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Second Edition

James S. Levine, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Russian
and Director of Russian Studies
George Mason University*

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Preface to the Second Edition

The second edition of *Schaum's Outline of Russian Grammar* contains a number of amendments and improvements. The section on vowel reduction in Chapter 1 has been revised, and the information on the pronunciation of unstressed vowels now conforms more precisely to current norms. The section on money and prices in Chapter 6 has been amended and updated to reflect the current value of Russian currency. New illustrative examples have been added, and stylistic improvements made, throughout the book. The most significant improvement in the second edition, however, is a new comprehensive Index of Russian Words and Affixes, which will now provide the user with easier access to information about almost any Russian word, or grammatical form, mentioned in the book.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to several people who helped me with this new edition. Two colleagues, Marianna Ryshina-Pankova (Georgetown University) and Tatiana M. Vasilyeva (George Mason University), both graciously agreed to read the book, and each of them offered many valuable suggestions for improvement.

My thanks also go to my friend Victor Zabolotnyi, who, over the years, has answered my many questions about subtleties, style, and changes in Russian language usage. I am also grateful to my friend and former professor William S. Hamilton (Wake Forest University) for sharing his observations and insightful comments on my revisions in Chapter 1. My gratitude goes as well to the *Schaum's Outlines* editorial staff at McGraw-Hill Professional, who invited me to prepare this new edition. In particular, I am grateful to Anya Kozorev (Sponsoring Editor), Tama L. Harris (Production Supervisor), and Kimberly-Ann Eaton (Associate Editor). I am likewise indebted to Daniel Franklin and Terry Yokota of Village Bookworks, who transformed the manuscript into the finished book and whose meticulous copyediting and perceptive queries helped me to clarify several points. Naturally, any errors or infelicities that remain in the second edition are my responsibility alone.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my students at George Mason University. Their enthusiastic response to the first edition leaves me with the hope that future students will also benefit from this new and improved edition of *Schaum's Outline of Russian Grammar*.

JAMES S. LEVINE

Preface to the First Edition

Schaum's Outline of Russian Grammar is intended as a study aid to assist English speakers in their acquisition of contemporary Russian. It is designed for students from the beginning to advanced levels: beginning students can use this book as a companion to any basic Russian language textbook, while intermediate-advanced students will find the book useful as a review text and reference for grammar. For individuals learning the language outside of an academic setting, the numerous practice exercises and answer key make it possible to use the Outline as a text for independent study.

The book consists of eight chapters: The Sounds of Russian; Nouns; Prepositions; Pronouns; Adjectives and Adverbs; Numbers, Dates, and Time; Verbs; and Conjunctions.

The first chapter, “The Sounds of Russian,” introduces the Cyrillic alphabet and presents a guide to the pronunciation of Russian consonants and vowels. This chapter also presents aspects of the Russian writing system, e.g., spelling rules, peculiarities of capitalization, transliteration from English to Russian, as well as a brief section on different Russian letter styles.

Chapters 2–8 present all the essentials for a solid foundation in Russian grammar. Grammatical terms, including the basic parts of speech and associated grammatical concepts (e.g., gender, number, and case in the noun; tense, aspect, mood, and voice in the verb), are clearly explained and illustrated with numerous examples. Comparisons between English and Russian — their similarities and differences with respect to particular grammatical features — are made throughout the book. In the author’s view, such comparisons will provide native speakers of English with greater insight into the structure of their own language, which in turn will enhance their understanding and ultimate mastery of the grammatical structure of Russian.

One of the most challenging tasks for English speakers is mastering the variable forms of Russian words, for example, the declensional endings of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and numbers, as well as the changes undergone by verbs in conjugation. In *Schaum's Outline of Russian Grammar* the task of learning grammatical endings is made easier by highlighting them in declension tables throughout the text. The presentation of verb conjugation addresses the dual audience of Russian learners: those who have learned verbs the traditional way, and others who have been exposed to the “single-stem system.” Verbs are classified according to their suffixed or nonsuffixed “basic (single) stem,” an approach which has become increasingly common in American textbooks at the first- and second-year levels. In addition, a representative example of each verb class is fully conjugated in a special box, and is then followed by a description of its stress and consonant alternation properties. All students will benefit from the thorough coverage of verbal aspect, and of the other major topics in the Russian verb, e.g., the conditional and subjunctive, verbs in **-ся**, verbs of motion, participles, and verbal adverbs.

The development of grammatical accuracy requires a good deal of practice in manipulating the structures of the language. In this book numerous drills and exercises follow the explanations of each grammatical point and provide practice and reinforcement of the covered material. Together with the answer key, the practice exercises enable students to gauge their own understanding and progress. Finally, the comprehensive index provides quick and easy access to information.

JAMES S. LEVINE

Acknowledgments to the First Edition

I am indebted to the many Russian language specialists whose work I consulted, and benefited from, in writing various portions of this book. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my debt to the following: G. G. Timofeeva's *Новые английские заимствования в русском языке* in the discussion of English-to-Russian transliteration (Chapter 1); Johanna Nichols' *Predicate Nominals: A Partial Surface Syntax of Russian* in the description of predicate nominatives and predicate instrumentals after forms of **быть** (Chapter 2) and in the description of the two types of **это** sentences (Chapter 4); Derek Offord's *Using Russian: A Guide to Contemporary Usage* in the presentation of prepositions (Chapter 3); Geneva Gerhart's *The Russian's World* in the presentation of numbers and fractions (Chapter 6); Alexander Nakhimovsky's *Overview of Russian Conjugation* in the description of the single-stem verb system (Chapter 7); and O. P. Rassudova's *Aspectual Usage in Modern Russian* in the discussion of the meaning and uses of the aspects (Chapter 7). A valuable source of information on topics throughout the book was Terrence Wade's *A Comprehensive Russian Grammar*. Complete references for these works, and for other sources consulted, are given in the Bibliography.

I would like to thank the following friends, colleagues, and students who helped in various ways in the preparation of this book. Particular thanks must go to William S. Hamilton (Wake Forest University), whose teaching first inspired me to learn Russian, and who has been a mentor and friend throughout my career. His advice and comments on an earlier draft of this book resulted in several improvements. I am also grateful to Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. (Middlebury College), who reviewed the manuscript and wrote a detailed report with many helpful recommendations. To Marybeth Spain go my sincere thanks for her help in the preparation of Chapter 8; certain formulations on the use of conjunctions originated with her, as did many of this chapter's illustrative examples. The book has fewer errors thanks to careful proof-reading by Mikhail Feldman, who read an early draft, and by Tatiana Vasilyeva, who read the page proofs for Chapter 3. I am also deeply grateful to Viktor Zabolotnyi, with whom I frequently consulted on questions of style and usage. He gave most generously of his time, sharing his native intuitions and judgments on my examples, often suggesting adjustments or replacing my examples with his own.

I would like to express my appreciation to the editorial staff of Schaum Publications of McGraw-Hill: Barbara Gilson (Editorial Director), who initiated the process of having a Russian volume added to the foreign-language grammars in the Schaum's Outline Series; Mary Loebig Giles (Associate Editor), who handled correspondence and coordinated the initial review of the manuscript; Maureen Walker (Editing Supervisor); and Meaghan McGovern (Editorial Assistant), who coordinated the final review of the manuscript, and was always helpful in responding to my questions and concerns. I am also grateful to the staff at Keyword Publishing Services Ltd, London: Alan Hunt, who expertly managed the copy-editing and typesetting of the manuscript, and Olga Abbott, who read the final proofs and helped eliminate a number of errors that I had missed. This book is certainly a better one for the efforts of all those mentioned, but any inaccuracies and mistakes that remain are mine alone.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my wife, Jody, and my daughters, Sasha and Erica, for generously tolerating my frequent absences and my near monopoly of the computer over the past year and a half. Their love and enthusiasm make everything possible. This book is dedicated to them.

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CHAPTER 1

The Sounds of Russian

The Russian (Cyrillic) Alphabet

The Russian alphabet is also known as the Cyrillic alphabet, named in honor of St. Cyril, the Greek monk and scholar who is credited with devising an early version of it. The Russian alphabet contains 33 letters, most of which represent sounds similar to those of English.

Alphabet

CYRILLIC LETTER	NAME OF LETTER	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT (APPROXIMATE)	CYRILLIC LETTER	NAME OF LETTER	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT (APPROXIMATE)
А а	a	<i>a</i> as in <i>father</i>	Р р	er	<i>r</i> as in <i>better</i>
Б б	be	<i>b</i> as in <i>bet</i>	С с	es	<i>s</i> as in <i>sun</i>
В в	ve	<i>v</i> as in <i>very</i>	Т т	te	<i>t</i> as in <i>Tanya</i>
Г г	ge	<i>g</i> as in <i>get</i>	У у	u	<i>u</i> as in <i>flu</i>
Д д	de	<i>d</i> as in <i>dog</i>	Ф ф	ef	<i>f</i> as in <i>fun</i>
Е е	ye	<i>ye</i> as in <i>yes</i>	Х х	kha	<i>ch</i> as in <i>Bach</i>
Ё ё	yo	<i>yo</i> as in <i>York</i>	Ц ц	tse	<i>ts</i> as in <i>cats</i>
Ж ж	zhe	<i>z</i> as in <i>azure</i>	Ч ч	che	<i>ch</i> as in <i>cheese</i>
З з	ze	<i>z</i> as in <i>zoo</i>	Ш ш	sha	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shoe</i>
И и	i	<i>i</i> as in <i>visa</i>	Щ щ	shcha	<i>shsh</i> as in <i>fresh sheen</i>
Й й	i kratkoye (short i)	<i>y</i> as in <i>boy</i>	Ъ ъ	tyordiy znak (hard sign)	no sound value
К к	ka	<i>k</i> as in <i>skate</i>	Ы ы	yeri	<i>i</i> as in <i>vigor</i>
Л л	el	<i>l</i> as in <i>lot</i>	Ь ь	myagkiy znak (soft sign)	no sound value
М м	em	<i>m</i> as in <i>Mike</i>	Э э	e oborotnoye (reversed e)	<i>e</i> as in <i>echo</i>
Н н	en	<i>n</i> as in <i>net</i>	Ю ю	yu	<i>yu</i> as in <i>Yukon</i>
О о	o	<i>o</i> as in <i>ought</i>	Я я	ya	<i>ya</i> as in <i>yacht</i>
П п	pe	<i>p</i> as in <i>span</i>			

The alphabet chart above lists approximate English equivalents for the sound values of the Cyrillic letters as well as the *Russian names* of the letters in the Cyrillic alphabet. It is important to learn the pronunciation of the letter names, as well as the order in which they occur, for several reasons. First, in order to pronounce the many acronyms that occur in Russian, one must know the names of the Cyrillic letters, since many acronyms are pronounced as a succession of individual letters, e.g., **МБ** is pronounced “em-be” and stands for **Мировой банк** *World Bank*, **ЦБР** is pronounced “tse-be-er” for **Центральный банк России** *Central Bank of Russia*, and **РФ** is pronounced “er-ef” for **Российская Федерация** *Russian*

Federation. Second, knowing the names of the letters is important for those situations when it is necessary to spell words such as names and addresses, for example, when traveling in Russia or when speaking to Russians on the telephone. Finally, when looking up words in a dictionary, knowing the correct sequence of the letters will make the search for words easier and faster.

Shapes and Sounds

Several Cyrillic letters are immediately recognizable from their similarity to English letters, and some of these are also pronounced close to their English counterparts. However, rarely are there exact sound equivalents between languages, and so the comparisons between Russian and English sounds given in this pronunciation key should be viewed only as a guide to correct pronunciation in Russian. In order to acquire native-like pronunciation it is important not only to study the differences between English and Russian sounds, but also to *practice* the correct Russian pronunciation with CDs and DVDs, and, of course, to take every opportunity to listen to, and talk with, native speakers of Russian.

In illustrating the sounds of Russian consonants and vowels, we use a *phonetic transcription*, which is shown in square brackets []. The transcription used in this book employs the Latin letters of English and, when needed, a few diacritical marks, e.g., the sounds associated with the letter combinations *sh* and *ch* in English *shop* and *cheese* are represented as [š] and [č], respectively, with the “haček” symbol ˇ above the letter. Also, Russian stressed vowels (discussed below) are represented by an acute accent mark [´]. It should be noted that the English equivalents of the Russian vowels in the alphabet chart are for the pronunciation of these vowels when they are stressed. If they are not stressed, they may shift to less distinct values, as we shall see below.

Letters Similar to English Letters in Form and Pronunciation

LETTER	SOUND	RUSSIAN EXAMPLE	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
А а	[á]	áКТ	<i>act</i>	like <i>a</i> in English <i>father</i> , but with the mouth open a bit wider
О о	[ó]	кОТ	<i>cat</i>	like <i>o</i> in English <i>ought</i> , but with the lips more rounded and protruded
Е е	[é]	тÉма	<i>theme</i>	like <i>e</i> in English <i>tempo</i>
М м	[m]	мáма	<i>mom</i>	just like English <i>m</i>
К к	[k]	кОмик	<i>comic</i>	like English <i>k</i> , but without the puff of air following it; like English <i>skate</i>
Т т	[t]	тОм	<i>tome</i>	like English <i>t</i> , but a pure dental, with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth, not the teeth ridge as in English

Letters Similar to English Letters in Form, But Not in Pronunciation

Other Cyrillic letters correspond in shape to letters in English, but they correspond in pronunciation to *different* English letters. These are examples of *faux amis*, or “false friends,” in the alphabet.

LETTER	SOUND	RUSSIAN EXAMPLE	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
У у	[ú]	ýтка	<i>duck</i>	like <i>u</i> in English <i>flu</i> , but shorter and with the lips more rounded and protruded
В в	[v]	вóдка	<i>vodka</i>	just like English <i>v</i>
Н н	[n]	нét	<i>no</i>	like <i>n</i> in English, but a pure dental, with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth (like Russian Т)
Р р	[r]	кáрта	<i>map</i>	like <i>r</i> in English <i>better</i> or <i>ladder</i> , i.e., a flapped [r], produced by the tip of the tongue tapping against the teeth ridge
С с	[s]	но́с	<i>nose</i>	like the <i>s</i> and <i>c</i> in English <i>sauce</i> , but a pure dental, with the tongue touching the upper teeth; never like the <i>c</i> in English <i>cat</i> or <i>contact</i>

Letters Corresponding to Letters in Greek

In addition to the letters that are shaped like those in English, a few Cyrillic letters resemble letters in the Greek alphabet, on which they were modeled. The following letters were fashioned after the Greek letters *gamma*, *delta*, *lambda*, *pi*, *phi*, and *chi*, respectively (also, Greek *rho* served as a model for Cyrillic Р, listed in the previous group due to its misleading similarity to English *p*).

LETTER	SOUND	RUSSIAN EXAMPLE	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
Г г	[g]	га́з	<i>gas</i>	like <i>g</i> in English <i>get</i> ; never like the first or second <i>g</i> in <i>George</i>
Д д	[d]	до́м	<i>house</i>	like <i>d</i> in English, but a pure dental, with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth (like Russian т and н)
Л л	[l]	Ла́ра	<i>Lara</i>	like <i>l</i> in English <i>pill</i> , but with the tongue farther back in the mouth
П п	[p]	па́спорт	<i>passport</i>	like <i>p</i> in English <i>span</i> ; not like the “aspirated” <i>p</i> in English <i>pan</i>
Ф ф	[f]	кафе́	<i>café</i>	like <i>f</i> in English
Х х	[x]	ца́хар	<i>sugar</i>	like <i>ch</i> in German <i>Bach</i>

Remaining Letters

The remaining Cyrillic letters do not resemble letters in English or Greek. At least one letter, **ш** [ʃ], is modeled after the Hebrew letter *shin*. Three others look like the reverse of English letters: Cyrillic **я** [ya] has the shape of a backward English **R**. Cyrillic **и** [i] is the reverse of English **N**. And Cyrillic **э** [e] is shaped like a reverse, but more rounded, English **E**.

LETTER	SOUND	RUSSIAN EXAMPLE	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION
Б б	[b]	банáн	<i>banana</i>	like <i>b</i> in English, but not aspirated (like Russian п)
З з	[z]	ва́за	<i>vase</i>	like <i>z</i> in English, but with the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth (like Russian ц)
Ё ё	[yo]	ёлка	<i>fir tree</i>	like <i>yo</i> in English <i>York</i> and <i>yore</i>
Ж ж	[ʒ]	жу́рнал	<i>magazine</i>	like <i>z</i> in English <i>azure</i> , but with the tongue farther back and the lips rounded
И и	[i]	ди́ск	<i>disk</i>	like <i>i</i> in English <i>visa</i>
Й й	[y]	ма́й	<i>May</i>	a “glide,” like <i>y</i> in English <i>toy</i> , <i>boy</i>
Ц ц	[c]	ца́рь	<i>tsar</i>	similar to the <i>ts</i> in English <i>nuts</i> , but pronounced together as one sound
Ч ч	[čʰ]	ча́й	<i>tea</i>	like <i>ch</i> in English <i>cheese</i> but softer, with the tongue raised higher
Ш ш	[ʃ]	шо́к	<i>shock</i>	like <i>sh</i> in English, but with the tongue farther back in the mouth
Щ щ	[ʃʃʰ]	бо́рщ	<i>borsch</i>	similar to <i>shsh</i> in English <i>fresh sheen</i> , but softer, with the tongue higher and more forward in the mouth
Ы ы	[ɨ]	сы́н	<i>son</i>	no close English equivalent; similar to <i>i</i> in English <i>sin</i> , <i>vigor</i> , but with the tongue drawn farther back and the lips spread
Э э	[e]	э́ра	<i>era</i>	similar to <i>e</i> in English <i>echo</i> , but with the mouth open wider
Ю ю	[yu]	ю́мор	<i>humor</i>	similar to English <i>yu</i> in <i>Yukon</i> , and <i>u</i> in <i>use</i>
Я я	[ya]	Я́лта	<i>Yalta</i>	similar to English <i>ya</i> in <i>Yalta</i> or <i>yacht</i>

The Two “Signs”

Finally, Russian has two “signs” that, by themselves, have no sound value, but serve important functions, especially the “soft sign”:

- ь soft sign indicates that a preceding consonant is “soft” or “palatalized,” which in transcription is represented by an apostrophe after the consonant, e.g., **со́ль** *salt* [sóɫʰ] (see the section Paired Consonants: Hard and Soft below). Between a soft consonant (C) and a vowel (V) the letter **ь** indicates the sequence C + [y] + V, e.g., **Та́тьяна** is pronounced **Та** [tʰ + y + á] **на**.
- ъ hard sign occurs only after a prefix ending in a consonant before a root beginning with a vowel, e.g., **въ́езд** *entrance* **в** + **ъ** + **езд** where **в** is a prefix meaning “in” and **езд** is a root meaning “drive”; **ъ** also indicates the presence of [y] before a vowel, e.g., **въ́** [yɛ] **зд**.

To summarize, of the 33 letters in the Cyrillic alphabet, 10 are vowels, 20 are consonants, one is a “glide” (**й** [y]), and two are “signs,” the “soft sign” (**ь**) and the “hard sign” (**ъ**).

The Vowels

There are five vowel *sounds* represented by 10 vowel *letters*, two letters for each sound. The vowel letters can be divided into two series: the “hard series” and the “soft series.”

Hard Series	а [a]	э [e]	о [o]	у [u]	ы [ɨ]
Soft Series	я [ja]	е [je]	ё [jo]	ю [ju]	и [i]
	[ˈa]	[ˈe]	[ˈo]	[ˈu]	[ˈi]

The terms “hard” and “soft” do not refer to the vowels themselves, but to the consonants that precede them. A hard consonant is the basic articulation of the consonant, just as it is described above in this pronunciation key. A *soft*, or *palatalized*, consonant is identical except for one important modification—in pronouncing a soft consonant the tongue is simultaneously raised toward the palate, or roof of the mouth. Most Russian consonants have these two forms of pronunciation. When a consonant is capable of occurring either hard or soft, it will be hard before the letters **а э о у ы**, and soft before the letters **я е ё ю и**. The soft series vowels with a preceding soft consonant are indicated in transcription by [ˈa] [ˈe] [ˈo] [ˈu] [ˈi], the apostrophe indicating the soft pronunciation of the consonant. In addition, the soft series vowels **я е ё ю** (but not **и**) are pronounced with a preceding [y] (as [ja] [je] [jo] [ju]) in the following positions.

Word-Initial	Ялта [yá]	Éльцин [yé]	ёлка [yó]	юмор [yú]
After a Vowel	моя [yá]	поёл [yé]	моё [yó]	мою [yú]
After б and в	друзья [yá]	въезд [yé]	бельё [yó]	матерью [yú]

Stressed Vowels

Russian, like English, is characterized by a heavy *stress* within a word. A stressed vowel is one that is emphasized by pronouncing it with greater force, or louder, than unstressed vowels. The stressed vowels are also tense and a bit longer than unstressed vowels in the word. However, even when stressed, Russian vowels are shorter than the long vowels in English, which may begin as one sound and *glide* into another sound, producing a diphthong. In pronouncing Russian vowels it is important to avoid pronouncing them like English diphthongs. Compare, for example, the vowel sound [uw] in English *boots* with Russian [u] in **бу́тсы** *soccer boots*; the sound [oə] in English *cork* with [o] in Russian **ко́рка** *crust*; and the sound [iy] in English *mere, feel, and fear* with [i] in Russian **ми́р** *peace*, **фи́ле** *fillet*, and **фи́рма** *firm*. The Russian vowels in these examples, and in Russian words generally, are monophthongs, that is, they begin and end with the same sound.

Stress in Russian, as in English, is “free,” that is, it can fall on any vowel in the word: first (**до́ктор** *doctor*), second (**профе́ссор** *professor*), third (**рестора́н** *restaurant*), fourth (**амери́канец** *American*), etc. Russian stress is also “mobile,” i.e., the stress may shift from one syllable to another within the grammatical forms of the same word, for example, within the singular and plural forms of a noun: **а́дрес** *address* and **адреса́** *addresses*. Also, stress can determine the meaning and/or the part of speech of certain words that are spelled alike, e.g., **мука́** *flour* and **му́ка** *torture*, the adverb **до́ма** *at home* and the plural noun **дома́** *houses*. (The same phenomenon occurs in English: Only the stress differentiates the noun *pérmit* and the verb *pe_rmit*.) For these reasons, it is very important when learning new words to learn the stress of the word as well. Stressed vowels are not normally marked in a Russian text, but they are marked in dictionaries and textbooks of Russian. Note also that the vowel letter ё [jo]/[ˈo] always indicates a stressed vowel, so it is the only vowel whose stress is not indicated by the acute accent ´.

Unstressed Vowels

The stressed vowel in a word is emphasized at the expense of the other, unstressed vowels. Thus, in relation to the stressed vowel, unstressed vowels are usually shorter and lax, i.e., pronounced in a more

“relaxed” way. These changes are referred to as *vowel reduction*. Not all vowels in Russian are reduced. For example, the vowels **ю/у** and **и/ы** when unstressed remain essentially the same. Nor can the vowel **ѐ** ever be reduced, since this vowel is *always* stressed. Therefore, the only vowels that may have a reduced pronunciation are **а о э я е**. The first two vowels, **а** and **о**, are reduced to varying degrees, depending on their location in relation to the stressed syllable. The least amount of reduction occurs in the syllable immediately preceding the stressed syllable—called the “pretonic” syllable—and in word-initial position. In any other syllable before or after the stress, the vowels **а** and **о** undergo a further reduction. It is important to keep in mind that a preposition and its object are pronounced as if they were a *single* phonetic unit, i.e., as one word. As a result, unstressed vowels in prepositions are reduced according to their position in relation to the stressed vowel of the following word. Examples are given below.

Vowel Reduction Rules

1. Reduction of the Vowels **а** and **о**

- (a) **а** [a] and **о** [o] → [ʌ]
 (b) **а** [a] and **о** [o] → [ə]

- (a) In pretonic (i.e., the syllable immediately preceding the stressed syllable) and/or word-initial position both **а** and **о** are pronounced as a slightly shorter and more lax *a* sound. In phonetic transcription it is customary to represent this sound with the symbol [ʌ].

Pretonic

банáн [bʌnʌn] *banana*
 Москвá [mʌskvʌ] *Moscow*
 доскá [dʌskʌ] *blackboard*
 вопрóс [vʌprʊs] *question*
 над дóмом [nʌddóməm] *above the house*
 до зáвтра [dʌzʌftʌ] *until tomorrow*
 под нóсом [pʌdnósəm] *under the nose*

Word-Initial

онá [ʌnʌ] *she*
 окнó [ʌknó] *window*
 отвéт [ʌtv'et] *answer*
 оборóт [ʌbʌrót] *turn*
 ананáс [ʌnʌnʌs] *pineapple*
 об э́том [ʌbétəm] *about this*

- (b) In any position other than pretonic or word-initial, Russian **а** and **о** are pronounced even shorter and more lax, similar to the sound of the first and last vowel, respectively, of English *about* and *sofa*. This sound is represented with the symbol [ə].

мáма [mámə] <i>mom</i>	дóктор [dóktər] <i>doctor</i>
собáка [sʌbákə] <i>dog</i>	хорóшó [xərʌʂó] <i>good</i>
молóкó [məlʌkó] <i>milk</i>	горóдóк [gərʌdók] <i>town</i>
кóмната [kómnatə] <i>room</i>	панорáма [pənʌrámə] <i>panorama</i>
под водóй [pədʌdóy] <i>under water</i>	на мостý [nəmʌstú] <i>on the bridge</i>

NOTE: When preceded by the consonant **ч**, unstressed **а** is pronounced [ɪ], a sound midway between [i] and [e], e.g., in **часы́** [č'ɪsɪ] *watch*, **частíца** [č'ɪst'ɪcə] *particle*, **частóта** [č'ɪstʌtá] *frequency*.

NOTE: When preceded by the consonant **ж**, unstressed **а** is pronounced [ɨ], e.g., in the words **жалéть** [žɨl'et'] *to regret* and **к сожалéнию** [ksəžɨl'én'iyu] *unfortunately*.

2. *Reduction of the Vowel э [e]*

э [e] → [ɪ]

In many words the vowel э [e] when unstressed is pronounced [ɪ]. This vowel letter occurs primarily in words of foreign origin, and almost always at the beginning of the word.

экватор [ɪkvátər] *equator*
 эпо́ха [ɪpóxa] *epoch*

эмба́рго [ɪmbárgə] *embargo*
 эконо́мика [ɪkɫnómʲikə] *economics*

3. *Reduction of the Vowels я [ya] and е [ye]*

(a) я [ya] and е [ye] → [yɪ]/[ɪ]

(b) я [ya] → [yə]/[ə]

е [ye] → [yɪ]/[ɪ]

(a) Except in grammatical endings, unstressed я [ya] and е [ye] are both pronounced [yɪ] in word-initial position or after a vowel; after a soft consonant, these vowels are pronounced [ɪ], without the initial [y].

Word-Initial

язы́к [yɪzɪk] *language*
 яйцо́ [yɪtso] *egg*

езда́ [yɪzdá] *ride*
 еда́ [yɪdá] *food*

After a Vowel

пояс [póyɪs] *belt*

поеди́м [pəyɪdʲim] *let's eat*

After a Soft Consonant

телефо́н [tʲɪlʲfón] *telephone*
 мясни́к [mʲɪsnʲik] *butcher*

ветерина́р [vʲɪtʲɪrʲinár] *veterinarian*
 де́сять [dʲésʲɪtʲ] *ten*

(b) In grammatical endings, the pronunciation of unstressed я is usually distinguished from unstressed е, as indicated in the following general rules.

(i) я [ya] → [yə]/[ə]

но́вая [nónəyə] *new*
 ба́ня [bánʲə] *bathhouse*

си́няя [sʲínʲəyə] *dark blue*
 галере́я [gəlʲɪrʲéyə] *gallery*

(ii) е [ye] → [yɪ]/[ɪ]

в ба́не [vbánʲɪ] *in the bathhouse*
 мо́ре [mórʲɪ] *sea*
 чита́ет [čʲítáyɪt] *(s)he reads*

к Та́не [ktánʲɪ] *to Tanya*
 изви́ните [izvʲínʲítʲɪ] *excuse (me)*
 краси́вее [krásʲívʲyɪ] *prettier*

NOTE: In certain endings, an alternative, old Moscow pronunciation of unstressed е [ye] as [yə]/[ə] is also acceptable, e.g., in the neuter nouns **мо́ре** [mórʲə] *sea* and **по́ле** [pólʲə] *field*. This pronunciation also occurs in the neuter singular adjective endings **-ое/-ее**, where the final **-е** is pronounced [yə], just like the final **-я** in the feminine ending **-ая/-ья**, e.g., both **но́вое** and **но́вая** are pronounced [nónəyə].

NOTE: After the consonants **ш**, **ж**, and **ц** in posttonic syllables, unstressed е is typically pronounced [ə], e.g., in **хоро́шее** [xɫrósʲəyə] *good*, **с му́жем** [smúžəm] *with (her) husband*, **вы́шел** [vʲíʂəl] *walked out*. However, in certain endings after these same consonants, unstressed е is pronounced like the vowel **ы** [ɨ], such as in the suffix of comparatives, e.g., in **ра́ньше** [ránʲʂɨ] *earlier*, **бли́же** [blʲíʂɨ] *closer*. This pronunciation also occurs in pretonic position, e.g., in the words **жена́** [ʒíná] *wife*, **шесто́й** [ʂístóy] *sixth*, **це́на** [cíná] *price*.

The Consonants

There are 20 consonants in Russian, 15 of which are paired, that is, they occur in pairs of hard and soft (palatalized) versions.

Paired Consonants: Hard and Soft

б [b]–[b']	д [d]–[d']	л [l]–[l']	п [p]–[p']	т [t]–[t']
в [v]–[v']	з [z]–[z']	м [m]–[m']	р [r]–[r']	ф [f]–[f']
г [g]–[g']	к [k]–[k']	н [n]–[n']	с [s]–[s']	х [x]–[x']

A soft consonant is pronounced the same way as its hard counterpart, except for one important additional feature—the consonant is pronounced with the middle of the tongue raised toward the roof of the mouth, as in the pronunciation of the vowel **и**. As a result, the soft consonant has an [i]-like quality superimposed on it. Soft consonants are represented in transcription as the consonant letter followed by an apostrophe, e.g., a soft **т** is [t']. Also, it is important to remember that a soft consonant is *one* sound, not two. Be careful to avoid pronouncing a soft consonant as a hard consonant with a following [y] sound, that is, avoid pronouncing [t + y], e.g., the Russian word for “aunt,” **тётя**, is pronounced [t'ót'ə], not *[tyót'ə].

Since the same consonant letter is used for both the hard and soft versions of the consonant, it is only possible to determine which ones are hard and which are soft by what *follows* the consonant in spelling. Remember that hard consonants are those that are followed by one of the hard series vowels **а э о у ы**, or they occur with no vowel following. Soft consonants are those followed by one of the soft series vowels **я е ё ю и**, or they are followed by the soft sign **ь**. Examples follow.

гулять	г is hard; л, т are soft
телефон	т, л are soft; ф, н are hard
весёлый	в, с are soft; л is hard
изюм	з is soft; м is hard
изумруд	з, м, р, д are hard
здéсь	з, д, с are soft

NOTE: In the last example, **здéсь**, not only the **д** but also the preceding **з** is soft. This “double softening” affects the consonants **д, т, н, с,** and **з** when they precede a consonant that is softened by a soft series vowel, or a consonant that is *always* soft: **ч** and **щ**, e.g., **кóнчик** [kón'č'ik] *tip, point*, **жéнщина** [žén'sš'inə] *woman* (see the section Unpaired Consonants below).

The rules for identifying hard and soft consonants are as follows.

1. Hard consonants precede **а, э, о, у, ы**.
2. Soft consonants precede **я, е, ё, ю, и, ь**.

Unpaired Consonants

The remaining five consonants do not form pairs of hard and soft counterparts. Two consonants are always soft: **ч** and **щ**. Three consonants are always hard: **ш, ж, ц**.

Consonants That Are Always Soft	ч	щ	
Consonants That Are Always Hard	ш	ж	ц

The consonants **ш, ж,** and **ц** remain hard even when they are followed by soft series vowels. In fact, when following these consonants, the stressed soft series vowels **е и ё** are pronounced like their hard series counterparts: **э ы о**. Recall, however, that when unstressed and pretonic, the combinations **же, ше,** and **це** are pronounced [žɨ], [šɨ], and [cɨ].

ше́ст [šést] <i>pole</i>	шестóй [šístóy] <i>sixth</i>
машíна [mašínə] <i>car</i>	шёлк [šólk] <i>silk</i>
шедéвр [šid'évr] <i>masterpiece</i>	жéст [žést] <i>gesture</i>
жестóкий [žístókiy] <i>cruel</i>	жёлтый [žóltiy] <i>yellow</i>
живóт [žívót] <i>stomach</i>	цýрк [cirk] <i>circus</i>
цéнтр [céntr] <i>center</i>	цeнтрáльный [cíntrál'niy] <i>central</i>

Clusters of Unpaired Consonants

The Clusters жч, сч, and зч

In the consonant cluster **жч**, the unpaired hard consonant **ж** assimilates to the following unpaired soft consonant **ч**, resulting in the pronunciation of the cluster as a long soft [šš'], e.g., **мужчíна** [mušš'ínə] *man*. In certain words, the clusters **сч** and **зч** are also pronounced [šš'], e.g., **счáстье** [šš'ás't'yu] *happiness*, **счáстливо** [šš'ástl'ivə] *happily*, **счёт** [šš'ót] *bill*, **закáзчик** [zakášš'ik] *client, customer*.

The Clusters жж and зж

The clusters of unpaired hard consonants **жж** and **зж** are pronounced as a long soft [žž'] in the words **дрóжжи** [dróžž'i] *yeast*, **жжёт** [žž'ót] *burns*, **éзжу** [yéžž'u] *I travel*, **поезжáй** [pəyžž'áy] *go!*, **пóзже** [póžž'ɨ] *later*.

Voiced and Voiceless Consonants

There are six pairs of voiced and voiceless consonants.

Voiced Consonants	б [b]	в [v]	г [g]	д [d]	ж [ž]	з [z]
Voiceless Consonants	п [p]	ф [f]	к [k]	т [t]	ш [š]	с [s]

The remaining consonants are unpaired as to voice: **л**, **р**, **м**, and **н** are voiced; **ц**, **х**, **ч**, and **щ** are voiceless.

Voiced consonants are pronounced with the vocal cords vibrating, whereas voiceless consonants are pronounced without the vibration of the vocal cords. As in English, the opposition of voiced and voiceless consonants can distinguish the meaning of words, e.g., English *bin* and *pin*. Note the following Russian words whose meaning is distinguished solely by the *voiced* or *voiceless member* of a consonant pair.

бáр <i>bar</i>	пáр <i>steam</i>
дóм <i>house</i>	тóм <i>tome</i>
игрá <i>game</i>	икрá <i>caviar</i>
зýб <i>tooth</i>	сýп <i>soup</i>

Voicing Rules

Paired consonants may change in pronunciation from their voiced to voiceless counterpart and vice versa, depending on their position in a word. Following are the rules governing the voicing and devoicing of the paired consonants.

1. In word-final position, voiced consonants are pronounced voiceless.

б [b] → [p]	зýб [zúp] <i>tooth</i>
в [v] → [f]	лéв [l'éf] <i>lion</i>
г [g] → [k]	дóг [dók] <i>Great Dane</i>
д [d] → [t]	гóд [gót] <i>year</i>
ж [ž] → [š]	нóж [nóš] <i>knife</i>
з [z] → [s]	гáз [gás] <i>gas</i>

2. In a cluster of two consonants within a word, or at a boundary between two words pronounced rapidly together, the second consonant causes the first consonant to assimilate to it. This rule has two parts.

(a) A voiceless consonant is pronounced voiced when followed by a voiced consonant.

тб	→ [db]	фут б ол [fudból] <i>soccer</i>
сб	→ [zb]	бей с бол [beyzból] <i>baseball</i>
кд	→ [gd]	ка к делá [kagd'lá] <i>how are you?</i>
кж	→ [gž]	та к же [tágž'i] <i>also</i>

(b) A voiced consonant is pronounced voiceless when followed by a voiceless consonant.

дк	→ [tk]	ло д ка [lótka] <i>boat</i>
вт	→ [ft]	в теáтр [ft'átr] <i>to the theater</i>
жк	→ [šk]	ло ж ка [lóška] <i>spoon</i>
бк	→ [pk]	прó б ка [própka] <i>cork</i>
вч	→ [fč]	в чeрá [fč'irá] <i>yesterday</i>
гт	→ [kt]	л я гтe [l'ákt'v] <i>lie down</i>

NOTE: There is one exception to rule 2(a): The voiced consonant **в** [v] does not cause a preceding voiceless consonant to be pronounced voiced, e.g., the **т** in the cluster **тв** is not pronounced [d], e.g., **твóй** [tvóy] *your*.

Syllabification

Words are more easily pronounced when they are divided up into rhythmic parts, called *syllables*. Each syllable in Russian consists of a vowel and, usually, one or more surrounding consonants, e.g., the two syllables in **кни́-га** *book*. Essentially, there is one basic principle to follow in pronouncing Russian words consisting of more than one syllable: wherever possible, *make the syllable break at a vowel*.

при-вéт	[pr'i-v'ét]	<i>hi</i>
спа-сй́-бо	[spɐ-s'í-bə]	<i>thank you</i>
га-зé-та	[gɐ-z'é-tə]	<i>newspaper</i>
пи-с ь мó	[p'i-s'mó]	<i>letter</i>
хо-ро-шó	[xə-rɐ-šó]	<i>good</i>

The only exception to this pattern involves words that contain consonant clusters beginning with **р**, **л**, **м**, **н**, or **й**. In these words, make the syllable break *after* these consonants.

жур-на́л	[žur-nál]	<i>magazine</i>
пóл-ка	[pól-kə]	<i>shelf</i>
сýм-ка	[súm-kə]	<i>handbag</i>
бан-кéт	[ban-két]	<i>banquet</i>
трóй-ка	[tróy-kə]	<i>three</i>

The same general rules that apply for pronouncing words in syllables also apply for hyphenating words that must be divided at the end of a written line. For example, words with various consonant clusters, including clusters of identical consonants, are normally hyphenated between the consonants: **ка́с-ка** *cashier window*, **ва́н-на** *bathtub*.

Spelling Rules

Russian, like English, has a few spelling rules. Students learning English, for example, memorize the rule “write *i* before *e* except after *c*” to help them remember to spell correctly words like *relieve*, *believe* vs. *deceive*, *receive*, *conceive*, etc. Russian has three spelling rules that, like this English rule, remind us that certain combinations of letters are not permitted. The Russian rules are important for choosing the correct spelling of endings on nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

Rule 1: Write **и**, NEVER **ы**, after **к г х ог ж ч ш щ**

(a) in forming plurals of nouns.

рубáшка ~ рубáшки *shirt ~ shirts*
кнѳ́га ~ кнѳ́ги *book ~ books*

(b) in adjective endings (masculine singular/nominative plural forms).

ру́сск(иѳ́)/ру́сск(иѳе) *Russian*
хорóш(иѳ́)/хорóш(иѳе) *good*

Rule 2: Write **а** and **у**, NEVER **я** and **ю**, after **г к х ж ч ш щ ц** in the conjugation of verbs (first-person singular and third-person plural).

ѳ́ молчѳ́ / онѳ́ молчáт *I am silent / they are silent*
ѳ́ лежѳ́ / онѳ́ лежáт *I am lying / they are lying*
ѳ́ пишѳ́ / онѳ́ пишут *I write / they write*

Rule 3: Write unstressed **е**, but stressed **ó**, after **ж ч ш щ ц**.

хорóшее *good*
большóе *big*
танцевáть *to dance*
танцевáльный *dancing (adj.)*
ВУТ танцóвщик (*ballet*) *dancer*

Capitalization

Russian is similar to English in that it capitalizes proper nouns (**Бѳ́лл**, **Вашингтóн**, **Амѳ́рика**, **Борѳ́с**, **Москвá**, **Россѳ́я**), and the first word of a sentence. Russian differs from English in NOT capitalizing the following words.

- The first-person singular pronoun “I” (**ѳ́**), unless it is the first word of a sentence
- Nouns (and adjectives) denoting nationalities (**америкáнец** *American*, **япóнец** *Japanese*, **ру́сский** *Russian*), as well as cities from which one originates (**москвѳ́ч** *Muscovite*, **петербѳ́ржец** *Petersburger*)
- Words that follow the first word of a title («**Войнá и мѳ́р**» *War and Peace*), the name of a holiday (**Нóвый гóд** *New Year*), or the name of an organization (**Акадѳ́мия нау́к** *Academy of Sciences*)
- Days of the week (**понедѳ́льник** *Monday*, **втóрник** *Tuesday*)
- Months of the year (**январѳ́** *January*, **феврáль** *February*, **мáрт** *March*)

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