>
<th>Юю</th>
<th>Яя</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“ха”</td>
<td>“це”</td>
<td>“че”</td>
<td>“ша”</td>
<td>“ща”</td>
<td>“твёрдый знак”</td>
<td>“ы”</td>
<td>“мягкий знак”</td>
<td>“э”</td>
<td>“ю”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“твёрдый знак”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pronouncing acronyms

Here are a few important acronyms, many of them from Soviet history. Most are pronounced letter-by-letter, but a few are pronounced almost as if they were ordinary words.

СССР “эс-эс-эс-эр” The USSR, Союз Советских Социалистических Республик
КПСС “ка-эс-эс-эр” Коммунистическая партия Советского Союза
ЧК “чэ-ка” The “Cheka,” Чрезвычайная комиссия
НКВД “эн-ка-эс-эд” The NKVD, Народный комиссариат внутренних дел
КГБ “ка-эс-бэ” The KGB, or Комитет государственной безопасности
ФСБ “фэ-эс-бэ” The FSB, Федеральная служба безопасности
ГУЛАГ “гу-лэг” The GULAG, Главное управление лагерей
США “эс-эш-э” The USA, Соединённые Штаты Америки
НАТО “нэ-то” NATO (the Russian acronym is adopted from the English)
ООН “о-он” The UN, Организация Объединённых Наций
МИД “мид” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Министерство иностранных дел
ГАИ “га-й” State Auto Inspectorate, Государственная автоинспекция
ВДНХ “вэ-дэ-эн-хэ” The VDNKh, a Soviet-era exhibition park in Moscow

* “фэ” is also heard  ** Typically sounds more like сэ-ша when said quickly.
day 4: handwriting

the Russian cursive alphabet; general handwriting principles; forming “tails,” “hooks” and “humps”; examples to practice

4.1 Russian cursive script

Cursive is more commonly used in Russia than in the United States these days, so it's very important to learn how to write and read this script. The best way to learn is simply to dive in and practice writing out words — then check your work to be sure you’re minding the few tricky details mentioned below (connections, hooks, etc.).

Of course, you’ll encounter variations on the models shown on the next page — and, in time, you’ll also develop your own inimitable style! The “rules” emphasized here are those that, if violated, can seriously affect legibility.

Although stress will be marked in this textbook, don’t include stress marks in your written work, unless specifically asked to as part of an exercise. Ordinarily, Russians would never include stress marks in their writing!*

4.2 Write each word continuously

The basic principle of cursive is to write each word in one continuous stroke, to whatever extent possible. Most (but not all!) letters will be connected. So, write out the body of the word first, then lift your pen and go back to “dot your i’s and cross your t’s.” In Russian, this final step may involve the following:

1) Adding the “hat” to the letter й
2) Adding the cross-stroke to the letter x — which initially looks much like a Russian r
3) Optionally, you can add an understroke beneath the letter ш and an overstroke above т.

The optional additional strokes mentioned in item 3 can help to further distinguish these letters visually. Not all Russians will add them; ultimately, it’s a matter of preference. But they are strongly recommended for students — especially with ш, if only to help differentiate it from щ.

4.3 Notes on connecting letters

* stress would usually be marked (if at all) with an accent mark, as in “á.” This textbook opts for a less conspicuous “underlining” technique.
If a letter requires more than two strokes to write (this is true of many capital letters, and may be true of lower-case к, depending on how you write it), then of course you’ll have to pick up your pen. Otherwise, strive to connect any letters that flow together naturally. Possible points of connection are indicated by the dotted lines in the chart below. Note which letters can attach to preceding or following letters — and, if so, where.

If there is no dotted line, this means that the given letter can’t connect at all. For example, э never connects to adjacent letters. Nor do many upper case letters, like Б, В, Г, Д, З, О, Р, У, Э, and Ю. Some letters never connect to subsequent letters. These include — importantly! — б and the soft signь.

Certain combinations of letters simply can’t connect “naturally.” For example, if one letter ends up high (near the mid-line), and the following letter can only begin down low, from the baseline, then simply pick up your pen before beginning the next letter. This often happens with lower-case о. Imagine: if we tried to connect it to a following letter that begins at the baseline, the о would begin to resemble an а, affecting legibility.

In this example, there should be no connection between the б and о, о and л, and ь and ш. Note how the ь comes to resemble an ы if we try to connect it to the following letter!
4.4 Forming the letter ж

This letter may take practice! Write it in three strokes (but without lifting your pen!); notice how the first and third strokes are “mirror images” of each other, separated by a single straight line.

4.5 Minding the midline; forming “tails”; the Russian п

Note how many lower-case letters remain entirely confined to the bottom half of the frame — baseline to midline. In some cases this differentiates them from their English counterparts (note the Russian к in particular). Also, the soft sign б MUST remain below the midline; otherwise, it may come to resemble lower-case в.

Note how the lower-case Russian п extends far below the baseline, and remains open at the bottom — unlike English p.

Finally, note that the “tails” on the letters ц and ш should be very short and compact; compare them to the letter y in particular.

4.6 “Hooks” when joining л, м, or я to a preceding letter

This is one of the most important details to remember when writing Russian: the letters л, м, and я begin with a tiny hook, even when they are the first letter in a word. When they are joined to a preceding letter, the hook must be preserved. This hook is crucial for distinguishing these letters from other letters; since it can severely affect legibility, it is not optional!

Namely, if the hook is not apparent, then you’ll find that your л will often resemble а г, your м will resemble а и or ч, and, finally, your я may even resemble а е, especially if written quickly.

Practice the examples in the upper box.

Meanwhile, as illustrated in the lower box, resist the urge to add an extra stroke to the hook of an initial л, м or я (or one not connected to a preceding letter).

4.7 “Humps” when joining н, п, т, ж, and к (but not и, й, etc.)

Note how the lower-case letters н, п, т, ж and к attach to preceding letters via a kind of curved “hump,” not via a sharp point as we see in such letters as и, й, ш, and щ.

Note how this results in a total of two “humps” for the completed letter н (which looks just like the English cursive н) and three humps for the completed letter т (which looks just like the English cursive м).

Students often confuse the cursive м and т.

Take a special look at Russian н, which is written in a single stroke, beginning with the “hump.” The example to the right shows a couple of ways in which students sometimes write н. In these cases the result is not illegible, but can still look odd. So remember to include a curving “hump,” just as for п or т.
4.4 Some examples to practice

As you practice, be sure to refer to the chart to check that your connections are made correctly, and that you haven't missed any “hooks!” Also check your letters’ position relative to the guidelines — e.g., check that your к doesn’t extend above the midline, and that the tiny “tails” on your ъ and ў don’t extend very far below the baseline (not nearly as far as the tail on у).

When printed in italics using traditional “serif” typefaces, many letters closely resemble the cursive forms we’re practicing now (note in particular т). For comparison’s sake, each word below is also given in serif italics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>город</th>
<th>город</th>
<th>ложь</th>
<th>ложь</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>фраза</td>
<td>фраза</td>
<td>поэзия</td>
<td>поэзия</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>книга</td>
<td>книга</td>
<td>союз</td>
<td>союз</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>стихи</td>
<td>стихи</td>
<td>язык</td>
<td>язык</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>неделя</td>
<td>неделя</td>
<td>борщ</td>
<td>борщ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сказка</td>
<td>сказка</td>
<td>кошка</td>
<td>кошка</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>большой</td>
<td>большой</td>
<td>студент</td>
<td>студент</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>журнал</td>
<td>журнал</td>
<td>читать</td>
<td>читать</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>конец</td>
<td>конец</td>
<td>сдача</td>
<td>сдача</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ёжик</td>
<td>ёжик</td>
<td>плохая</td>
<td>плохая</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Чехов</td>
<td>Чехов</td>
<td>Толстой</td>
<td>Толстой</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Франция</td>
<td>Франция</td>
<td>Петербург</td>
<td>Петербург</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Германия</td>
<td>Германия</td>
<td>Москва</td>
<td>Москва</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Россия</td>
<td>Россия</td>
<td>Япония</td>
<td>Япония</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Америка</td>
<td>Америка</td>
<td>Пушкин</td>
<td>Пушкин</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
day 5: learning names and getting acquainted

Russian names; introductions; more handwriting practice; overview of classroom Russian; introduction to word endings

5.1 Russian names

Full Russian names consist of a given name, имя (note: this word is neuter!), a patronymic, отчество (a name formed from the name of the person’s отец, father), and a last name, фамилия. For example:

Александр Сергеевич Пушкин  his father’s имя was Сергей
Anna Andreevna Akhmatova  her father’s имя was Андрей

Formally, we would address these poets using имя + отчество. But even if we were their close friends, we’d be unlikely to ever call them by their имя. We’d likely use a short form of that name that expresses familiarity.

* You may notice that some of these cursive letters differ ever-so-slightly from the models we gave yesterday.
We’ll learn more examples of these short “friendly” names in a later lesson (Book 2). It must be said that Russians today are somewhat more likely to refer to each other using the full first name only in semi-formal situations, such as business circles, as old formalities give way to more casual practices.

Александр Сергеевич! (formal) → Александр!
Саша! Саша!

Анна Андреевна! (formal) → Анна!

However, one should always be prepared to be polite by addressing Russians (especially superiors at work, professors, etc.) using both first name and patronymic!

A brief history of titles in Russia

What titles do Russians use to address each other formally? It’s not quite as simple as “Mr.” and “Ms.”!

In Imperial days, there were a large number of honorific titles, based on the addressee’s rank (чин) according to the infamous “Table of Ranks” (Таблица о ранах) introduced by Peter the Great. For example, if you were in the 3rd or 4th grades of the bureaucracy, you had the privilege of being addressed as “Ваше превосходительство” (Your Excellency), but if you made your way to the 1st or 2nd grades, you became “Ваше высокопревосходительство” (Your High Excellency). You’ll encounter many such tongue-twisting honorifics when you begin reading 19th-century literature (they are sometimes contracted to “Вашество!”).

In Soviet times, “comrade” (товарищ) could be used with men and women; as a form of address, it is used today (if at all) with irony. Today, the Russian equivalents of “Mr.” (господин) and “Ms.” (госпожа) can be used in formal contexts, often to refer to someone in the third person (“Господин Медведев сказал…” (Mr. Medvedev said…), “Госпожа Меркель сказала…” (Ms. Merkel said…).

“Ladies and gentlemen” is “Дамы и господа.”

What about strangers? It’s common to address men (waiters, for example) as “молодой человек” (“young man”) and women (waitresses, for example) as “девушка” (girl, young lady). This may strike us as insulting, but it is perfectly normal in Russian! Generally, though, to get a stranger’s attention, simply begin with “Извините.” There’s no precise Russian equivalent of “Ma’am” or “Sir.” Colloquially, you may hear unfamiliar (older) men and women referred to as “uncle” (дядя) or “aunt” (тётя), but never as a form of address!

5.2 Introductions

Let’s get to know our classmates with a short dialogue. We won’t understand much of the grammar yet, but we will soon. For example, in Russian, мне зовут literally means “They call me…”

Unfortunately, the Russian for “hello” (здравствуйте) is one of the hardest words to pronounce! As we’ve seen, the first в is not pronounced. This word literally means “Be healthy!”

Tonight, as part of your homework, you’ll learn how to spell your name in Russian. If your name has a standard Russian equivalent, such as Николай (Коля) for Nicholas (Nick), then you might choose to go with that!

Саша! Саша!

Hello! Let’s get acquainted!
“They call me…”
“How do they call you?”

Моя фамилия _______________. My last name is _______________.

А как ваши фамилии?
А как ваша фамилия?

Моя фамилия _______________. And yours?
Моя фамилия _______________. My last name is _______________.

* Of course, Pushkin wrote this long before the term товарищ had any Communist connotations!
5.3  More handwriting practice

Let’s practice our cursive a bit more, while getting acquainted with just a few of the many outstanding Russian writers who await us! Have you heard of them? We will be reading many of them later in this series of books!

Александр Сергеевич Пушкин

1799-1837. Generally considered Russia’s greatest poet, and the founder of modern Russian literature.

Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов

1814-1841. Another major poet of the “Golden Age” (Золотой век). Author of the novel A Hero of Our Time.

Николай Васильевич Гоголь

1809-1852. Author of such well-known Petersburg Tales as “The Nose” (Нос) and “The Overcoat” (Шинель).

Лев Николаевич Толстой

1828-1910. The author of the novels War and Peace (Война и мир) and Anna Karenina (Анна КARENINA).

Фёдор Михайлович Достоевский

1821-1881. Wrote The Idiot (Идиот), Demons (Бесы), and The Brothers Karamazov (Братья Карамазовы).

Антон Павлович Чехов

1860-1904. A renowned playwright and author of short stories. Plays include Uncle Vanya (Дядя Ваня).

Анна Андреевна Ахматова

1889-1966. A poet of the Silver Age (Серебряный век). Author of “Requiem” (Реквием).*

Михаил Афанасьевич Булгаков


Here’s a quick list of some odd sounds you may hear Russians make under various circumstances — for future reference!

ой! surprise, concern, accidents

тьфу! spitting (three times: тьфу-тьфу-тьфу, to avoid being jinxed)

fu! in response to a foul odor

ага! uh-huh! (confirmation); a-ha! (I get it!)

опа! wow, look at what I just did! tah-dah!

ну well...

ах! (эх!) ah! surprise, fright, “sigh”

ну-ка come on, you can do this!

тац! bang! wham! whack!

* this is a cycle of poems dealing with the imprisonment of Akhmatova’s son under Stalin; we will read it in its entirety in Book 2!
5.4 An overview of classroom Russian

Let’s get some more pronunciation and reading practice while learning a few useful phrases we’re likely to use on a daily basis in class. We’ll be positioned to understand much of this grammar soon; for now, just practice reading and repeating these phrases. You’ll get used to them in time as you hear them over and over in class!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>по-русски</td>
<td>in Russian (“in the Russian way”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>по-английски</td>
<td>in English (“in the English way”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

У вас есть вопросы? Есть вопросы?
Do you have questions? Are there questions?
У меня есть вопрос.
I have a question.
Нет, вопросов нет.
No, there are no questions.
Какая страница?
What page (are we on)?
Понято. Всё понятно.
Understood, I get it. Everything is understood.

Как это будет по-русски / по-английски?
How do you say that in Russian / English?
Как будет по-русски ________?
How do you say ________ in Russian?
Как будет по-английски ________?
How do you say ________ in English?

Как это пишется?
How is this spelled (“written”)?
Как пишется слово ________?
How is the word ________ written?
Это пишется через “_____”.
This is written with an _____ (insert name of letter!).

Где ударение?
Where’s the stress?
Ударение здесь. Ударение на этом слоге.
The stress is here. The stress is on this syllable.

Читайте, пожалуйста. (say: “пожалста”)
Read, please.
Повторите, пожалуйста.
Repeat, please.
Переведите на русский, пожалуйста.
Translate into Russian, please.
Переведите на английский, пожалуйста
Translate into English, please.

Сдайте, пожалуйста, свою домашнюю работу.
Hand in your homework, please.
Молодец! / Молодцы!
Great, way to go! (said to one / to several people)
Это всё на сегодня. До завтра!
That’s all for today. Until tomorrow!

Here are some more useful terms for discussing classes and languages — for reference and passive knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>домашняя* работа</td>
<td>homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>домашнее задание</td>
<td>homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>контрольная</td>
<td>quiz, test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>экзамен</td>
<td>exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>урок / на уроке</td>
<td>class / in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>учёбник</td>
<td>textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>страница</td>
<td>page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ударение</td>
<td>stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>окончание</td>
<td>(word) ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>произношение</td>
<td>pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>предложение</td>
<td>sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>фраза</td>
<td>phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>конструкция</td>
<td>construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>выражение</td>
<td>expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>упражнение</td>
<td>exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>интонация</td>
<td>intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>грамматика</td>
<td>grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>падеж</td>
<td>case (of nouns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>глагол</td>
<td>verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>предлог</td>
<td>preposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>существительное</td>
<td>noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>прилагательное</td>
<td>adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>слово</td>
<td>word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>слог</td>
<td>syllable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nouns versus adjectives: an introduction to word endings in Russian

Ever notice how easily English turns nouns into adjectives, often without any changes to the word at all (as in, a soccer ball)? In Russian, one of several adjectival suffixes would have to be added to a noun to produce a true adjective — which, of course, must have adjectival endings. Here are just a few examples formed using a very common adjectival suffix, -ный:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>футбол</td>
<td>soccer, football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>баскетбол</td>
<td>basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>хоккей</td>
<td>hockey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>футбольный</td>
<td>“soccer-related”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>баскетбольный</td>
<td>“basketball-related”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>хоккейный</td>
<td>“hockey-related”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>футбольное поле</td>
<td>soccer field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>баскетбольный мяч</td>
<td>basketball ball (!)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>хоккейный матч</td>
<td>hockey game (match)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are two other examples, with other adjectival suffixes: -ский and -ческий.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>студент</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>совет</td>
<td>council, a soviet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>студенческий</td>
<td>“student-related”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>советский</td>
<td>“soviet-related”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>студенческий билет</td>
<td>a student ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Советский Союз</td>
<td>the Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short, parts of speech are not interchangeable in Russian, because nouns, adjectives, and verbs each have their own special set of endings, and those endings will also change. These changing endings will help convey the role each word plays in a given sentence.

* This isn’t a typo — it’s a feminine soft adjectival ending! We will not formally introduce soft adjectives until Book 2 (Day 6).
** A student once told of the baffled responses he received when he went around asking Russians for a "баскетбол."