

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

Russian

for
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A beginner's guide
to speaking Russian

Familiarize yourself
with basic grammar

Learn ready-to-use
Russian phrases

Andrew D. Kaufman, PhD
Popular college professor of Russian
language, literature, and culture

Serafima Gettys, PhD
Teaching English to Russians and
Russian to Americans for decades



Russian

3rd Edition

by Andrew D. Kaufman, PhD,
and Serafima Gettys, PhD

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dummies[®]
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Introduction

Speaking more than one language is like living more than one life, one of the ancient philosophers said. And it's true — traveling in a foreign country such as Russia suddenly becomes a lot more exciting when you can engage in elegant small talk with a hotel receptionist, compliment your tour guide's dress, or actually read the menu and order the food that you really want. Being able to ask for things instead of pointing at them and getting directions from the locals instead of staring at a map are some of the little things that make you feel at home.

You don't even need to cross the ocean to immerse yourself in Russian culture; you can find little Russian neighborhoods (or even pretty big ones!) in many American cities. Whether your colleagues, your neighbors, or your friends speak Russian, the best way to win their hearts is to speak their language to them.

Now, *Russian For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, won't make you a fluent reader of the original works of Dostoevsky (most Russians themselves need some preparation for that). Neither is it a textbook or grammar reference book. It will, however, equip you with phrases necessary to function in many life situations, from shopping to visiting the theater. And little gems of cultural wisdom offered throughout the book help you not only translate the language, but also understand Russians so much better. So, buckle up, and good luck on your journey! Or, as the Russians like to say, **Желаемвамудачи!** (zhi-lah-eem vahm ooh-dah-chee!) (*We wish you good luck!*).

About This Book

The best thing about *Russian For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is that you don't have to read all the way through it to get the information you need. Again, this is not a Russian textbook where each new chapter or unit is built upon what you've learned before. What this means is you can open the table of contents, find the section that interests you at the moment, and start talking! You don't have to read the previous chapters to understand any sections of this book. And if you decide that you want more information about something, a convenient system of cross-references takes you to just the right place.

Another thing you don't need to do is memorize long vocabulary lists or grammar rules. We give you ready-made phrases; you just need to read them to start using them right away to impress your Russian friends!

Conventions Used in This Book

Here are some conventions that allow you to navigate through this book with maximum ease:

- » We present Russian in Russian, or what is also known as the Cyrillic alphabet. You can see the Cyrillic alphabet in [Chapter 2](#). Russian terms are easily found in the text because they're set in **boldface**.
- » Each Russian word or sentence is followed by its pronunciation shown in English letters, and its English translation, respectively, in parentheses. In each pronunciation, the stressed syllable is in *italics* (Russian stresses are unpredictable and the words need to be remembered with their stresses); translations are also in italics.

Here's a little example to give you an idea of what we mean: The phrase for "I love you" in Russian is **Я тебя люблю** (ya tee-*bya* lyooh-*blyooh*) (*I love you*).

- » Verb conjugations (lists that show you the forms of a verb) are given in tables in this order:
 - The *I* form
 - The *you* (informal singular) form
 - The *he/she/it* form
 - The *we* form
 - The *you* (formal singular or plural) form
 - The *they* form

Pronunciations follow in the second column.

The meaning of a phrase doesn't always equal the sum of the individual words the phrase consists of. In this case, we talk about a literal meaning (the meaning of the individual words) and an idiomatic meaning (the actual meaning of the phrase in conversation). If the literal translation of a phrase differs from its idiomatic meaning, we give you both the idiomatic and the literal meanings in parentheses. For instance: **Как дела?** (kahk dee-*lah*?) (*How are you? Literally: How is business?*).

In each chapter, look for the following elements:

- » **Talkin' the Talk:** These real-life dialogues illustrate how native speakers use words and phrases in a particular section of the book. These informal dialogues are the actual conversations you may hear in similar situations. You can also play an audio version of these dialogues to help you grasp them even faster!
- » **Words to Know:** This element follows every Talkin' the Talk and provides pronunciation and transcription

of key words and expressions you encounter in the dialogue.

- » **Fun & Games:** Find this section at the end of each chapter. These fun activities allow you to use the new words and phrases you encounter in each chapter to answer questions and solve puzzles.

What You're Not to Read

We like to think that you'll read every word in this book, but we also know that you're eager to start speaking Russian. So feel free to skip the sidebars (the gray-shaded boxes sprinkled throughout the book); they contain interesting information but aren't essential to your study of Russian.

Foolish Assumptions

When we started writing this book, we tried to imagine what our future reader was going to be like. In the end, we came up with a list of foolish assumptions about who we think wants to read this book. Do you recognize yourself in these descriptions?

- » You know no Russian — or if you took Russian in high school, you don't remember a word of it.
- » You're not looking for a book that will make you fluent in Russian; you just want to know some words, phrases, and sentence constructions so that you can communicate basic information in Russian.
- » You don't want to have to memorize long lists of vocabulary words or a bunch of boring grammar rules.
- » You want to have fun and learn a little bit of Russian at the same time.

How This Book Is Organized

Russian For Dummies, 3rd Edition, consists of four parts and a few appendixes. Each part of the book offers something different.

Part 1: Getting Started

In this part, you find the essentials of the Russian language. [Chapter 1](#) gives you an overview of what you discover in this book. [Chapter 2](#) introduces the Russian alphabet, [Chapter 3](#) gives you a crash course on Russian grammar (but in very general terms, to give you a sense of the principles of Russian grammar, not mastery of it), and [Chapter 4](#) gets you started with some basic Russian expressions. [Chapter 5](#) is the right place to turn to if you want to talk about numbers, times, and measurements in Russian. And finally, [Chapter 6](#) encourages you to start speaking Russian in the comfort of your home.

Part 2: Russian in Action

[Part 2](#) prepares you for most social situations that you need to handle in Russian. [Chapter 7](#) shows you how to make small talk; [Chapter 8](#) is all about asking for directions in a strange city. [Chapters 9](#) and [10](#) prepare you to talk about food and shopping. [Chapter 11](#) equips you with words and phrases you can use while going out on the town. [Chapter 12](#) takes you on a tour of your office and equips you with the necessary phrases to make phone calls and use a computer. In [Chapter 13](#), you find out how to talk about fun things, such as sports, reading, and other hobbies.

Part 3: Russian on the Go

This part covers all the aspects of traveling, such as planning your trip ([Chapter 14](#)), settling your financial matters ([Chapter 15](#)), discussing transportation ([Chapter 16](#)), and arranging for a place to stay ([Chapter 17](#)). [Chapter 18](#) prepares you for handling emergencies.

Part 4: The Part of Tens

The Part of Tens is an unusual part of this book; it gives you lists of fun things to know, such as ten ways to pick up Russian quickly and ten things never to say in Russian. This part is also the place to find ten favorite Russian expressions and to pick up ten phrases that make you sound authentically Russian.

Appendixes

Russian For Dummies, 3rd Edition, also includes three appendixes, which bring together some useful information. In [Appendix A](#), you find two mini-dictionaries (both Russian-to-English and English-to-Russian) for quick reference. [Appendix B](#) contains verb tables that show you how to conjugate regular and irregular verbs. [Appendix C](#) offers the answer keys to the Fun & Games sections of each chapter.

Icons Used in This Book

For your convenience, we marked some information in this book with special icons. Check out this guide to the icons, and the next time you see one of them, you'll know what to expect!



**CULTURAL
WISDOM**

From famous Russian writers to a polite way to decline an invitation, this icon marks a wide variety of curious and useful facts about Russian culture.



PLAY THIS

The website associated with this book gives you the opportunity to hear Russian in action. The site features audio files of native Russian speakers bringing to life some of the dialogues from the pages of this book. Check it out at:

www.dummies.com/go/russianfd3e.



REMEMBER

This icon points out some important information about Russian that's worth remembering.



TIP

This icon signals a useful bit of information that can make life easier for you, whether it's a handy way to remember a useful word or an insider's advice on how to better handle a certain situation.



WARNING

This icon attracts your attention to something you need to know to avoid a common mistake.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and type **Russian For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

Now that you're familiar with the anatomy of *Russian For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, you can embark on your journey. You can start anywhere, and you don't have to go in a specific order. Just choose a topic that seems appealing, find the corresponding chapter in the table of contents, and start speaking Russian!

If you're at a loss about where to start, please take our advice and begin with [Chapter 2](#): It provides you with a very powerful tool — the ability to read Russian. [Chapter 3](#) is a good place to get a grasp on the essentials of Russian grammar. After that, you can go straight to the sections that deal with information you need urgently. Wherever you decide to start, you can find plenty of useful phrases to get you speaking Russian and exploring the benefits that your language skill brings. And now we wish you **Счастливого пути!** (sh'ees-lee-vah-vah pooh-tee!) (*Bon voyage!*).

Part 1

Getting Started

IN THIS PART ...

Learn the basics of Russian.

Explore the Russian alphabet.

Understand basic Russian grammar.

Say some simple Russian expressions.

Get your numbers, times, and measurements straight.

Identify items at home using Russian.

Chapter 1

Russian in a Nutshell

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Approaching the Russian alphabet
 - » Looking at grammar in a new light
 - » Getting started with some useful words and expressions
 - » Putting Russian to use in common social situations
 - » Taking Russian on the road
-

Russian has a reputation for being a difficult language. Is it? We would say that *different* is a better word to describe the experience of studying Russian. Russian actually is a distant cousin of English. Both languages belong to a huge Indo-European family of languages — unlike, say, Arabic, Chinese, or Japanese, which belong to completely different language-family clans.

This chapter provides you a taste of Russian. Get ready to study this fascinating language!

Discovering How Easy the Russian Alphabet Really Is

If you were to ask people on the street what they think the most difficult thing about learning Russian is, most of them (slightly taken aback by your question) would likely say, “The alphabet!”

But we're here to tell you that nothing could be further from the truth: The Russian alphabet is perhaps the easiest part of learning Russian. In fact, you may be surprised to hear that most people are able to start reading Russian in several hours. That's how easy the Russian alphabet is!

Don't believe us? Consider this: The Russian alphabet, often called the *Cyrillic* alphabet, was named after a ninth-century Byzantine monk named Cyril, who developed it with the help of his brother, Methodius. (Please don't ask us why Methodius's name wasn't added to the name of the alphabet. Life isn't fair.) Cyril and Methodius wanted to translate the Bible into one of the Slavic languages spoken by the Eastern European pagan tribes, because the brothers were planning to convert those tribes to Christianity. These languages had never been written down before. When the brothers were creating their alphabet, they borrowed quite a few letters from the Latin alphabet to indicate the sounds produced by the tribes. Luckily for those tribes (and for anyone studying Russian), a lot of the borrowed letters sound the same in Russian as they do in any Latin-based alphabet (like English).

Are you ready to jump in and start reading Russian? [Chapter 2](#) shows you how to sound out the letters of the Russian alphabet.

Tackling Basic Grammar

In addition to the alphabet, grammar is responsible for earning Russian its reputation for being a difficult language. Don't worry, though! [Chapter 3](#) makes your transition from English grammar to Russian grammar as smooth as possible. We give you the scoop on Russian

nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and sentence construction.



TIP One benefit of Russian: Compared with English, which enforces the strictest order of words on its speakers, Russian allows a completely free, almost anarchic order of words. In the sentence “The dog chased the boy,” for example, the Russian words for *boy* and *dog* can switch places, but the sentence will still mean “The dog chased the boy.”

But to fully enjoy this freedom of word order, Russians had to pay a dear price in the form of six grammatical cases (nominative, genitive, accusative, dative, instrumental, and prepositional), which anybody who speaks Russian has to juggle constantly to create sentences that make sense. Don’t let this fact intimidate you, however. With the guidelines we provide in [Chapter 3](#), you’ll have a handle on cases in no time.

Easing into Common Expressions

In [Chapter 4](#), we present numerous basic Russian expressions that enable you to start speaking Russian immediately (and politely). Here are just a few of the easiest, shortest ones:

- » Привет! (pree-vyeht!) (*Hi!*)
- » Какдела? (kahk dee-lah?) (*How are you?*)
- » Пока! (pah-kah!) (*Bye!*)
- » Спасибо! (spuh-see-bah!) (*Thank you!*)

- » **Понятно!** (pah-nyat-nah!) (*I see!*)
- » **Да.** (dah.) (*Yes.*)
- » **Да-да-да!** (dah-dah-dah!) (*Yes-yes-yes!*) The repetition makes your *yes* stronger.
- » **Нет.** (nyeht.) (*No.*)
- » **Нет-нет-нет!** (nyeht-nyeht-nyeht!) (*No-no-no!*) You guessed it: This expression makes your *no* stronger.
- » **Простите!** (prahs-tee-tee!) or **Извините!** (eez-vee-nee-tee!) (*Sorry!*) This word is a bit longer than its English counterpart, but it comes in handy for acknowledging the blunders you may make as a beginning Russian speaker.
- » **Ой!** (ohy!) (*Oh!*) This term serves to express a wide range of emotions, such as fear, surprise, delight, anger, and many more.
- » **Ай!** (ahy!) (*Ah!*) Use this expression in place of **ой** if you prefer, or use it just for the sake of variety.

Counting on Numbers, Times, and Measurements

Even if you were bad at math in high school, don't underestimate the importance of numbers, times, and measurements while learning a new language (including Russian). Just think about the activities you'll be able to perform: using currency, calculating prices, exchanging phone numbers, setting meeting times, making sense of addresses and zip codes, and a lot more. So don't even think about missing [Chapter 5](#); it brings you up to speed on all these topics.



REMEMBER In the meantime, you can start using Russian numbers by counting on both hands:

- » один (ah-deen) (*one*)
- » два (dvah) (*two*)
- » три (tree) (*three*)
- » четыре (chee-ti-ree) (*four*)
- » пять (pyat') (*five*)
- » шесть (shehst') (*six*)
- » семь (syehm') (*seven*)
- » восемь (voh-seem') (*eight*)
- » девять (dyeh-veet') (*nine*)
- » десять (dyeh-seet') (*ten*)

Speaking Russian around the House



ТИП A great way to practice Russian is to wander around your home! Each time you enter a room, recall its name in Russian:

- » кухня (koohkh-nyeh) (*kitchen*)
- » столовая (stah-loh-vuh-yeh) (*dining room*)
- » гостиная (gahs-tee-nuh-yeh) (*living room*)
- » спальня (spahl'-nyeh) (*bedroom*)

» туалет (tooh-uh-lyeht) (*bathroom*)

» гараж (guh-rahsh) (*garage*)

[Chapter 6](#) introduces you to Russian words for common rooms, household items, and regular everyday activities such as eating, drinking, sleeping, and doing chores.

Using Russian in Social Scenarios

After practicing Russian at home, you can take it outside. [Part 2](#) comes in handy in a lot of life scenarios: making small talk with new acquaintances, asking for directions, eating out and shopping, going out on the town, communicating and handling routine tasks at work, and enjoying hobbies. The following sections give you a sense of what to expect.

Starting conversations

Have you ever been on bus, plane, or some other public transportation and some stranger just tried to talk your ear off? Small talk makes some people really uncomfortable, but allowing yourself to get over those initial fears could mean making a new friend or feeling more comfortable in a foreign place. In fact, if you want to learn a new language, making small talk is a valuable skill. So we encourage you to take a risk and chat up someone yourself. [Chapter 7](#) helps you initiate conversations with folks in Russian. You find out how to state where you're from, talk about your nationality and ethnicity, give your age, and discuss your family.

You'll also be armed with a battery of questions that are great icebreakers, such as the following:

- » **Откуда вы?** (aht-kooh-duh vi?) (*Where are you from?*)
- » **Сколько вам лет?** (skohl'-kah vahm lyeht?) (*How old are you?*)
- » **У вас большая семья?** (ooh vahs bahl'-shah-yeh seem'-ya?) (*Do you have a big family?*)
- » **Что вы по профессии?** (ktoh vi pah prah-fyeh-see-ee?) (*What do you do?*)

Finding your way around



ТИП Asking for directions is what tourists in all countries do. If you're in Russia (or traveling in any new place where Russian is the main language), it doesn't hurt to carry a map with you at all times, just in case, or to use Google Maps on your phone, assuming that you have a good cell connection. If neither of these tools is available to you, you'll need to ask somebody for directions. But first, you need to attract a passerby's attention. The best way to do this is to say the following: **Извините, где...?** (eez-vee-nee-tee, gdyeh...?) (*Excuse me, where is ...?*) plus the place you're looking for. For full details on asking for (and understanding) directions, see [Chapter 8](#).

Eating out and buying food



ТИП A fun (and satisfying!) activity for practicing your Russian is going out to eat. At a Russian restaurant or cafe, you may discover that the names of dishes on the menu are translated into English, followed by very flowery explanations; the wait-staff usually understands English as long it's words that are on

the menu. When placing an order, you can just point to the item you want. You can also add the following phrase, just to show off your Russian: **Ябуду ...** (ya booh-doooh ...) (*I will have ...*) followed by the name of the item.

You can discover more Russian to use while eating out and buying food at a market in [Chapter 9](#).

Going shopping



CULTURAL
WISDOM

To indicate that they want to buy an item, Russians use a language structure that, in a way, reflects the shortages in merchandise they experienced in Soviet times: **Увасесть...?** (ooh vahs yehst'...?) (*Do you have ...?*) plus the name of the item.

A couple of Russian phrases are especially useful when you go shopping. To ask how much something costs, use the phrase **Сколько стоит ...?** (*skohl'-kah stoh-eet...?*) (*How much does ... cost?*), inserting the name of the item if you're buying one thing. If you're buying more than one thing, ask **Сколько стоят...?** (*skohl'-kah stoh-eet...?*) (*How much do ... cost?*), using the word for the items in plural form.

[Chapter 10](#) features a lot more shopping vocabulary and phrases for getting help, trying on clothes, asking for specific colors, and paying for the merchandise you buy.

Exploring entertainment opportunities

Exploring new places and meeting new people are always fun. When you head out on the town, you may