

Appendix B: Nouns and Modifiers

Hard Stems vs. Soft Stems

Every Russian noun and modifier has either a *hard* (nonpalatalized) or a *soft* (palatalized) stem. *When adding endings to hard-stem nouns and modifiers, always add the basic (hard) ending. When adding endings to soft-stem nouns and modifiers, always add the soft variant of the ending.*

However, if the stem of a modifier or noun ends in one of the velar sounds (г к х) or one of the hushing sounds (ш щ ж ч ц), do not worry about whether the stem is hard or soft. Rather, always attempt to add the *basic* ending, then apply the spelling rule if necessary (see Appendix A).

One can determine whether a noun or modifier stem is hard or soft by looking at the first letter in the word's ending. For the purposes of this discussion, ъ and ь are considered to be endings.

Hard Stems	Soft Stems
Have one of these letters or nothing as the first letter in the ending:	Have one of these letters as the first letter in the ending:
а	я
(э)* о	е ё
у	ю
ы	и
no vowel (Ø)	ь й

*The letter э does not play a role in grammatical endings in Russian. In grammatical endings, the soft variants of о are ё (when accented) and е (when not accented).