

Russian
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Andrew Kaufman, PhD, and
Serafima Gettys, PhD, with Nina Wieda**



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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* won't make you a fluent reader of Dostoevsky in the original (most Russians themselves need somewhat of a preparation for that). 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, **Zhelayem vam udachi!** (zhih-lah-eem vahm oo-dah-chee; We wish you good luck!)

About This Book

The best thing about *Russian For Dummies* is that you don't have to read all the way through it to get the information you need. 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 of the 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 and 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 phrases in *transliteration* (Russian sounds represented with English characters). You can see the Cyrillic alphabet in Chapter 1. Russian terms are easily found in the text because they are set in **boldface**.
- ✔ Each Russian word is followed by its pronunciation and English translation in parentheses. In each pronunciation, the stressed syllable is in *italics*.

A little example to give you an idea of what we mean: The phrase for “I love you” in Russian is **Ya tebya lyublyu**. (*ya tee-bya lyu-blyu*; I love you.)

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 literal and the idiomatic meanings in parentheses. For instance: **Kak dyela?** (*kakh 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. And the CD has the audio version of these dialogues to help you grasp them even faster!
- ✔ **Words to Know** — This section follows every **Talkin' the Talk** and provides pronunciation and transcription of new words and expressions encountered 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 encountered in each chapter to answer questions and solve puzzles.

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 consists of five parts and an audio CD. Each part of the book offers something different.

Part I: Getting Started

In this part, find the basic essentials of the Russian language. Chapter 1 shows you that you already know some Russian, although it may be a surprise to you. We introduce the Russian alphabet and also give you an idea of how to use your knowledge of English to decipher some Russian words. Chapter 2 gives you a crash course on Russian grammar; it's also the right place to turn to if you want to know Russian numbers. And finally, find your first Russian words — greetings and introductions — in Chapter 3.

Part II: Russian in Action

Part II prepares you for most social situations that you need to handle in Russian. Chapter 4 shows you how to make small talk; Chapters 5 and 6 prepare you to talk about food and shopping. When you have the essentials covered, find out how to talk about fun things, such as going out (Chapter 7), and

sports, reading, and other hobbies (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 equips you with the necessary phrases to make phone calls and send mail. For navigation through serious situations like getting a job or finding an apartment, refer to Chapter 10.

Part III: Russian on the Go

This part covers all the aspects of traveling, from planning your trip (Chapter 11) and discussing transportation (Chapter 12), to arranging for a place to stay (Chapter 13) and settling your financial matters (Chapter 14). Chapter 15 also shows you how to ask for directions, and Chapter 16 prepares you for handling emergencies.

Part IV: 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, ten holidays that Russians celebrate, and ten things never to do or say in Russia or to Russians. This part is also the place to find ten favorite Russian expressions and to pick up ten phrases that make you sound authentically Russian.

Part V: Appendixes

Russian For Dummies also includes four appendixes, which bring together some useful information. In Appendix A, find Russian verb tables. Appendix B is a convenient mini-dictionary for your quick reference. Appendix C offers the answer key to the Fun & Games sections of each chapter. And Appendix D helps you navigate through the attached audio CD; it contains the description of all the dialogues on the CD and tells you in which chapter you can find the text of the dialogue.

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!



This icon indicates which Talkin' the Talk dialogues are included on the audio CD that comes with this book. This CD allows you not only to read but also to hear real conversational Russian.



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.



If you're curious about how the Russian language works, and if you want to expand your command of Russian to the extent of making up your own phrases, these bits of grammatical information may be of interest to you.



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



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.



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

Where to Go from Here

Now that you're familiar with the anatomy of *Russian For Dummies*, 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, Chapter 2 may be a good place to get a grasp of the essentials of Russian grammar. Another good starting point is Chapter 1, which quickly boosts your confidence by pointing out all the Russian words you already know. Or, you can go straight to the sections that deal with something you need urgently: Ordering ice cream is covered in Chapter 5, for example.

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 **Schastlivogo puti!** (shees-lee-vuh-vuh poo-tee; bon voyage!)

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Russian For Dummies

Part I

Getting Started

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"If you open your mouth, I think this will help you get the feel for rolling your r's."

In this part . . .

part I is the beginning of your exciting journey. Here you get the essential information you need to take you through the rest of the book. Chapter 1 puts you at ease as you breeze through the Russian alphabet and discover that you actually already know quite a few Russian words. Chapter 2 gives you the basics of Russian grammar, which you may want to refer to throughout the rest of the book. And in Chapter 3, you start putting your newfound knowledge to work right away with popular greetings and introductions in Russian. So, get ready to start speaking **po-russki** (pah roos-kee; Russian)!

Chapter 1

You Already Know a Little Russian

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting a grip on Russian words you know
 - ▶ Understanding the Russian alphabet
 - ▶ Pronouncing words properly
 - ▶ Discovering popular expressions
 - ▶ Reading Russian with confidence
-

Welcome to Russian! Whether you want to read a Russian menu, enjoy Russian music, or just chat it up with your Russian friends, this is the beginning of your journey. In this chapter, trust your eyes, ears, and intuition, and you quickly discover that Russian isn't that hard after all. When you're done with this chapter, you'll be able to recognize all the letters of the Russian alphabet, discover the basic rules of Russian pronunciation, and be able to say some popular Russian expressions and idioms.

Scoping Out Similarities between English and Russian

You may be surprised to find out that English and Russian are very distant relatives. They both come from the same ancestor — Sanskrit — and both belong to the same family of Indo-European languages. The similarities don't stop there. If you know English, you already know many Russian words.

In this section, you discover Russian words that are already part of English, and you find out about Russian words that have the same meaning and pronunciation as their English counterparts. We also warn you about a few words that sound similar in both languages but have very different meanings.

Identifying Russian words in English

As the world becomes more and more international, languages and cultures are constantly borrowing from and lending to one another, and Russian is no exception. Many Russian words that now appear in English either describe food and drinks or came into use during important historical periods.

Eating and drinking up

If you drink **vodka**, then you can already speak some Russian, because the word, like the drink, came from Russia. Maybe you can even rattle off the differences between **Smirnoff** (smeer-nohf) and **Stoly**. If so, you're already on your way to sounding like a real Russian, because **Smirnoff** is a Russian person's last name, and **Stoly** is an abbreviation for the word **Stolichnaya** (stah-leech-nuh-ye), which means "metropolis" in Russian.

When you go out to eat, do you like to order a great big bowl of **borsh'** (bohrsh'; beet soup) with sour cream? Well, then you're eating one of the most famous Russian dishes, and when you order it, you're using a completely Russian word.

Hearing historical terms

If you're interested in world history, then you probably know that the head of the Russian state in previous centuries was not the president or the king, but the **tsar**, which is just what they called him in Russia, too: **tsar'** (tsahr').

Some of the best-known Russian words actually came into English during the Cold War period, when the Soviet Union was competing with the United States in the areas of science, technology, military, and education. Who would've thought that a short and simple Russian word, **sputnik** (spoot-neek; traveling companion), which refers to the first Soviet artificial Earth satellite, would become a household word in English and even lead to a revolution in American space education? And if you've ever used the word **sputnik**, then you were speaking Russian. **Sputnik** means "companion" in Russian.

Maybe you followed world news in the 1980s. If so, you may remember a guy by the name of Mikhail Gorbachev, who reformed Russian Soviet society. He also added two new words to the English language: **glasnost** and **perestroika**, or in Russian: **glasnost'** (glahs-nuhst'; openness) and **pyeryestroika** (pee-ree-strohy-kuh; restructuring). These words have become part of American speech. Even Ronald Reagan, who was president during Gorbachev's era, liked to repeat the famous Russian phrase, **Dovyeryai, no provyeryai!** (duh-vee-ryahy, noh pruh-vee-ryahy; Trust but verify!), when talking about the new nuclear weapons treaties he was negotiating with the Soviet Union.

Recognizing English words in Russian

Russian today is filled with words that came from English. Words that have a common ancestry are called *cognates*. Cognates are like foreign political refugees or immigrants. They settle down in their new country and start to adapt to their new life, and even begin to look and behave like native words of their new country.



Your ability to recognize English cognates when you read or hear Russian will be very helpful to you. Cognates are your allies, and they greatly increase your Russian vocabulary. Here are some examples of common cognates you should recognize:

- ✓ **aeroport** (ah-eh-rah-pohrt; airport)
- ✓ **akadyemiya** (uh-kuh-dye-mee-ye; academy)
- ✓ **algyebra** (ahl-geeb-ruh; algebra)
- ✓ **amyerykanyets** (ah-mee-ree-kah-neets; American man)
- ✓ **astronomiya** (uhs-trah-noh-mee-ye; astronomy)
- ✓ **bank** (bahnk; bank)
- ✓ **biologiya** (bee-ah-loh-gee-ye; biology)
- ✓ **biznyes** (beez-nehs; business)
- ✓ **biznyesmyen** (beez-nehs-mehn; businessman)
- ✓ **boks** (bohks; boxing)
- ✓ **dyemokrat** (dee-mah-kraht; democrat)
- ✓ **diryektor** (dee-ryek-tuhr; director)
- ✓ **doktor** (dohk-tuhr; doctor)
- ✓ **dokumyent** (duh-koo-myent; document)
- ✓ **effyektivnyi** (eh-feek-teev-nihy; effective)
- ✓ **fyermyer** (fyer-meer; farmer)
- ✓ **filarmoniya** (fee-luhr-moh-nee-ye; philharmonic)
- ✓ **futbol** (foot-bohl; football)
- ✓ **gamburgyer** (gahm-boor-geer; hamburger)
- ✓ **gyenyetika** (gee-neh-tee-kuh; genetics)
- ✓ **gyeografiya** (gee-uhg-rah-fee-ye; geography)

- ✓ **gimnastika** (*geem-nahs-tee-kuh*; gymnastics)
- ✓ **gol'f** (*gohl'f*; golf)
- ✓ **intyeryesnyj** (*een-tee-ryes-nihy*; interesting)
- ✓ **istoriya** (*ees-toh-ree-ye*; history)
- ✓ **kommunizm** (*kuh-moo-neezm*; communism)
- ✓ **kosmonavt** (*kuhs-mah-nahft*; astronaut)
- ✓ **kosmos** (*kohs-muhs*; cosmos)
- ✓ **kryedit** (*kree-deet*; credit)
- ✓ **lityeratura** (*lee-tee-ruh-too-ruh*; literature)
- ✓ **muzyka** (*moo-zih-kuh*; music)
- ✓ **nos** (*nohs*; nose)
- ✓ **profyessor** (*prah-fye-suhr*; professor)
- ✓ **sotsiologiya** (*suh-tsih-ah-loh-gee-ye*; sociology)
- ✓ **sport** (*spohrt*; sports)
- ✓ **sportsmyen** (*spahrts-myen*; sportsman or athlete)
- ✓ **stadion** (*stuh-dee-ohn*; stadium)
- ✓ **studyent** (*stoo-dyent*; student)
- ✓ **styuardyessa** (*styu-uhr-deh-suh*; stewardess)
- ✓ **tyeatr** (*tee-ahtr*; theater)
- ✓ **tyelyevizor** (*tee-lee-vee-zuhr*; TV)
- ✓ **tyennis** (*teh-nees*; tennis)
- ✓ **tyeoriya** (*tee-oh-ree-ye*; theory)
- ✓ **univyersityet** (*oo-nee-veer-see-tyet*; university)
- ✓ **viski** (*vees-kee*; whiskey)
- ✓ **viza** (*vee-zuh*; visa)
- ✓ **vollyejbol** (*vuh-leey-bohl*; volleyball)
- ✓ **zhiraf** (*zhee-rahf*; giraffe)
- ✓ **zhurnal** (*zhoor-nahl*; journal)
- ✓ **zoologiya** (*zuh-ah-loh-gee-ye*; zoology)