

Русский алфавит

The Alphabet

The Russian alphabet was devised by a monk, St. Cyril, who was born in Thessaloniki, Greece, around A.D. 827. The Russian alphabet is now called *Cyrillic* in honor of St. Cyril.



РУССКИЙ АЛФАВИТ					
Letter	English spelling	Approximate sound	Letter	English spelling	Approximate sound
А а	a	father	Р р	r	pero (Spanish)
Б б	b	bad	С с	s	sad
В в	v	very	Т т	t	stain
Г г	g	gun	У у	u	boom
Д д	d	door	Ф ф	f	far
Е е	e, ye	yet	Х х	kh	loch
Ё ё	yo	New York	Ц ц	ts	cats
Ж ж	zh	measure	Ч ч	ch	child
З з	z	zoo	Ш ш	sh	shine
И и	i	eel	Щ щ	shch	fresh cheese
Й й	y	boy	Ъ	(hard sign)	(no sound)
К к	k	ski	Ы	i	hill
Л л	l	lock	Ь	(soft sign)	(no sound)
М м	m	man	Э э	e	set
Н н	n	noise	Ю ю	yu	university
О о	o	or	Я я	ya	yard
П п	p	spin			

1. The Cyrillic alphabet is relatively easy to read. Try to read the following list of American states in Russian.

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Техáс | 5. Алаба́ма | 8. Индиáна |
| 2. Монтáна | 6. Миннесóта | 9. Калифóрния |
| 3. Колора́до | 7. Аризóна | 10. Флорíда |
| 4. Оклахо́ма | | |

Note: Unstressed o is pronounced [a] or [ə]. See the section Notes on Pronunciation for details.

There are 33 characters in the Cyrillic alphabet, some of which are the same as in English.

SAME AS ENGLISH						
Russian letter	А а	Е е	К к	М м	О о	Т т
English equivalent	a	e	k	m	o	t

2. Read the following Russian words.

- | | | |
|--------|----------|---------|
| 1. ТОМ | 3. áТОМ | 5. тéма |
| 2. КОТ | 4. ма́ма | |

FAMILIAR LOOKING, BUT DIFFERENT SOUNDING						
Russian letter	В в	Н н	Р р	С с	У у	Х х
English equivalent	v	n	r	s	u	kh

3. Read the following American first names.

- | | | |
|----------|------------|-----------|
| 1. Скoтт | 3. Анна | 5. Терéса |
| 2. Марк | 4. Ванéсса | 6. Хуáн |

DIFFERENT LOOKING, BUT FAMILIAR SOUNDING				
Russian letter	Б б	Г г	Д д	З з
English equivalent	b	g	d	z
Russian letter	И и	Л л	П п	Ф ф
English equivalent	i	l	p	f

4. Read some more American first names.

- | | | |
|-----------|----------|-------------|
| 1. Рóберт | 5. Ада́м | 8. Па́трик |
| 2. Тим | 6. Кéлли | 9. Лиз |
| 3. Грег | 7. Лíнда | 10. Тíффани |
| 4. Крис | | |

5. The following Russian words sound very much like English.
1. At home children have a **ма́ма** and **па́па**.
 2. In your room you have a **ла́мпа** and **ра́дио**.
 3. A teenager's best friend is the **телефо́н**.
 4. To get money you go to a **банк**.
 5. When your car is broken you may need to take a **такси́**.
 6. At the zoo you can see a **фламы́нго**, a **тигр**, and a **зе́бра**.

6. Can you recognize the following musical instruments?

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1. гита́ра | 4. кларне́т |
| 2. бас-гита́ра | 5. тромбо́н |
| 3. саксофо́н | |

INTERESTING S-SOUNDS	
Ж ж zh	has the approximate sound of <i>s</i> in <i>pleasure, usually</i> . Жа́нна is a girl's name. Жи́раф is an animal you might see at the zoo. You can read a журна́л . The person who writes in one is a журнали́ст .
Ц ц ts	sounds like the last two letters in <i>cats</i> . An African insect that causes sleeping disease is called a цеце́ fly. When Russian children want to see clowns they go to the цирк .
Ч ч ch	looks like the number 4. It is pronounced like <i>ch</i> in <i>child</i> . The Russian spelling of the name Charlie is Ча́рли .
Ш ш sh	is pronounced like <i>sh</i> in <i>shine</i> . All Russian children over six years of age go to a шко́ла .
Щ щ shch	looks like the previous letter with a tail. It is pronounced like the combination of <i>sh</i> and <i>ch</i> in <i>fresh cheese</i> . The famous Russian red beet soup is called борщ .

7. Russians spell English names the way they are pronounced. For instance, *Chelsea* would be spelled **Че́лси** in Russian. Try to match the English names with the corresponding Russian spellings.

- | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|---------|
| 1. Ча́рлз | Jim | 5. Джи́м | Charles |
| 2. Джи́он | Sean | 6. Джи́еф | John |
| 3. Шо́н | Michelle | 7. Ша́рлот | Sharon |
| 4. Ше́рон | Charlotte | 8. Мише́л | Jeff |

THE YO-, YU-, YA- GROUP

Ё ё yo	looks like the letter <i>e</i> with dots on. It is pronounced like <i>yo</i> in <i>New York</i> . The two dots on top are optional and are used mainly in language textbooks. The syllable with <i>ё</i> is always stressed. A Russian Christmas tree is a ёлка.
Ю ю yu	looks like the number 10. It is pronounced <i>yu</i> , as in <i>yule</i> . Russians also have a sense of юмор (<i>humor</i>).
Я я ya	looks like a backwards <i>r</i> . It has the sound of <i>ya</i> , as in <i>yard</i> . Ягу́ар is a large cat and also a make of car.

8. When the letters **ё**, **ю**, or **я** are not at the beginning of the word, the sound resembles *o*, *u*, and *a*, respectively. Listen to the recording and imitate the speaker's pronunciation of the following Russian names in which these letters appear in different positions.

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| 1. Алёша | 6. Андрю́ша |
| 2. Фёдор | 7. Яков |
| 3. Юра | 8. Яша |
| 4. Юлия | 9. Со́ня |
| 5. Катю́ша | 10. Ко́ля |

ADDITIONAL SOUNDS

Й й y	И крáткое, short <i>i</i> , looks like и with a hat on. It is pronounced like the letter <i>y</i> in <i>boy</i> . In Техáс you can often see a ко́вбо́й (<i>cowboy</i>). И крáткое is often used in combination with other vowels, for example: ай, ей, ий, ой, уй, ый The hat on top of the letter й is <i>not</i> optional, unlike the dots on the letter ё .
Ы ы i	looks as though it is formed of two parts. It sounds like the letter <i>i</i> in <i>hill</i> . This letter never starts a word. телеви́зоры <i>televisions</i> телефо́ны <i>telephones</i>
Э э e	Е оборо́тное, the “backwards <i>e</i> ” is pronounced like the <i>e</i> in <i>set</i> . It is used mostly at the beginning of a word. If your first name starts with an [e] sound, you should use this letter. Элино́р Эрин Эрик Эли́забет

9. Listen to the recording and imitate the speaker's pronunciation of the following Russian words.

ма́йка	<i>T-shirt</i>	извѣстный	<i>famous</i>
кана́ре́йка	<i>canary</i>	телевизо́ры	<i>televisions</i>
музе́й	<i>museum</i>	фру́кты	<i>fruit</i>
ру́сский	<i>Russian</i>	ры́ба	<i>fish</i>
плохо́й	<i>bad</i>	э́то	<i>this</i>
пожа́луй	<i>perhaps</i>	Эсто́ния	<i>Estonia</i>

SPELLING SIGNS

- Ь** Мягкий знак (*soft sign*) does not have a sound of its own. It is a spelling sign indicating that the preceding consonant is *soft*, or *palatalized* (more about this in the Notes on Pronunciation). Ольга is a common first name for women. Do not confuse the soft sign with the letters **в**, **б**, and **ы**.
- Ъ** Твёрдый знак (*hard sign*) is sometimes used as a separating sign between the prefix and the stem of a word. Very few words have this sign.

10. Listen to the recording and imitate the speaker's pronunciation of the following Russian words.

Ольга	<i>Olga</i>
писа́тель	<i>writer</i>
писа́мо	<i>letter</i>
большо́й	<i>big</i>
въезд	<i>entrance</i> (hard sign)


Notes on Pronunciation

Word Stress


The stress may fall on any syllable in a word. To help students pronounce Russian correctly, the stressed syllable is marked with an accent on the vowel. You can see the accent marks in textbooks, but not in materials intended for native speakers. Russians do not normally write the accents. In this textbook, the stress is marked *except* in monosyllabic words, and when the stress falls on a capital letter.

- óпера (stress on the first syllable)
актри́са (stress on the second syllable)
телефо́н (stress on the third syllable)

The syllable with **ѐ** is always stressed, and therefore no accent mark is needed.

 ѐлка (stress on the first syllable)
берѐза (stress on the second syllable)

Note: Do not confuse the accent mark on **и** with the letter **й**. The hat is part of **й** and should *always* be written, whereas the accent on **и** is optional. Compare the following:

 карандашѝ (optional accent mark on the letter **и**)
музѝй (**й** in a stressed syllable preceded by another vowel. The stress mark on **е** is optional, but the hat on **й** is required)

The stressed syllable is *pronounced with greater emphasis* than the unstressed syllable(s). The vowel in the stressed syllable is slightly longer and more distinct than in unstressed syllables.

Pronunciation of o, a, e, and я in Stressed and Unstressed Positions

<u>o</u> in a stressed syllable	<u>o</u> in an unstressed syllable
[o]* он дóма	[a] in a position right before a stressed syllable зовѹт онá [ə] in other unstressed positions хорóшó профѐссор

* Notice that the Russian letter o does not have the *u*-glide, as in the English word *home*.

<u>a</u> in a stressed syllable	<u>a</u> in an unstressed syllable
[a] мáма	[a] in a position right before a stressed syllable мáшѝна [ə] in other unstressed positions сѹмка

 1. Listen to the recording and imitate the speaker's pronunciation of the following words.

o in the stressed syllable

прирóда *nature*
гóры *mountains*
марафóн *marathon*


o in the unstressed syllable

горá *mountain*
пока́ *bye*
до свидáния *good-bye*
собáка *dog*

o in different positions

плóхо *badly*
плóхой *bad*
хорошó *well*
погóда *weather*
порóда *breed*
городá *cities*
бородá *beard*
голосá *voices*

<u>e</u> in a stressed syllable	<u>e</u> in an unstressed syllable
[e] газéта	[i] река́

 2. Listen and repeat.


e in the stressed syllable

студéнт *student*
спортсменка́ *athlete f.*
профéссор *professor*

e in the unstressed syllable

Техáс *Texas*
метрó *subway*
америкáнский *American*

<u>я</u> in stressed syllables	<u>я</u> in unstressed syllables
[ya] я́рко	[yә] at the end of the word ру́сская [yi] at the beginning of a word я́зык [i] in other unstressed positions де́сять

 3. Listen and repeat.

я in the stressed syllable

я́блоко *apple*
ма́йк *lighthouse*
я́сно *clearly*

unstressed я at the beginning

яйцо́ *egg*
январь *January*

unstressed я at the end of a word

Англи́я *England*
хоро́шая *good*
плоха́я *bad*

unstressed я in other positions

де́вять *nine*
пятиле́тка *five-year plan*

Hard and Soft Consonants

Most Russian consonants have a soft (palatalized) and a hard (nonpalatalized) variant and, therefore, two different pronunciations. The palatalized consonants are pronounced with tongue high and forward in the mouth.

A consonant is hard <i>before</i> the following:	а	э	о	у	ы	ø (before another consonant)
A consonant is soft <i>before</i> the following:	я	е	ё	ю	и	ь

 4. Listen to the recording and repeat the following words.

- лѐнта (soft *l*)
- лáмпа (hard *l*)
- пáста (hard *s*)
- письмó (soft *s*)
- аллигáтор (hard *r*)
- Игорь (soft *r*)

 5. Listen to the pronunciation of the hard and soft variants of the following consonants. Repeat after the recording.

consonant	hard	soft	
л	лáмпа	лѐнта	(e follows)
з	зонт	газѐта	
л	лáмпа	лѐд	(ë follows)
т	том	тѐтя	
р	рок	тури́ст	(и follows)
л	Лáра	йли	
н	Анна	Тáня	(я follows)
т	Тамáра	Кáтя	
т	Тúла	Катиúша	(ю follows)
с	сúмка	сюпрíз	
л	Вóлга	Ольга	(soft sign follows)
с	пáста	письмó	

The Letters **е, ё, я, and ю** at the Beginning of Words or After Another Vowel

The letters **е, ё, я, and ю** start with a distinct *y*-sound at the beginning of a word and after another vowel.

 6. Listen and repeat.

Beginning of word

ёсли

Екатери́на

Еле́на

ёлка

ёжик

я́сно

Яша

Юра

Юпи́тер

After another vowel

краси́вее

её

ру́сская

слу́шаю


 7. Listen and repeat. After a consonant, the letters **е, ё, я, and ю** have a vowel sound only.

Ле́на

Але́ша

Та́ня

Кати́юша

 8. Listen and repeat. Notice the difference between the letters **э** and **е**.

э

е

Эрика

Еле́на

э́то

ёсли

If your name is Eric, Elizabeth, Elinor, or the like, the Russian spelling should start with an Э; otherwise, your name will be mispronounced.

Voiced and Voiceless Consonants


The distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants exists in many languages, including English (*b/p, v/f, d/t*, etc.). Twelve Russian consonants can be arranged into voiced and voiceless pairs.

voiced	б	в	г	д	ж	з
voiceless	п	ф	к	т	ш	с

Words *ending in a voiced consonant* are pronounced with the corresponding *voiceless* consonant. A native Russian with a typical Russian accent might say in English

I'm go**nk** to a meet**nk**.

or: I'm hungry. I want some foot.

-  9. Listen to the devoicing of consonants in the following words. The actual pronunciation is given in brackets. Repeat after the recording.

клуб [..п]

Иванóв [..ф]

друг [..к]

гóрод [..т]

муж [..ш]

газ [..с]

Consonant assimilation takes place in consonant clusters containing both voiced and voiceless consonants. The second consonant in the cluster determines the quality of the first one.

-  10. Listen and repeat. If the second consonant is voiced, the first one is pronounced voiced.

отдéл [аддел]

вокзáл [вагзал]

If the second consonant is voiceless, the first one is pronounced voiceless.

Кавкáз [кафкас]

лóжка [лошка]

Cursive Writing Chart

Printed	Italics	Cursive
А а	<i>А а</i>	<i>А а</i>
Б б	<i>Б б</i>	<i>Б б</i>
В в	<i>В в</i>	<i>В в</i>
Г г	<i>Г г</i>	<i>Г г</i>
Д д	<i>Д д</i>	<i>Д д</i>
Е е	<i>Е е</i>	<i>Е е</i>
Ё ё	<i>Ё ё</i>	<i>Ё ё</i>
Ж ж	<i>Ж ж</i>	<i>Ж ж</i>
З з	<i>З з</i>	<i>З з</i>
И и	<i>И и</i>	<i>И и</i>
Й й	<i>Й й</i>	<i>Й й</i>
К к	<i>К к</i>	<i>К к</i>
Л л	<i>Л л</i>	<i>Л л</i>
М м	<i>М м</i>	<i>М м</i>
Н н	<i>Н н</i>	<i>Н н</i>
О о	<i>О о</i>	<i>О о</i>
П п	<i>П п</i>	<i>П п</i>
Р р	<i>Р р</i>	<i>Р р</i>
С с	<i>С с</i>	<i>С с</i>
Т т	<i>Т т</i>	<i>Т т</i>
У у	<i>У у</i>	<i>У у</i>
Ф ф	<i>Ф ф</i>	<i>Ф ф</i>
Х х	<i>Х х</i>	<i>Х х</i>
Ц ц	<i>Ц ц</i>	<i>Ц ц</i>
Ч ч	<i>Ч ч</i>	<i>Ч ч</i>
Ш ш	<i>Ш ш</i>	<i>Ш ш</i>
Щ щ	<i>Щ щ</i>	<i>Щ щ</i>
Ъ	<i>ъ</i>	<i>ъ</i>
Ы	<i>ы</i>	<i>ы</i>
Ь	<i>ь</i>	<i>ь</i>
Э э	<i>Э э</i>	<i>Э э</i>
Ю ю	<i>Ю ю</i>	<i>Ю ю</i>
Я я	<i>Я я</i>	<i>Я я</i>

Lowercase *в* is a tall letter.

Lowercase *г* has rounded corners.

Uppercase *З* looks like the number 3.

The “hat” is required.

Lowercase *к* is a short letter.

This letter has a hook in front.

This letter has a hook in front.

Lowercase *р* is not closed.

Lowercase *т* often has a line on top to distinguish it from *ш*.

Uppercase *У* does not extend below the line.

The tail on this letter is very small.

Lowercase *ч* has sharp corners.

Lowercase *ш* often has a line under it to distinguish it from *т*.

The tail on this letter is very small.

This letter has a square top.

Do not confuse the soft sign with the letter *в*.

Do not confuse with *З*.

This letter has a hook in front.

Notes on Cursive Writing

1. Letters *н*, *п*, *т*, and *к* are connected to the top. The left-side downward stroke needs to stay intact.

*напа, панда, нет, спорт, как, актриса,
артист*

2. The Russian letter *д* looks like this in cursive: *д да, куда*
3. Notice the difference between the letters *г* (rounded corners) and *ч* (sharp corners).

друг, город чек, конечно

4. The upper case *У* does not extend below the line, unlike the lower case *у*.

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5. The letter *ц* has a very small tail: *цече, пицца*

6. *в* and *б* are the only tall letters.

август, вас банан, зебра

7. The soft sign is a small letter that looks like the number “six.” Do not confuse it with the letter *в*.

ь день, писатель, очень

8. The letter *ы* looks like the soft sign with an extra line.

мы, вы, рыба, макароны

9. *Э* has a circular shape with a line in the middle, whereas the upper-case *З* looks like the number “three.” *Зина*

Э is connected to the next letter from the middle: *это*

Since the word *это* is one of the first words you will learn, make sure that you learn to write it correctly.

это, это, это

10. The letters *л*, *м*, and *я* have a “hook” in the front only.

*или, если, балерина, мама, спортсмен,
композитор, русская, американская, Оля,
меня*

Меня зовут Таня.

11. Do not confuse the letter *и* with *й*. The *и* краткое (*й*) often appears after another vowel: ай, ей, ий ой, уй, ый. The “hat” on the letter is **required**.

*майка, канарейка, русский, ковбой,
здравствуй, добрый, известный*

Pay special attention to words with one *и*:

по-русски (no “hat”)

but: *русский*

Also, do not confuse a stress mark on *и* (used in your textbook) with the letter *й*.

крокоди́л

Leave the stress marks out in cursive. *крокодил*

12. The letter *ш* ends with a downward stroke. Do not confuse it with the English “w.”

ш шапка, карандаш