

Duolingo Russian grammar

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Chapter 1

Alphabet 1

We'll start with some simple sentences right away. Russian does not have articles, nor does it normally use the verb "to be" in the Present tense.

An em-dash is used instead of "the verb "to be" between the two nouns: «Мокка — кофе» ("A mocha is coffee").

Russian uses a version of the Cyrillic Alphabet. Many letters look similar to their Latin counterparts. As Cyrillic typography was remodeled around 300 years ago, both alphabets have a similar style.

For information on how to install a Russian keyboard layout, please click [here](#).

To switch Duolingo from Latin transliterations to Cyrillic, click the little **Аа-Яя** switch near the top of the screen during a lesson.

1.1 Letters and Sounds

К, О, М, Т, А sound similar to their Latin counterparts (to be more precise, "o" is the sound in "more"). However, in handwriting and typed italics, the letter **Т** can look rather like a lower case 'm' in the Latin alphabet. E.g. in the verb *просить* (to ask for, to request), *m* = t.

Е actually sounds more like "ye", as in "yell", not as in "Hear ye, hear ye!" (this will work for now; it's more complicated after a consonant).

В sounds like 'v', **Б** sounds like 'b'. **Н** is "n" and **И** is "i" ('eeh'). The remaining letters are included in the table below:

Ёё ⁰ (your)	Вв (v ase)	Бб (b ed)
Ээ (red)	Нн ¹ (n ap)	Дд ¹ (d ab)
Уу (soon)	Хх ² (Ba ch)	Гг (g ap)
Ии (meet)	Йй (y es)	Лл ¹ (ni l)

Юю (you)	Рр (trilled R)	Пп (poor)
Ыы ³ (hit)	Сс (S am)	Зз (zebra)
Яя (y ard)	Фф (p hoton)	Цц (cats)
Жж ⁴ (seizure)	Шш ⁴ (shun)	Щщ ⁴
Чч (cheer)		Ъ and Ъ ⁵

- ⁰ Ёё The umlaut-like double dots are optional in writing. Syllables containing this letter are always stressed.
- ¹ т, д, н, л are pronounced near your teeth
- ² х('kh') is somewhat similar to the H in “hue”. It is like making the “sh” sound, only it is pronounced where you make the “K” sound.
- ³ ы has no equivalent in English. It is an “eeh”-like sound, but less distinct, sounds closer to “e” in “lover”, and has your tongue deeper than in “heat” or “hit”.
- ⁴ for ш and ж your tongue is lower than in English and slightly bent back. щ has all your tongue raised—it is a longer and more hissy sound. Ч corresponds to щ (i.e. a bit different than “ch”)
- ⁵ ъ and ъ are separators and have no sound.

Л can have a flat top, like П, or a pointy top like А (it comes from the Greek Λ). Д and Л have a similar top in many fonts, though it’s up to the designer. Handwritten Д looks like *D*, and д like a *g* or a *∂* (the last two affect the italic shapes).

An Italic Г in lower case usually looks this: *г*.



That’s it with the introduction! We will discuss reading words in more detail in later skills.

P.S. In our notes, we use an accute accent to show you the stress (e.g., ра́дио). It is a standard practice in Russian textbooks for little children or foreign learners—and, generally, the most common way of marking the position of the stress.

Chapter 2

Basics 1

2.1 Welcome to our course!

Now you are ready to proceed to the main part of the tree!

We are happy that you have chosen our Russian course. Just to make it clear, we are using American English in this course—but don’t worry, we will accept all versions of English where appropriate. Just be careful around expressions like “bathroom” or “1st floor”, because these may mean different things than what you are used to.

As for Russian, we teach the standard language, which is based on the variation spoken around Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and we stick to the usage typical of these cities. Do not worry, though: for more than one reason Russian is rather uniform over the territory of Russian (still, there is some variation in pronunciation and a few items of everyday vocabulary). We try to stay neutral in style, with occasional trips into formal and informal language.

2.2 Cases and word order

Russian is an inflected language, so the forms of nouns and modifying adjectives correspond to their role in the sentence.

These forms are called **cases**. Russian has 6 cases: Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Prepositional, Dative and Instrumental. The Nominative is the dictionary form; as for the others, we are going to cover them gradually, one by one.

This allows for a more loose word order. But not random! A typical word order is *subject—verb—object*. “Old” information (the things you tell *about*) is normally closer to the beginning of the sentence which is probably why

pronouns are often found closer to the beginning of a sentence than a noun would be :

- *I know him.* → Я **его́** знаю.
- *I know Maria.* → Я знаю **Ма́рию**.

That includes words like “here”, “in this way”, “then” and so on.

Unlike English, adverbs are NOT universally grouped at the end. So pay attention to the typical positions for the expressions of time, place and manner. Eg. “very much” is typically in the end-position in English, but in Russian it is just before the thing that is “very” or “very much”:

- *She likes to read **very much*** = Она́ **о́чень** любит́ чита́ть

Good luck!

2.3 Vowel reduction

Like in English, vowel letters aren’t *all* pronounced just like in the alphabet. In Russian, unstressed syllables have vowels *reduced*:

- **A and O** become the same uh-sound
- **И and Е** (Э) become the same sound similar to “i” in “hit”
- **Я** actually becomes an i-like sound, not an uh-like (except in a few words). This also affects “a” after ч,ш,щ,ж or ц in many words (sadly, not all).

So, when a vowel is not stressed, it becomes weaker, somewhat shorter, and also some vowels become indistinguishable.

The unstressed syllable is strongest just before the stress. In all other places it is even weaker than that (though, some long words, especially compounds, may acquire a secondary stress). This makes the system different from the English one, where stronger and weaker syllables tend to alternate.

2.4 More on the case system

For now, we only study simple sentences that either use the dictionary form, the *Nominative* case, or use the *Accusative* (direct object of an action), which has the same form for many classes of nouns.

The case is defined by its use. Nevertheless, these forms have names, usually calques from Latin that reflect some typical use (but not the only one):

- Nominative (subject)
- Accusative (direct object)
- Genitive (“of” something)
- Prepositional (place or topic)
- Dative (recipient, “indirect” object)
- Instrumental (means of action)

As you can see, these names are of little use until you know what sentence, verb or preposition requires that you use that particular form.

- some nouns of foreign origin are *indeclinable*, i.e. all their forms are the same. This includes words like метро, Дженни or кафе.

Chapter 3

Phrases 1

3.1 Hello

Russian has a more informal greeting «Привёт» and a more formal «Здравствуй(те)». Here, we focus on the first, since it is the shorter one.

When on phone, use «Алло» (Алё).

«Пожáлуйста» (please) has another popular position in the sentence—namely, after the verb (more on that later).

- *you can also use «пожáлуйста» as a reply to “thanks”, meaning “You are welcome!”*

3.2 How are you?

The phrase for “How are you?” literally means “How are your affairs (the stuff you do)?”

No one uses it as a greeting, i.e. you are not expected to use it with people you barely know (or those you know, for that matter). And be prepared for a person to *actually* tell you how they’ve been doing. ;)

3.3 Good morning!

Morning typically starts at 4 or 5 a.m., afternoon at noon, evening at 5 p.m. (at 6 for some) and night at 11 or at midnight.

You only use “Good night” (Спокойной нóчи) when parting before sleep (or saying your goodbyes really late, so it is implied you or the listener are going to bed soon after).

If you are advanced enough to have noticed oblique forms used in some phrases—you are right! Greetings and other similar expressions are often shortened versions of longer phrases, where words still retain their forms. For example, «Спокойной нóчи» probably replaces the longer «Я желаю вам спокойной нóчи!» (I wish you a peaceful night). Needless to say, the full version is never used.

Chapter 4

Basics 2

4.1 *I have a cat*

English prefers to express ownership and “possession” with the verb “have”. In Russian “existence” is almost universally used instead (in the official/academic style «иметь» *to have* is OK to use).

Use it like that:

- **У А есть X** \sim by A there is an X \rightarrow A has an X

The owner is in the *Genitive case* (more on that later) while X is formally the subject. For now we will only study the Genitive form for some pronouns.

4.2 *You have wonderful eyes!*

Omit “есть” if the *existence* of the object is obvious or not the point — very typical for describing traits or a number of objects (“Tom has a beautiful smile/large eyes”, “She has a very fat cat”). This also applies to expressing temporary states and illnesses (“She has a migraine”).

4.3 *I eat/ She eats*

In English, the only way a verb changes in the present tense is that you add -s for the 3rd person singular. In Russian, all 6 forms are different and fit two regular patterns.

However, ***eat*** «есть» and ***want*** «хотеть» are two of the four verbs that are irregular (that is, do not strictly follow any of the 2 patterns).

Note that the “present” tense is formed from one stem and the “past” and infinitive from the second one. In general, these two are slightly different. For now, don’t worry about the infinitive stem.

4.4 Hard and soft

Russian consonants are split into two groups of 15, which are pronounced in two different ways, *palatalized* (aka “soft”) and *non-palatalized* (aka “hard”). We’ll stick to the shorter “soft” and “hard” (sorry).

When a consonant is “soft” it means that you pronounce it with your tongue raised high; for “non-palatalized” consonants it stays low. Russian orthography has its history but, long story short, you can tell the “softness” of a consonant from a vowel letter spelled afterwards:

- **А, Ы, У, Э, О** follow “hard” consonants
- **Я, И, Ю, Е, Ё** follow palatalized ones

If there is nothing after a consonant, the soft sign **Ь** is used to show the softness. In consonant clusters palatalization is predictable from the softness of the last consonant. We aren’t teaching it here. These days the trend is to only “soften” the last consonant in most clusters, while a hundred years ago some clusters were palatalized even without any obvious reason.

To show you how it works, here is an example, using an ad-hoc transcription:

- **жéнщина** = [жэ^hн^hщи^hна]
- **стенá** = [ст^hи^hна] or [с^hт^hи^hна]

There are dictionaries («орфоэпический словарь») that show the recommended pronunciation of words and contain general pronunciation rules, too.

4.5 Voicing

Some consonants let your voice come out immediately (voiced) while others wait for the release of the consonant and only then let your voice escape (unvoiced). In Russian there are 6 pairs of such consonants: Б/П, В/Ф, Г/К, Д/Т, Ж/Ш, З/С.

- whenever one of these consonants (except Б) follows another, the second overrides or reverses the voicing of the first: **сд** = [з^hд], **вс** = [ф^hс]

- the end of the phrase is unvoiced: *этот клуб* [*клуб*]
- rules apply between the word boundaries, too
- X, Ч, Ц, Щ also play this game, even though Russian lacks letters for their voiced partners ([*γ*], [*дж*'], [*дз*], [*ж'ж'*]). They will devoice the preceding consonant or become voiced themselves.

Unlike Ukrainian, Russian only uses [*γ*], [*дж*'] and [*дз*] as voiced variants of x, ч, ц. Ukrainian has them as full-fledged consonants—the ones that are an intrinsic part of a word and can appear anywhere.

Chapter 5

Name and polite “You”

5.1 Thou art

Russian makes a distinction between **ТЫ**, singular “you”, and **ВЫ**, plural “you” (y’all). The latter also doubles for “polite” you, with verbs also in plural. And don’t forget that the “excuse” in “Excuse me” is a verb!

- Use **ТЫ** with friends and your family members
- Use **ВЫ** with adult strangers, your teachers and in other formal interactions (at the store, the doctor’s, the airport etc.)
- People use **ВЫ** with those who are much older
- Nobody is “polite” toward kids

Contrary to what many native speakers have come to believe in the last ten or fifteen years, the polite “you” is not automatically capitalized in Russian, and never was. Such capitalization is used in some formal styles.

5.2 Grandson, son of Grand

As you might know if you ever read any Russian literature, Russians have three names; their first name and their surname—just like you have—and a *patronymic* (отчество), which is based on their father’s name (отец = father). A very common ‘polite’ pattern is to use a person’s first name and a patronymic:

- Ива́н Иванович, вы за́няты? = *Ivan Ivanovich, are you busy?*

In this course, **name+patronymic** are always used with the polite **ВЫ**-form.

5.3 What is your name?

«Как вас зову́т?» is literally “How (do) they call you?”

Russian has a casual diminutive form for many common names, : Ива́н→Ва́ня, Ма́рия→Ма́ша, Алекса́ндр(Алекса́ндра)→Са́ша, Евге́ний(Евге́ния)→Же́ня, Еле́на→Ле́на, Алексе́й→Ле́ша, Пе́тр→Пе́тя. Needless to say, there’s no “politeness” with these, but they are often used with some degree of affection.

5.4 Excuse me...

Russian has two very common polite patterns for questions that English does not:

- **negative** questions give a shade of “by any chance”: «Извини́те, вы не зна́ете Михаи́ла?» = *Excuse me, do you happen to know Mikhail?*
- **“Please tell”** when asking for information: «Скажи́те, пожа́луйста, где музе́й?» = *Excuse me, where is the museum?*

5.5 Thank you

«Спаси́бо» is the word. A fancier option would be «Благода́рю!» (a form of the verb «благодари́ть», “to thank”), though quite a number of people use it, if only for variety.

Chapter 6

Plurals

Here is how the Nominative Plural is formed.

TYPE	ending	Example
-а/-я -nouns	ы/и	ма́мы, зе́мли
-ь -nouns, feminine	и	крово́ати
most consonant-ending masculines	ы/и	сто́лы, ма́льчики
-о/-е -nouns	а/я	о́кна, мо́ря
some consonant-ending masculines	а/я	доктора́, глаза́

(so, the plural «я́блоки» is actually an uncommon way of doing it)
There are some irregular plurals too.

6.1 Spelling Rules

Or maybe not. Sometimes Russian forces your choice of vowel to spell or pronounce after a certain letter.

The 7-letter rule: Whenever you make any form of a word, and you need to write И or Ъ, check this:

- after К, Г, Х and Ц, Ж, Ш, Ч always use **И**

These are velars (“back” consonants) and hushes. For hushes, it is merely a spelling convention, owing to their former “soft” status. For velars, it is true to their pronunciation — i.e., these consonants always use the palatalized И where another consonant would use Ъ:

- страна́ → страны

- строка́ → стро́ки

Of these seven consonants, «K» should be your main concern for now. A lot of nouns have it as a suffix or a part of their suffix, forcing you to remember this rule.

The 8-letter rule: Whenever you make any form of a word, and you need to write А, У or Я, Ю after a consonant, follow the rule:

- after К, Г, Х, Ш, Ж, Ц, Ч **and** Ь, always use **А** or **У**

Chapter 7

Where is it?

Russian words take different forms depending on their role in the sentence. These forms are called **cases**. A few forms may look the same (cf. “frequent rains” vs. “It rains often”).

These forms have names (mostly calques from Latin) that describe some “prototypal” use of such case: Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Prepositional, Dative and Instrumental. For you, these are just tags: the use is what defines a case.

As of now, you know the NOMINATIVE case: the dictionary form of a word. This form acts as the *grammatical subject* of the sentence, the “doer”. It is also used for both nouns in “A is B” structure:

- Мой па́па ест.
- То́м — мой брат.

You also know a few Genitive forms (у **меня**) but that’s it. For now, we will tackle something easier.

7.1 Prepositional case

When we talk about things *being* somewhere, we typically use **в**(in) or **на** (on) with the Prepositional form of the noun. It doesn’t work when you mean *motion* to that place!

The Prepositional case (a.k.a. Locative) is the only case that is *never* used on its own without a preposition, even though only four or five prepositions ever use it:

- Я на ко́нцерте. = I am at a concert.
- Я в шко́ле. = I am at (in) school.

- видео о школе = a video about school

Unlike English (“at/in school”), in Russian each “place” is associated with just one preposition. The rough overall rule is: use “в”(in, at) when talking about buildings and places with certain boundaries and use “на” (on, at) when talking about open spaces or events:

- в доме (*at home*), в школе (*at school*), в комнате (*in the room*), в театре (*in the theater*), в кино (*at the cinema*), в университете (*at the university*)
- на улице (*in the street, outdoors*), на площади (*at the square*), на концерте (*at the concert*), на уроке (*at the lesson*), на корабле (*on a ship*)

When you mean physically being inside/on top of some object, there is little ambiguity. “Places”, unfortunately, require memorization.

7.2 Prepositional endings

Here is the rule that covers most nouns:

- feminine nouns ending in ь take **-и**
- nouns ending in -ия, -ий or -ие also take **-и** (so that they end in -ии instead)
- all other nouns take **-е**

7.3 What about me and my friends?

Use “у + Genitive” when talking about being at some *person’s* place: Да, я у друга = *Yeah, I am at my friend’s place.*

7.4 ▲▼WC

The room with a toilet is туалет. In this course, we stick to the North American “bathroom”, even though a room with a bath is, technically ванная (it has ванна, “a bath”). Still, in Russian you would not ask for a “bath-room” unless you really mean it.

7.5 And what if I gotta go away?

We'll deal with that later. But the pattern is consistent. When you *are* somewhere, going *to* that place and going *away* from that place, use the following triplets:

AT	TO	FROM
в + Prep	в + Acc	из + Gen
на + Prep	на + Acc	с + Gen
у + Gen	к + Dat	от + Gen

For example, if the place is used with **на**, the correct prepositions for the three uses are **на–на–с**.

Chapter 8

Animals 1

8.1 “Spelling rules”

Note how plurals of «соба́ка» and «ко́шка» end in И: соба́ки, ко́шки, even though you might expect А to turn into Ъ.

There are some restrictions on which consonants are used with which vowels when making word forms. Here are the rules for **и, а, у** vs. **ы, я, ю**:

- use only И, not Ъ, after **к, г, х/ ж, ш, щ, ч**
- use only А, У after **к, г, х/ ж, ш, щ, ч** and **ц** (and never use Я, Ю after them)

К, Г, Х are called *velar consonants* (i.e. made in the back) and *Ш, Щ, Ж, Ч* are often called *hushes*. The latter do not show palatalized/non-palatalized pairs in modern Russian, so the spelling rule does not affect pronunciation anyhow. It’s just a convention.

8.2 Fleeting vowels

It is not too important for you at the moment, but you may notice how О and Е sometimes appear in consonant clusters or disappear from them. For example:

- Это лев. = This is a lion.
- В зоопáрке нет льва́. = There isn’t a lion at the zoo.

Later you will encounter the Genitive plural (often used with numbers and words like “many” or “few”), which shows a simple pattern for -к-suffixed feminine nouns that do not have a vowel before “-ка”:

- много кошек = *many cats*
- много девочек = *many girls*
- много уток = *many ducks*
- много тарелок = *many plates*

As you can see, the vowel (O or E) depends on whether the previous consonant is palatalized or not. Hushes behave as if they were palatalized, despite Ж and Ш having lost this quality in the modern language.

Chapter 9

Genitive Case - 1

In Russian “I have” is expressed by «У меня (есть)» structure. The owner is in the *Genitive case*.

9.1 Genitive

"The **of**-case". It is one of the most universal cases. How do you make the forms? Here is the regular pattern:

<i>ENDING</i>		Genitive sg.	soft stem	
-а/-я	мама	мамы	земля	земли
zero-	сок /	сока /	конь	коня
ending	молоко	молока		
<i>masc, -о/-е</i>				
<i>neut</i>				
-ь fem	мышь	мышь		

A **zero ending** means that the word ends in a consonant or a soft sign (which is just a way to show the final consonant is “soft”). In the Nominative singular, a Russian word can only have the following endings: **а, я, о, е, ё** or **nothing** (“zero ending”).

9.2 Genitive of Negation

If you use «нет» to say that there is “no” something or you do not have it, the object is always in Genitive:

У меня есть яблоко → У меня нет **яблока**
 Здесь есть рюкза́к → Здесь нет **рюкзакá**.

9.3 Major uses

- “of” (possession): яблоко мамы = mom’s apple
- “of” (amount): чашка чая, много чая = a cup of tea, a lot of tea

A huge number of prepositions requires this case. Yes, «у меня есть», «У неё есть» only use «меня» and «неё» because «у» wants Genitive.

For *он*, *она* and *оно* Genitive doubles as a non-changing possessive “his”, “her”, “their”: **его**, **её**, **их**.

- initial «н» is used for him/her/them with the majority of prepositions (doesn’t affect possessives)

9.4 Indeclinable nouns

A little side note: some nouns of foreign origin are indeclinable. It means that all their forms are the same. Foreign nouns that end in o/e become like that (кофе, метро, радио, резюме), as well as all nouns that do not fit into Russian declension patterns (see above).

This includes female names that end in anything other than А or Я. A few **-ь**-ending names are an exception (Любовь and Biblical names like Юдифь).

So, all of the following names are automatically indeclinable: Маргарет, Мэри, Элли, Дженни, Рэйчел, Натали, Энн, Ким, Тесс, Жасмин.

9.5 I am away

Russian also uses the Genitive to state that someone is “away”, “not there”: *Мамы сейчас нет*. In English such use would correspond to “There is no mom at the moment”, or even “There is no me now”. We are not hard on that particular construction in the course, but it is important to know it all the same.

*Added bonus: when a verb directly acts on a noun, the noun is called a **direct object** and is in Accusative. In Russian, only -a/-я feminine nouns have a unique form for it. Others just reuse Genitive or don’t change the word at all (Nominative)*

9.6 Nothing

Russian uses . . . let's call it "consistent" negation. It means that in negative sentences you are *required* to use "nothing" instead of "anything", "nowhere" instead of "somewhere" and so on. Let's meet the first of these pronouns:

- У меня **ничего** нет. = I don't have anything.
- Она **ничего** не ест. = She doesn't eat anything.

You'll also notice that, unlike standard English, Russian has no rule against using double negatives.

Chapter 10

Possessives and Gender

10.1 Russian possessives

There isn't much to say about words like “my” or “your” in Russian.

- **his/her/their** do not change: **его́**, **её́**, **их** (and they don't get an initial H after prepositions!)
- **my/your/our** roughly follow an adjectival pattern, i.e. they copy the gender and the case of the noun they describe. Just like **этот**:

- мой/твой/наш папа
- мо~~я~~/тво~~я~~/наша ма́ма

Unlike English, no distinction is made between *my* and *mine*, *her* and *hers* etc.

Pronunciation: in «его́», as well as in adjective endings and “сегодня” the letter Г is pronounced В. It is a historical spelling.

10.2 Grammatical gender

Nouns in Russian belong to one of three genders: feminine, masculine or neuter. If a noun means a person of a certain gender, use that one. For all other nouns look at the end of the word:

ending in Nom.sg.	gender	examples
-а/-я	feminine	ма́ма, земл́я, Росси́я, маши́на
consonant	masculine	сок, ма́льчик, чай, интерне́т, апе́льсин
-о/-е	neuter	окно́, яйце́, мо́ре

ending in Nom.sg.	gender	examples
-Ь	feminine or masculine; consult a dictionary	ло́шадь, но́чь, ма́ть, лю́бь

If there's a soft sign, it isn't possible to predict the gender, at least, not accurately. However, about 65-70% of the most used nouns that end in **-Ь** are feminine. Also, you can learn the common suffixes ending in a soft sign that produce a word of a predictable gender. They are:

- **-ость/-есть, -знь** → feminine
- **-тель, -арь, -ырь** → masculine

*All nouns with **-чь, -щь, -шъ, -жъ** at the end are feminine. The convention is to spell feminine nouns with a soft sign and masculine ones without one: но́ж, лу́ч, му́ж, ду́ш. It doesn't affect pronunciation, anyway.*

Chapter 11

Partitive

As you know, the Genitive case has *lots* of uses in Russian.

One of them expresses **an amount** of something:

- чашка чая = a cup of tea
- тарелка риса = a plate of rice
- корзина яблок = a basket of apples

With mass nouns it is also used to express “some” unspecified amount of that stuff when used instead of the Accusative:

- Я хочу воды = I want (some) water.
- Дайте, пожалуйста, риса. = Could I have some rice, please? (literally, “Give me, please, some rice”).
- Хочешь сока? = Want some juice?

Note that this usage is only characteristic for situations when you ask or hypothesize about using “some or other amount” of a substance. You cannot actually say that you are drinking “воды” right now—but you can say that you want some (or that you sipped some in the past—with a perfective¹, of course).

11.1 чашка чаю

«Чай» has an alternative Partitive form «чаю»:

- Хочешь чашечку чаю? = Want cup of tea?

It is optional. Actually, many short masculine nouns that denote substances used to have such form. However, «чай» is, probably, the only one where the form is immensely popular in spoken speech and does not sound old-fashioned or downright archaic.

11.2 стакан

Russian differentiates between a number of drinking vessels. **Стакáн** is what you call a “glass” in English: typically, a cylindrical vessel made of glass, with no handle. However, if you mean a measurement unit (quite popular in cooking), it corresponds to the English word “cup”. In Russian you use not a cup or rice or flour but a “glass” of rice or flower.

- a beer or a wine glass is «бока́л»
- a smaller wine glass is «рю́мка»

¹ Perfective is an *aspect*. Russian has verbs of two flavors: those that denote “processes” and those that mean “events” (events are never used in the present). I would argue that aspect is the main culprit for consumption verbs here. You can want “воды” forever, but you aren’t “*drinking*” it at any specific moment. Semantically, “some” water only becomes a real amount when you are done, not while you are still at it.

Chapter 12

The Accusative: the Direct Object

12.1 Accusative

Until now, you've been using the base form of the word in sentence like «Он ест **яблоко**».

Actually, whenever a verb, like “read”, “cut” or “want” acts *directly* on some noun, the latter is a *direct object*. Such nouns take the Accusative case.

12.2 Formation

Only feminine nouns ending in **-а** / **-я** have a separate form. «Мама» is a good example of this class :

- ма́ма → ма́му

Neuter nouns and feminine nouns with a final **-ь** (e.g., «мышь») use the Nominative form.

Now we are left with masculine nouns ending in a consonant (сок, медве́дь, бра́т). They use the same form as in Nominative or Genitive:

- living beings (“animate”) copy the Genitive
- objects (“inanimate”) stay Nominative
- in plural this rule applies to all types of nouns

-а/-я	— (masc.)	neuter	-ь (fem.)
-у/-ю	Nom. / Gen.	Nominative	Nominative

With “substances”(mass nouns) **Genitive** may be used instead to convey a meaning of “some” quantity.

Verbs that take a direct object are called *transitive*. Unfortunately, some verbs that are transitive in Russian are not transitive in English (“wait”) and vice versa (“like”).

12.3 I want some

Russian has two main verb form patterns, which we are going to introduce soon. Unfortunately, the verb «хотѣть»(to want) is irregular and mixes both. On a brighter note, it is a very common verb, so you’ll memorize it eventually.

The other notable thing is that it does not have a strong connotation of ‘need’, unlike the English verb “want”. Similarly, the Russian verb for “give”(дѣть) is totally OK for polite requests. Just use it with «пожѣлуйста».

- *the one the ‘giving’ is directed towards is NOT a direct object in Russian. It is called an indirect object and takes the Dative. We’ll deal with it later.*

Chapter 13

Verbs in the Present 1

13.1 E- and И- conjugation

The verbs in Russian change according to person and number. Each form has a different ending. There are only two patterns (apart from some phonetic changes).

	endings	Е- / И- examples
я	-ю (у)	чита́ю, пи́щ ^у / говорю́, ви́жу
ты	-е́шь / -и́шь	чита́ешь, пи́шешь / говори́шь, ви́дишь
он/о́на	-е́т / -и́т	чита́ет, пи́шет / говори́т, ви́дит
мы	-е́м / -и́м	чита́ем, пи́шем / говори́м, ви́дим
вы	-е́те / -и́те	чита́ете, пи́шете / говори́те, ви́дите
они́	-ю́т(у́т) / -я́т (а́т)	чита́ют, пи́шут / говори́т, ви́дят

We will learn these one by one. There are only **four** stems with irregular conjugation. The verbs *хотѣтъ*, *даѣтъ*, *еѣтъ*, *бежѣтъ* and all their derivatives do not strictly follow any of the 2.

Note that if the endings are stressed, Ё replaces Е. Fortunately, a non-past form has only 2 options:

- fixed stress – on the stem (чита́ю, чита́ете, ви́жу, ви́дит) or on the ending (стою́, стои́т, стои́шь)
- “я”-form is has a stressed ending (Я пи́щ^у). The stress is on the stem in the other forms (ты пи́шешь, она пи́шет..)

A verb uses one stem to form Infinitive and Past tense forms. It uses the

2nd one, similar, for non-past and imperative. Thus, as a rule you cannot predict all forms from the infinitive. You can make a guess, though.

13.2 Meals

In this course we use the American English definitions:

- **завтрак** = *breakfast*, a morning meal
- **обед** = *lunch*, a midday meal
- **ужин** = *dinner*, an evening meal

Chapter 14

The Infinitive, Likes and Dislikes

14.1 I like/I love ?

In Russian, you can express liking things and activities pretty much the same way as in English, with similar verbs. The usage differs a bit, though.

A rule of thumb, «Я люблю» means “*I love*” only when directed at a single person (or animal). Otherwise, it’s just “I like”.

- “LOVE” **любить** means a stable, lasting feeling (note the phonetic change for the 1st person singular: “люблю”). A normal, transitive verb, i.e. used with the Accusative. Use it for *loving* an individual or *liking some things/people/activity in general* (verbs take infinitive). Very much preferred in negations of such activities (i.e. “don’t like to wait”)
- “LIKE” **нравиться** means moderate “liking” something or someone, often something specific. Not transitive! The thing liked is the subject, acting indirectly on a person: «Мне нравится стол» = *I like the table*.
- note that «Мне нравится стол» works in a similar way to the English verb “to seem”: “*The table seems good to me*”. The sentence is built as though the table “transmits” the feeling towards you. While rare in English, in Russian, this is pretty typical for feelings and experience to be expressed that way («Мне хорошо»).

Infinitive «нравиться» and 3rd person singular «нравится» are pronounced exactly the same, however, for the sake of consistency they are spelt differently (most infinitives end in «-ть», so -ть + ся = -ться, naturally)

When you refer to generic things and activities, both verbs can be used but «любить» is mildly more useful.

14.2 May I?

Possibility and/or permission are often expressed with words **можно** and **нельзя**.

- Здесь можно жить. = One may live here.
- Здесь нельзя есть. = One cannot/should not eat here.

The English translation may vary. You can specify the person for whom the permission or recommendation applies, in the Dative (but you do not have to):

- Мне нельзя спать. = I should not sleep.
- Нам нельзя много есть. = We should not eat a lot.

P.S. the **-ся** at the end of “нравится” is a reflexive particle and comes after the ending (in verbs, use *-сь* after a vowel, *-ся* after a consonant). Technically, a reflexive verb is one where the subject of the verb acts on itself. As you can see, often this is not always reflected clearly in the meaning. «Нравиться» is one of those verbs that are reflexive “just because”.

Don’t worry about it too much for now, as we’ll be tackling reflexives in more detail further down the tree.

Chapter 15

Food

15.1 Yummy

«для»(for) always takes Genitive nouns

Food offers a delicious intake of mass nouns. Russian has them massed up even where English does not!

- so **карто́шка**(potatoes), **лук**(onions), **шокола́д** are mass nouns in Russian
- and you may recall that mass nouns may be used in Gen. instead of Acc. if you mean “some quantity”: *Купи́ сы́ра/карто́шки.* = Buy some cheese/potatoes.

15.2 'Taters

The formal word for potato is **карто́фель** (German speakers, rejoice), but it's hardly ever used in speech. Use «карто́шка» instead.

The word for tomato is **помидо́р**. There is also the word **тома́т**, but it is

- the plant's name, pretty formal; look on pricetags
- the base stem for derivative products: *тома́тная па́ста* = *tomato paste*
- **посуда** is a word for different containers used for cooking, consuming and further storage of food. English, sadly, does not have the exact equivalent. However, it is obviously “dishes” that you wash and “cook-ware/tableware” that you buy.

15.3 Verbal wisdom

In this skill, we used *perfective* verbs for “cook”, “cut”, “wash”. The reason is simple: that’s the verb you’d use when you want a *single specific* action, often with a result—rather than referring to “activity” (activity may be fun but, in some cases, pointless).

More on that later. For now, just go with the flow.

Chapter 16

Adjectives Basics and Spelling

In Russian adjectives *agree* with the nouns they modify in gender/number and case. Out of 24 combinations only 12 forms are different. This system is completely regular, with no change of stress. The endings have “hard” and “soft” variants depending on the stem (for example, *ый/ий* or “*ая/яя*”).

Here is the Nominative and Genitive for “classic” hard- and soft-stem adjectives (“new”/“blue”):

	NOM	GEN
fem	но́вая/си́няя чашка	но́вой/си́ней ч‘ашки
masc	но́вый/си́ний дом	но́вого/си́него до́ма
neut	но́вое/си́нее окно́	но́вого/си́него окна
pl.	но́вые/си́ние ча́шки	но́вых/си́них ча́шек

note that *masculine* and *neuter* merge in all their forms different from the Nominative one (their Accusative will be the same as the Gen. or the Nom. depending on animacy). In the Nominative there is also -ОЙ masculine ending: **большо́й** (“big”). Only for ending-stressed adjectives.

- ОГО/ЕГО are historical spellings: **г** actually sounds like [в]
- unstressed -ая(яя) /-ое (ее) sound identical in standard Russian: *си́няя* and *си́нее* have no difference in pronunciation.

The following universal rules of Russian spelling will give you the rest of the endings for any adjective you ever meet (there exist 4 patterns at most):

- After **Г-К-Х** (“velars”) and **Ш-Щ-Ж-Ч** (“hushes”) use **И** and never **Ы**

- After **Ц** , **Г-К-Х** (“velars”) and **Ш-Щ-Ж-Ч** (“hushes”) use **А**, **У** and never *Я*, *Ю*
- After **Ц** and **Ш-Щ-Ж-Ч** (“hushes”) use **Е** *when unstressed* and never *О*.

Chapter 17

Conjunctions

17.1 а vs. и

In Russian, **и** is used to show similarity. Otherwise you should use **а**, which shows *contrast*. To be more specific, here are the typical patterns:

- Я мальчик, а ты девочка. = I am a boy and you are a girl.
- Я работаю в кафе, а ты в школе. = I work in a cafe, and you (work) in a school.
- Я люблю спать, а ты нет. = I like sleeping, and you don't.
- А ты? = And you? → often used to indicate a question.

17.2 зато (*negative*, зато *positive*)

A conjunction used for “compensating” for something unpleasant with something that, you imply, is good:

- У нас нет молока, зато есть хлеб = *We don't have milk but we do have bread.*
- Мальчик ещё не умеет писать, зато хорошо читает. = *The boy cannot write yet but he reads well.*

Not exactly the best thing to translate into English (“*on the other hand*”? “*but at least*”? “*thankfully*?”), so it is not often used in this course.

17.3 хотя (‘though’)

Much like the English *though/even though/although*. It is often combined with “и” before the predicate (which is sometimes directly after «хотя»):

- Он здесь, хотя (он) и не знает ничего. = Он здесь, хотя (он) ничего и не знает. = He is here, even though he doesn't know anything.

17.4 как

This conjunction has a rather interesting use, to show when someone perceives someone else's action:

- Я ви́жу, как она́ танцует. = I see her dancing.
- Они́ слýшают, как музыкáнт игра́ет. = They listen to the musician playing.

*For **a**, there is also “narrative” contrast pattern, largely absent from this course (but not from real-life Russian):*

- На столе чашка, а в чашке чай. = *There is a cup on the table, and the cup has tea in it.*
- Он здесь, а это значит — воды нет. = *He is here, and that means there's no water.*
- Такси — это машина, а машины не всегда хорошо работают. = *A taxi is a car, and cars do not always work well.* (here, you are making your point by introducing a new thought “unexpected” by a listener)

Chapter 18

There is

18.1 Word order

To say “there is/are” in Russian, do the following:

- say THE PLACE
- then the verb (if any)
- then THE OBJECT

«есть» is not used, unless the sentence really has to emphasize the existence of the object. Some examples:

- На столé лóжка. = There is a spoon on the table.
- На стýле ма́льчик. = There is a boy on the chair.
- В до́ме никогó нет. = There is no one in the house.
- На столé лежít ко́шка. = A cat is lying on the table.

In the Present tense no verb is necessary; in the past, you would at least need a form of “to be”. Note that even in the present Russian still uses verbs like “is situated”, “stands”, “lies” way more often than would be considered normal in English.

The most natural translation into English is a structure like “There is an apple on the table” or “An apple is on the table”. The emphasis is on the object, not on the place.

Actually, such a sentence answers the question of WHAT is in the said place. For out-of-the-blue sentences about objects that have nothing unique about them it matches what English THERE-IS sentences are for. So this is what we have in this course.

18.2 Actions

The initial position of a “place” inside the sentence holds for many other structures, too. Whenever the place is not a part of the “message” of your sentence, it is usually somewhere at the beginning (that is, if the place frames your description of an action rather than providing crucial information).

If the whole point of uttering a sentence is telling someone about the place then, naturally, it takes the sentence-final position:

- Завтра я в Нью-Йорке. = I am in New York tomorrow. (not somewhere else)

18.3 lies/stands

You don’t have to translate verbs like “to stand” and “to lie” literally when they refer to objects. Such use is not, by a wide margin, nearly as standard in English as it is in Russian:

- На столе стоит чашка. = *A cup is (“stands”) on the table.*

In English “to be” is perfectly fine, so we accept that.

Chapter 19

Questions

19.1 Where

Russian makes a distinction between being somewhere (тут/здесь, там) , going there (сюда, туда) and coming *from* there (отсюда, оттуда)—so naturally question words follow suit:

- Где? = Where (at)?
- Куда? = Where to?
- Откуда? = Where from?

19.2 What or what are you?

Russian uses «Кто» (who) when asking about identity and occupation and «Что» is used for objects rather than people. Since Russian nouns have cases, **кто** and **что** also change depending on their role in the implied sentence. As you will discover a little bit further down the tree, «Кто» behaves rather like a masculine adjective.

CASE	What	Who	Whose
Nom.	что	кто	чей, чьё, чья , чьи
Gen.	чего	кого	чьего, чьего, чьей, чьих
Acc.	что	кого	Gen/Nom; «чью» for Fem.
Prep	чём	ком	чём, чьём, чьей, чьих

19.3 Почему? and Зачем?

- **Почему** is used when asking a question about a cause of some event or action. It is a question that looks back at the past.
- **Зачем** starts a question about the **purpose** of some action or some event that can have one. It is a question that looks towards a desired future.

In a few regions of Russia (Tatarstan, for example) people may use *зачем* for both questions if their usage of Russian is influenced by a major local language that makes no distinction between the two. In Standard Russian these are two clearly separate entities.

Chapter 20

People 1

20.1 Vocabulary

- **директор** is usually the main boss, akin to CEO in English. Also the Principal or Head Teacher of a school.
- **ученик** is a school student or a “follower” or “disciple” of some “teacher” in a more spiritual sense. AmE speakers may confuse it with “студент”, which is strictly a college-level student.
- **коллега** is your first word of *common* gender, i.e. its gender depends on who you are referring to.

Chapter 21

Around you

21.1 Do that the English way

To express the idea of speaking some language, or something being written in that language, Russian has adverbs literally meaning “Russian-ly”, “English-ly” etc.. :

- Я не говорю по-ру́сски. = I do not speak Russian.
- Вы говори́те по-а́нглийски. = Do you speak English?

They are formed from **-ский** adjectives by attaching **по-** and changing the tail to bare **-ски**: по-ру́сски, по-и́тальянски, по-япо́нски, по-вьетна́мски, по-амери́кански, по-фра́нцузски and so on.

And remember, these words actually mean something done “in a certain way”, so «суши по-американски» (American-style sushi) should not surprise you!

21.2 Locative 2

A relatively small group of short masculine nouns have an accented **-y** ending with *в/на* in the meaning of place (and only then):

- Мы в аэропорту́. = We are at the airport.
- Я сплю́ на полу́. = I sleep on the floor.

Our course has about a dozen of them (there are about 100 in the language). Also, there exists a very small group of feminine nouns, all “-ь”-ending, that have a stressed Locative-2 ending:

- Твой сві́тер в кро́ви. = Your sweater is covered in blood.

All these nouns use their normal Prepositional form with “о” and “при”.

совсѐм This word is used with qualities that manifest “totally”— usually with negatives:

- Он совсѐм не рабѳтает. = He doesn’t work at all.
- Том совсѐм не ест. = Tom doesn’t eat at all.
- Мы совсѐм близко. = We are really close (i.e. almost there).

междунаро́дный It comes from «ме́жду» + «наро́ды», i.e. “between”+“peoples”, which is quite literally “international”.

The loanword «интернациональный» means the same but has quite limited use in certain combinations like “international team” or “international debt” (mostly these are from political contexts). This course largely avoids this word.

Probably, “international team/orchestra” etc. is the context where you must use «интернациональный»).

живѳтное The word for an “animal” is a nominalised neuter adjective, and its case forms follow adjectival pattern. Of course, its gender is fixed:

- Это живѳтные. = These are animals.
- Я люблю живѳтных. = I like animals.

Chapter 22

Prepositions and Places

22.1 Verbs of motion

Russian distinguishes between “going” on foot and by some sort of vehicle. If you aren’t moving within the city, use a ‘vehicle verb’ **ехать** (one-way movement) or **ездить** (repeated, round trip or in general). More on that later, in “Motion verbs”.

22.2 Into/onto... at-to?

Once again, with **в** and **на** you use Prepositional for *location*, and Accusative for *direction*:

- Я живу́ в Лондоне. ~ I live in London.
- Я еду́ в Лондон. ~ I am going (by vehicle) to London.

Here is a ‘cheat sheet’ of forms you’ll need for places (no living beings, so—the easy Accusative for masculine):

Nominative	Асс.	Prep.	example
-а/-я	-у/-ю	-е	Америка → в Америку/в Америке
ø/-о/-е	ø/-о/-е	-е	стол → на стол / на столе
-ь <i>feminine</i>	-ь	-и	дверь → на дверь/на двери
-ия	-ию	-ии	Англия → в Англию/в Англии
-ие	-ие	-ии	здание → в здание / в здании

22.3 Word choice

For “outdoors” Russians use **«на улице»** (literally, “on the street”).

The preposition **о** (об) means “about” only as in the sense of “thinking/writing about”. Don’t use it for “approximately”. With **«мне»** a special form is used, **обо**.

The contraction “USA” or “the U.S.” is **США** (сэ-шэ-А, with the stress on the last vowel).

There is no difference drawn between “city” and “town”.

In Russian it is typical to describe objects as “standing”, “lying”, “being situated”, “hanging”. This is rare in English, and often sounds unnatural, therefore in this course it is perfectly OK to translate a “whereabouts”-verb with a simple “is”, “was” etc.

22.4 Here and there, and here

For “here”, the words **здесь** and **тут** are almost completely interchangeable in any imaginable context. **Тут** is considered a bit more informal, and is used in set expressions (**тут же** ~ right away, **тут и там**). **«Здесь»** is somewhat less suitable for figurative meanings (when by “here” you mean the current situation rather than a place). In this course, they are completely interchangeable when not being used in a set expression.

находиться is a verb to denote the whereabouts of things, and, sometimes of people (when the emphasis is on exactly where they are). It could be translated as “to be situated” or “to be located”, but as these verbs usually sound rather formal in English, so you can just use “to be”.

около is almost the same as **«возле»**. It can also be used in the sense of “about”(=approximately).

Chapter 23

Verbs Present 2

23.1 \rightarrow and \Rightarrow

There are two options for verbs of **going**: a specific 1-directional verb and also repeated motion, multi-directional verb. For now, stick to this rule for **идти́ / ходить́**:

	ENG	RUS
right now \rightarrow	I <i>am going</i> .	Я иду́ . \rightarrow
<i>habitual</i> \Rightarrow	I often <i>go</i> there.	Я ча́сто туда́ хожу́ .
<i>generic</i> $\rightsquigarrow \curvearrowright \curvearrowleft$	The baby already <i>walks</i> . I <i>am walking</i> (around).	Ребе́нок уже́ ходи́т .

23.2 Asking

- **проси́ть** \rightarrow to ask for/beg for/request something
- **спра́шивать** \rightarrow to ask a question (i.e. ask for information)

In other words, when using *про́сит*, one wants to be given something (or for something to be done). He who *спра́шивает*—wants an answer.

By the way, “to ask a question” is, actually, «зада́ть/задава́ть вопро́с». Those who speak German may recall *eine Frage stellen*, which works in a similar way (apparently, “to ask an asking” is no good in German, either).

23.3 Negative sentences

Remember that Russian sort of uses double and triple negatives. To be more precise, it is coordinated negation: when the sentence is negative, you should

automatically negate every pronoun referring to *someone, anywhere, some time, anything, in some way* and so on:

- Мы никогда нигу́да ни с кем не ходи́м = We never go anywhere with anyone (Literally, “We never to nowhere with nobody don’t go”).

They all change to *nobody, nowhere, never, nothing, by no means* and so on. *No one* and *nothing* will have the correct case (though, “nothing” is virtually always *ничего*, not *ничто*)

23.4 Adverbs

The typical position for **-o(-e)-ending** adverbs is *before* the verb. For example:

- «Он хорошо ви́дит» = “He sees well”.
- «Том бы́стро ушёл» = “Tom left quickly”

23.5 Consonant mutation.

You might have noticed that the consonant before the ending is sometimes different in the infinitive than in the personal forms. It is called *mutation* and is quite similar to the process that makes “tense” into “tension” (where an “s” turns into a “sh”). Here are the patterns you might encounter:

- Б, П, В, Ф, М adding Л (люби́ть / люблю́)
- С, Х becoming Ш (писа́ть / пишу́)
- Д, З becoming Ж (ви́деть / ви́жу)
- Т, К becoming Ч (плати́ть / плачу́)
- СК, СТ becoming Щ (пусти́ть / пу́щу)

If there is alteration, there is a rule:

- **И-conjugation verbs** only have 1st person singular mutated. It is normal (e.g. люблю́ / любит)
- **Е-conjugation verbs** have mutation in ALL personal forms (if any). It is *non-productive behaviour*, which in practice means that a lot of popular verb stems still have this behavior (e.g. писа́ть, сказа́ть). However, new E-conjugation verbs do not get this pattern.

рисова́ть → рису́ю, on the other hand, is a regular transformation of -ова́ть/-ева́ть verbs

23.6 Playing

The verb «играть» is used as follows:

- **в** + Accusative for games
- **на** + Prepositional for musical instruments

For example, Я играю в футбол / Я играю на гитаре.

Chapter 24

Time and Numbers

24.1 Using numbers with nouns

Let's focus on the Nominative for now (this also works when Acc.=Nom). Russian numbers may seem a bit weird. The case of the noun depends on the last word of the number:

last word	means	Case	example
один (<i>одна́, одно́, одну́</i>)	1	Nom. sg.	один дом, одна́ ма́ма, двадца́ть одно́ окн
два (<i>две</i>), три, четы́ре	2, 3, 4	Gen. sg.	две ко́шки, два столá, три ма́льчика, три
Larger than that	5, 6, 12, 100 etc.	Gen. pl.	пять ко́шек, пять ма́льчиков, двадца́ть п

Just like English, Russian has words for *eleven through nineteen*, so they fall into the “larger” category.

Genitive plural has a rather bizarre set of patterns, so a separate skill later on will teach you how to make it for most nouns.

24.2 Expressions

- *I am 10 (years old)* = Мне де́сять (лет) Note the Dative “мне” and the number in the Nominative. The Genitive plural “лет” is irregular.

The Dative forms of он, она and они are ему, ей, им respectively.

- *at 9 o'clock* = в де́вять часо́в → the Accusative here (same as the Nominative)
- *at 2 in the morning* = в два (часá) но́чи (in Russian ‘morning’ starts at about 4-5 a.m.)

- *in January, June. etc.* = в январé, ию́не ... (Prepositional). Note that all the month names are masculine nouns.
- the beginning/end of July = нача́ло/коне́ц ию́ля

Why are Russian numbers so strange? Well, for 2-3-4 these are the remnants of Dual number (which is between the singular and the plural). As for the larger numbers, they are essentially “nouns”: *a heap of cats, a lot of cats, a thousand... of cats.*

24.3 Сейчас

Russian uses two words for “now”. One is «сейчас», which means “now, at the moment”, and describes the current moment in a neutral manner, often implying that things change and the state described is attributed to this particular moment. It can change soon:

- Сейчас никого нет дома. = No one is home (right) now.
- Сейчас пять утра. = It is 5 a.m. now.

Теперь is the “now” you use when things are different from “before”. You imply that the situation has changed. It is also associated with a more prolonged period of time, i.e. the state of affairs is different from before, and will stay so for now:

- Мы теперь работаем в главном офисе. = We now work at the main office. (*We did not, but now we are, and things are going to stay like that for some time*)

24.4 время

The noun «время» (“time”) belongs to a really small class of neuter nouns. Its Genitive form is времени, and all other oblique forms also retain the -ен part.

Chapter 25

Family

Not much to say here, except that Russian does not have a special word for *siblings* or *grandparents*.

Unlike English, Russians rarely say “my mother”, “my grandfather”; usually they omit “my”.

25.1 свой ~ one’s own

...And when they don’t, it is more natural to use reflexive “свой” (one’s own). English does not have anything quite like that. Essentially, it is a substitute for *my*, *your*, *his*, *her* etc. that you use when it refers to the person (or thing) that is the subject of the sentence or, at least, the clause you are in. A few typical examples:

- Кошка ест из *своей* миски = The cat is eating out of *its* bowl.
- Мы у (*своих*) родителей = We are at *our* parents’ place. (here you can omit “своих”)
- Я думаю, он у *своих* родителей = I think he’s at *his* parents’ place.

Forms of «свой» follow the same mostly-adjectival pattern that «мой», «твой», «ваш», «наш» and «этот» use: свой, своя, своё, свои → своего, свою, своих. . .

Since «свой» describes something belonging to the subject of the sentence, it cannot be used with the subject of the sentence itself. The exception is made when you are making generalisations, e.g. “One’s (own) reputation is always more important” ~ «Своя репутация всегда важнее».

Pay attention to what the *grammatical subject* is. Sentences like «Мне нравится у своей сестры» are sort-of-OK sometimes, but you are really treading on thin ice here. This one sounds almost normal, while some others would immediately look unnatural.

25.2 Mister!

In spoken Russian «дядя»(uncle) and «тётя»(aunt) are often used to refer to some adult “guy” or “woman”. A special case is children’s use, since they often use it even as a form of address (“тётя Маша!”).

Chapter 26

People 2

26.1 A student

Russian has different words for a school student (aka *a pupil*, BrE) and a college-level student, which both have masculine and feminine versions:

- **уче́ник** / **уче́ница** – a school student or a student/apprentice in general, especially in spiritual sense
- **студе́нт** / **студе́нтка** – a college or university-level student (attends a corresponding institution)

Молоде́ц is a word you use when someone “did a good job”. It comes with a patronizing shade, so ideally you use it towards your friends or actual students/ subordinates (but not towards people whose work you are in no position to judge).

26.2 5 men

When you are counting people, use “челове́к” for numbers that end in «пять» (5) or more. Anywhere else use the normal Genitive plural “люде́й” (with *много* and *мало* both are possible, but I’d stick to *люде́й*).

26.3 Learning and studying

OK, Russian has a number of ways to express learning, but in this course we have **учи́ться**, **учи́ть**, and **занима́ться**. The 1st verb, **учи́ться**, is introduced in this skill. Here is a bit more:

	meaning	exam
учи́ться	to study (e.g. to attend classes or to do self-study)	Днѣ
учи́ться в(на) + Prep.	to study somewhere; to be in <i>nth</i> grade/ <i>nth</i> year	Дѣв
учи́ть + Acc.subject	to learn, to memorize something («наизу́сть» = “by heart”)	Я у
учи́ть + Acc + Dat	to teach somebody something	Я у

26.4 Doctor

The usual word for a (medical) doctor is «**врач**». Then you have «до́ктор», which is also OK but informal. However, a “doctor” as a person with this level of post-graduate qualification is «до́ктор» with no alternatives.

Chapter 27

Weather and Nature

27.1 It's raining

“To go” is the verb used for precipitation in Russian:

- Идёт дождь = It is raining.
- Идёт снег. = It is snowing.
- Идёт град. = it is hailing (*we don't have it in the course*).

27.2 in summer/winter

Russian has adverbs for “in spring”, “in summer” etc. They are formed as the *Instrumental* case of a corresponding noun.

We'll cover Instrumental in detail later. Right now just get used to the words themselves:

- Весной мокро. = It's wet in spring
- Зимой хорошо = It's good/nice in winter.
- Осенью грязно. = It's muddy in the fall.
- Летом солнечно. = It is sunny in summer.

Russians usually assign each season 3 months, i.e. winter is December through February and spring is March through May (even if you have snow well into April).

27.3 Category of State

It is easier than it sounds. When expressing a “state”, some modality, or one's opinion on the situation, Russian often uses these *impersonal* words,

saying that such and such state is observed:

- Мне **хóлoдно**. = I'm (feeling) cold.
- На úлице **теплó**. = It is warm outside.
- **Хорoшó**, что вы тут. = It is good you are here.
- **Трúдно** сказа́ть. = It is hard to say.

Many are homonymous with adverbs and short-form adjectives. So we'll study them later with adjectives. For now, we' only have a handful of such words useful when discussing the weather.

Needless to say, these do not use any grammatical subject and are quite useful with verbs like “to be” and “to become” (“It’s getting warmer”).

The concept of “category of state” is not even taught to native speakers. However, it does have a distinctive pattern of use. Makes it easier to learn when you know why you say «мне хóлoдно».

Chapter 28

Sport

28.1 win/lose

Here you encounter two *perfective* verbs; these two very obviously refer to a specific result:

- Ты проиграл! = You lost!
- Нам надо выиграть. = We need to win.

Note the formation of the past. If you remember *был, была́*—all Russian past forms are essentially formed the same way. The endings correspond to gender and number:

masc	fem	neut	pl
—	-а	-о	-и

We'll be practising many more past forms in the skill in the next row.

28.2 Reflexive

As a reminder, if a verb has **-ся** at the end, you stick it after the usual ending («-сь» is used after a vowel):

- катáться на лы́жах = to ski
- Я катáюсь на лы́жах = I ski.

28.3 «бежа́ть», to run

In this skill, we introduce the one-way verb “to run”. You may not remember but it has one of the four irregular stems:

SING.	PLUR.
Я бе́гу	Мы бежи́м
Ты бежи́шь	Вы бежи́те
Он бежи́т	Они бе́гут

Chapter 29

Adjectives 1

In Russian the adjective *agrees* with the noun it modifies in gender(number) and case. Fortunately, the system is *completely* regular and the stress stays the same. The forms for the cases you know are:

ENDINGS	masculine	neuter	feminine
Nom.	-ый(ой)/-ий	-ое/-ее	-ая/-яя
Acc.	Nom. or Gen.	-ое/-ее	-ую/-юю
Gen.	-ого/-его	see masc.	-ой/-ей
Prep.	-ом/-ем	see masc.	-ой/-ей

The plural ending in the Nominative is **-ые (ие)**. We will address the oblique forms later in the course.

(we are not teaching possessive adjectives for now,)

A few examples:

- Я живу в большом городе. (Prep.,masc.)
- Дайте большого кота. (Acc.,masc.)
- Нам надо найти хорошую книгу. (Acc.,fem)

29.1 velars and hushes

Adjectives with the stem on **-к, -г, -х, -ш, -щ, -ж, -ч** will use “и”, “а”, “у” instead of “ы”, “я”, “ю” so watch carefully (“русский”, for instance).

We will tackle the endings one at a time.

29.2 целый vs. весь

In Russian the idea of “the whole” of something can be expressed by either «целый» or «весь». The former is used when implying the unexpectedly “large” amount; it is the one we’re teaching in this skill:

- Он целый день спит. (normally, a person should have been awake for a long time)

Chapter 30

Past & Infinitive

30.1 The infinitive stem

In Russian the Past tense and the Infinitive are formed from the same stem.

The forms are actually much easier than in the Present because there are only four forms in total for *masculine/feminine/neuter + plural*, similar to adjectives (the forms were participles once).

VERB	masc	fem	neut	pl
ending	—	-а	-о	-и
быть	был	была́	было́	были
есть	ел	ела́	éló	эли

«идти» and all its derivatives (пойти́, прийти́, найти́..) has a strange, irregular past stem:

walked, went: он пошёл, она пошла́, оно пошло́, они пошли́

For the masculine form, there is a phonetic simplification for verbs with infinitives in *-чь, -сти/-зти, -зть/-сть*. For example “мочь”(“can”), “ползти́”(crawl) and “лезть”(climb): он *мог, полз, лез* — no final **Л** here.

This skill mostly covers the past form of imperfective verbs (only «устáть» and «подождáть» are perfective). What it means for you is that when 2 or more such actions are mentioned, they were all happening at the same time or in no particular order. Why? Imperfective verbs like «идти́», «жить», «говорить» are by nature unspecific about their exact time frame.

- they express repeated or prolonged action
- they express action in progress
- they can also express the fact that an action has or has not occurred (with or without details on “when” it took place).

30.2 What about the present form?

For some verb types the two stems are nearly identical (понимать, говорить). Which is a good thing for you!

Chapter 31

Shopping

31.1 Give me that!

By now, you have probably noticed a surprising lack of “that one” in Russian. The thing is, Russian mostly uses “этот” both for “this” and “that”, unless you need to make a contrast between “this one here” and “that one there”.

However, when you are really pointing at things, use whatever you like!

- «ВОТ ТУТ» ~ right here; «ВОТ ЭТОТ» ~ “this one here”
- «ВОН ТАМ» ~ over there; «ВОН ТОТ» ~ “that one over there”

(“ВОТ” is acceptable with both)

31.2 Clothing

- **одежда** is a mass noun for “clothes”, **обувь** for footwear.
- **туфли** are also “shoes”, but a more specific kind: “dress shoes” or the shoes you’d use with a gown
- **ботинок** . . . a dictionary will say it’s a bit higher than a “dress shoe”. In reality, especially in men’s speech, the word is often used for shoes, too
- **сапог** is most definitely a boot
- **пальто** is typically a long outer garment
- **куртка** is more generic but usually refers to a shorter outer garment—with proportions not much different from a shirt
- **рубашка** is the word used for shirt. «Сорочка» is a formal word for a shirt that is worn as a part of a suit (eg. with pants, a jacket and a necktie), but people still use “рубашка” anyway.

31.3 a bigger/smaller shirt

From the **Adjectives** skill you might remember «большее» and «меньшее» as words for “more/bigger” and “less/fewer/smaller”. Since these work as adverbs, it is problematic to use them with nouns.

Instead, the words «**побольше**» / «**поменьше**» are used AFTER a noun:

- Я хочу стол побольше/поменьше.
- Дайте яблоко побольше.

This works with some other popular adjectives: подлиннее, покороче, получше. When not used with nouns directly, these have a colloquial quality.

Actually, with adjectives other than *большой/маленький* you may resort to «более длинное пальто». However, «более большое»? No. Just no.

Chapter 32

Dative and Plurals

32.1 The Dative Case in Russian

You have already seen that many **expressions of feelings and experience** use the Dative: “Мне нра́вится...”, “Ма́ме хоро́шо”, “Ему́ 5 лет”, “Мне ка́жется...” etc.

The Dative introduces an *indirect object* of an action: usually the person whom the action is directed towards. An example would be a sentence like “I handed a package to *my mom*”: “my mom” here is a recipient.

Actually, this depends on the verb, just like in English. Some popular verbs of speech, writing or “giving” will use the bare Dative for the recipient: *говори́ть, сказа́ть, пи́сать, чита́ть, да́ть, прине́сти* and so on.

32.2 Dative prepositions

- **по**: the basic meaning is “movement along the surface”(“covering” it) which may realise as “walking around the park”, “running down the street”, “looking for it all over the house” etc.
- **к**: towards, to. Often used when you are going towards somebody (“towards Anna” = «к Анне»)
- several bookish prepositional phrases like «благодаря́» (thanks to) or «вопреки́» (contrary to)

По has an additional meaning, “apiece” or “each” : «Они́ взяли по три я́блока» = “They took 3 apples each”.

There is a bookish use of «по» meaning “upon”. It goes with Prepositional, and is mostly used in set prepositional phrases like «по оконча́нии» (upon completion).

32.3 Cases in plural

Plurals generally have only **one pattern** shared by all nouns. The ending only depends on the case, not the class of a noun: «я говорю о домах, странах, городáх, яблоках, дочеря́х».

Only the Nominative and (especially) the Genitive have a number of different plural endings that depend on the class of a noun.

Chapter 33

Speaking 1

33.1 Sequence of tenses in Russian

There is no sequence of tenses in Russian whatsoever.

The information in a subordinate sentence is understood to be relative to the main clause:

- Он сказа́л, что не зна́ет. = *He said he didn't know.*

So if the piece of information is simply about where things are or what someone does, use present tense in the subordinate clause.

33.2 ли

Use the particle “ли” in reported questions or situations when you don’t know which option is true:

- Я спроси́л, зна́ет ли он Москвú. = *I asked him if he knew Moscow.*
- Мы не зна́ем, бу́дет ли он в о́фисе. = *We don't know whether he is going to show up in the office.*

The particle is attached to the word that is in doubt. It needn’t be a verb, for instance, «Я не зна́ю, в Москвé ли он» (i.e. whether he is in Moscow or in some other city). The particle generally attaches to the first stressed word of the clause.

33.3 Talk or say?

The verb *говори́ть* is used both as “to say, to tell” and as “to talk, to speak”. When you report someone’s words, obviously, the 2nd meaning is in action:

- Она говори́т, что хо́чет спать. = She says that she wants to sleep.

Russian has a whole set of **perfective** verbs. The thing is, usually you arrange verbs neatly into closely matching pairs of *imperfective* + *perfective*. And these are different for the two meanings of «говори́ть»:

- to say → говори́ть / сказа́ть
- to speak → говори́ть / погово́рить

Remember «Скажи́те, пожа́луйста . . . » ?

Rather than referring to ongoing actions or past(future) actions in general, perfective verbs refer to actions in a point-wise manner, ignoring the action’s inner structure. That is, such “singular” actions happen at some particular “moment” and can be conveniently arranged in a sequence when telling a story. This distinction is about to come into focus in one of the following skills.

Chapter 34

Perfective Verbs -1

34.1 Aspect in Russian

Verbs in Russian come in two ‘flavors’ : *perfective* (eg. “приготóвить”) and *imperfective* (eg. “готóвить”).

Let’s get this straight right away: most perfectives are made by attaching a prefix—and the endings of the resulting verb change in the same way they changed for the source verb.

Perfective verbs express an action, an “event” linked to a point in time. Sometimes they assert the presence of a result. You use them for sequences of actions, too.

Imperfective verbs are used for everything else: processes, states, repeated actions and for generic reference to an action (when the time of occurrence is irrelevant).

In this introductory lesson we deal with the most basic pattern of use:

- **perfective verbs** are used to tell stories about **successive** actions
- imperfectives are used for *simultaneous* processes
- **perfective verbs** are often used to describe *single* actions that have a specific result, e.g., “Give me that”, “I bought some food”, “I have painted many pictures”. However, not all of them can be reliably described like that.
- we use imperfective to tell that someone has or has never done something, especially in “out of the blue” situations. When the action was *supposed* to be done (which is known by listener), we use the perfective.

34.2 Morphology

Being too lazy to make up many different verbs, we usually make new ones based on the old ones. The vast majority of unprefixed verbs are imperfective.

- **Prefixation** is the main method to create a perfective verb: писать → написать, идти → пойти.
- a different **suffix** is sometimes used: опаздывать ← опоздать
- occasionally, the **stress** changes: нарезать → нарёзать
- **different stems** are used for a few verbs: говорить → сказать

The last phenomenon is known as *suppletion* and only happens for a limited number of verbs and their derivatives. The English verb “to go” is another example of such behavior (its past form is “went”).

Note that suffixation is very popular for *secondary* imperfectives. Usually only one prefixed verb is considered an “ideal match” for an imperfective verb. Others are somewhat different in meaning (or a lot different). But you need imperfective partners for these, too, so Russian uses suffixes for that:

- читать = to read (imperf.)
- перечитать = to reread (perf.) → *cannot be considered a “natural” perfective for this verb*
- перечитывать = to reread (imperf.)

34.3 can

The verb «мочь» is used to talk about the general possibility of something, and also, very often—about your ability to perform something and reach some result. Perfectives are used in the second meaning:

- Я могу написать книгу за месяц = I can write a book in a month.
- Она может посмотреть? = Can she take a look?

We do not use мочь for skills. Russian has **уметь** for this.

34.4 опять / снова

Both mean “again” and are largely interchangeable when they mean that an action from the past occurs again.

«Опять» is more popular but it's focused on staying “the same as before”. «Снова» (cf. «новый») can also mean action performed “anew, from the beginning”.

Only «опять» is used in «опять же» (~“besides”).

When asking someone to repeat, use «ещё раз».

34.5 What else is there to it?

imperfective verbs

- name the action as a whole (“I can *swim*”)
- describe prolonged *states* and *processes*, regular actions

Perfective verbs describe **events**: singular, definite actions that are viewed as localized in time. They “happened” at some moment (“I made a video”, “I slept for some time and then went outside”). Or they describe a certain change of state at some “turning point” (not yet eaten→eaten, not slept enough→slept enough and ready to get up).

It is argued in a few works that “a natural” perfective is just a prefixed verb where a prefix’s metaphorical meaning so conveniently overlaps the verb’s own meaning, that you cannot feel any change. So don’t be surprised if some vague actions have several perfective matches for a single imperfective verb.

That also means that sometimes you’d better memorize a pair even if it is technically a “poor” match. After all, in some contexts it will come in handy:

- есть → съесть (to consume something, completely)
- есть → поесть (to have a meal, to spend some time eating—regardless of whether you finish your meal or decide you’ve had enough half-way)

Chapter 35

Instrumental Case

35.1 Fortunately, this is the very last case!

It is used for some very specific meanings, that's why we've put off covering it for so long.

- It is used alone for a “tool” or an “agent” of an action. English mostly uses “with” or “by” instead: “**молотком**” (with hammer), “**ветром**” (by wind), “**силой**” (by force)
- It is used alone with some verbs of “being”, “becoming”, “seeming”: *Я стал учителем* ~ “I have become a teacher”

It is also used with prepositions: - **с (со)** = “with” (together with someone/something) — note that with prepositions “Я с ней” or even “Мы с ней” is the most natural way of saying “She and I” - **за/ перед** — behind/ in front of - **над/ под** — above/under - **между** — between (also used with Genitive)

35.2 Мы с тобой

When you tell someone about “you and I” or “my friend and I” etc., it is most idiomatic to use **мы с** + your companion in Instrumental.

- Мы с тобой друзья. = You and I are friends.
- Мы с мамой вчера купили компьютер. = Mom and I bought a computer yesterday.

Of course, when translating sentences out of the blue, you cannot (strictly speaking) tell if a speaker means “I” or “we”. This is rarely a source of

confusion in real situations (where it is unlikely a speaker goes on randomly switching between “I” and “we”).

Sometimes you can interpret a joint action using “and” or “with”, whatever sounds more natural:

- Мы с ними вчера не говорили. = They and I didn’t talk yesterday / I didn’t talk with (to) them yesterday.

35.3 But wait, there’s more!

Actually, Russian also has a handful of inconsistent cases that only exist for some words. They are (mostly) beyond the scope of this course:

- **the Locative-2: the most important** Why? Because it’s obligatory with the nouns that it applies to. It expresses the meaning of place, with *в, на* or both. It exists for over a hundred masculine nouns: *в году, на мосту, в лесу, на полу*. And for about 20 feminine nouns in *—ь*: *в крови* (the ending is always stressed for both!)
- **the Neo-vocative**: a form of a name used when addressing a person. It exists for common names and several nouns: *Вань! Бер! Алён! Мам! Пан!* (just the last vowel sound is removed). The Historical vocative (“человек → челове́че”) has been lost in modern Russian.
- **the Genitive-2** for “some amount of substance”. Increasingly replaced by the usual Genitive but still can be used for several masculine nouns: “Хочу чаю”
- **“Waiting” case**: not much of a case, but actually the verb “ждать” (to wait) would use Accusative for people and things that can affect their appearance and Genitive for everything else (an event/thing that does not choose when to arrive).

Chapter 36

Body, Life and Death

36.1 You have big eyes

Be careful NOT to use «есть» when describing properties of body parts, if their existence is normal and unlikely to surprise anyone:

- У меня длинный нос = *I have a long nose.*

36.2 A Handy thing to know

The Russian words for limbs and what they have on the end of them can be a little confusing initially. Depending on the situation, рука can mean hand or it can mean arm. The same is true for нога; it can be foot or leg. Most of the time the meaning is clear from the context.

The difference works as follows:

- in English “hand”, strictly speaking, means the part starting at the wrist.
- in Russian «рука», strictly speaking, means the whole arm.
- when you need a word describing the limb *functionally* (as something we use to work, to grab things etc.), English uses “hand” while Russian uses “arm”

The same goes for the lower limb.

