

Pre-Reform Russian Orthography Cheat-sheet

The purpose of this document is to assist individuals working with publications issued in pre-reform or non-standard Russian orthography. Individuals working with these publications may need to be able to convert bibliographic data from pre-reform to modern orthography, and vice versa, in order to, for example

- search bibliographic records and authority headings;
- provide additional access points in bibliographic records;
- make references in authority records that need to be set up in pre-reform orthography.

This document summarizes systematic correspondences between pre-reform and modern Russian spelling, and lists other common variations where special attention may be needed. Catalogers may use this document in conjunction with [\[link to that other document we are working on\]](#).

The Russian orthographic reform of 1917-1918 introduced a number of major changes into the Russian language, including the elimination of several letters from the alphabet and the spelling of a number of ubiquitous affixes. However, Russian spelling rules were not officially codified until 1956, and certain minor variations and inconsistencies can be found in Soviet publications of this early period. Pre-reform spelling rules were not officially codified at all; therefore much greater variation in spelling can be found in pre-revolutionary publications. Furthermore, the Russian émigré communities, for whom spelling became a political matter, continued to issue publications in pre-reform orthography (often introducing their own variations) throughout the 20th century. Consequently, individuals working with these publications may encounter variations in spelling not covered in this document. Appropriate reference sources should be consulted in those cases.

I. Obsolete letters:

The orthographic reform eliminated 4 letters (**Ѣ ѣ**, **Ѧ ѧ**, **Ѩ ѩ**, **Ѫ ѫ**) from the Russian alphabet, and greatly restricted the use of **Ѳ ѳ** (tverdyi znak). The following table summarizes the correspondences between obsolete letters and their modern counterparts. Each letter is discussed in greater detail below.

Pre-reform spelling	Romanization	Modern spelling	Romanization
И и	Ī ī	И и *	I i
Ѣ ѣ	I Ě ě i ě ě	Е е *	E e
Ѵ ѵ	F f	Ф ф	F f

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У у

Ү ү

И и

І і

*For exceptions and special situations see below.

1. І і (и десятиричное / i desiaterichnoe)

This letter appeared most commonly before vowels and the letter **й**, as well as in a small number of roots (e.g. **міръ** 'world'). It corresponds to the modern letter **И и** in most environments.

Example:

стихотвореніа		стихотворенія
stikhotvorenī ^а	→	stikhotvorenii ^а

However, when **і** occurs before the letter **о**, modern spelling may have several different outcomes, and special attention should be exercised.

Example:

фиілетовый	→	фиолетовый
fīoletovyi		fioletovyi
серіозный	→	серьезный (серьёзный)
serīoznyi		ser'eznyi (ser'ëznyī)
маіоръ	→	майор
maīor		maior
медаліонъ	→	медальон
medalīon		medal'on

2. Ъ ъ (ятъ / yat)

This letter appeared in approximately 130 roots, as well as in a number of derivational and inflectional affixes. It corresponds to modern **Е е** in all environments, save for the exceptional forms below.

Example:

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повѣсть повесть
povi`e`st' → povest'

Алексѣй Алексей
Aleksi`e`i → Alekseï

Exceptional forms:

Pre-reform orthography had distinct forms for the 3rd person plural feminine pronoun (онѣ) and for the feminine plural of один (однѣ). Modern spelling does not make these distinctions.

онѣ они
oni`e` → oni

однѣ (однѣхъ, однѣмъ, однѣми) одни (одних, одним, одними)
odni`e` (odni`e`kh, odni`e`m, odni`e`mi) → odni (odnikh, odnim, odnimi)

3. Ѡ ѡ (фита / fita)

This letter occurred in words of Greek origin. It corresponds to modern Ф ф in all environments.

Example:

орѡграфія орфография
orfografii`a` → orfografii`a`

4. Ѣ ѣ (ижица / izhitsa)

This letter occurred in words of Greek origin. It corresponds to modern И и in all environments.

Example:

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сѢНОДЬ СИНОД
sĭnod → sinod

5. Ъ ъ (твердый знак / tverdyi znak)

This letter appeared at the end of all words and components of compound words that would otherwise end in a consonant. It also appears in the body of words as a separative sign. Modern spelling retains its use as a separative sign, but omits it at the end of words and components of compound words.

Note, that while the letter is omitted in Romanization at the end of words, it should be retained in parallel Cyrillic fields.

Example:

контрѢ-адмиралѢ контр-адмирал
kontr-admiral → kontr-admiral

Variations in the letter's use as a separative sign were frequent well into the Soviet period. In some publications, "Ѣ" was commonly replaced by an apostrophe.

Example:

с'езд сѢезд
s'ezd → s''ezd

[There is a section of SCM that addresses this for authority records. Should we explicitly address it for bibs here?

Cf. <http://www.indiana.edu/~libslav/slavcatman/tverdzn.html>)]

II. Morphological changes

1. Prefixes ending in -з

In pre-reform orthography, prefixes ending in -з (**без-**, **вз-**, **воз-**, **из-**, **низ-**, **раз-**, **роз-**, **чрез-**, **через-**) remained unchanged regardless of the following consonant. In modern orthography, -з became -с if the following consonant was voiceless.

Example:

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бѣзполезный bezpoleznyĭ	→	бесполезный bespoleznyĭ
возсоединеніе vozsoedinenie	→	воссоединение vossoedinenie
черезчуръ cherezchur	→	чересчур chereschur

2. Masculine and neuter genitive singular adjectives

Pre-reform orthography had endings **-аго**, **-яго** for masculine and neuter genitive singular adjectives. Modern spelling has **-ого**, **-его**.

Example:

соборъ свята го Марка sobor svi ^ˈ a ^ˈ ta go Marka	→	собор свя то го Марка sobor svi ^ˈ a ^ˈ to go Marka
синя го цвѣта sini ^ˈ a ^ˈ go t ^ˈ s ^ˈ vi ^ˈ e ^ˈ ta	→	син е го цвета sinego t ^ˈ s ^ˈ veta

3. Nominative and accusative feminine and neuter adjectives

Pre-reform orthography had distinct forms for nominative and accusative feminine and neuter adjectives, with endings **-ыя**, **-ія**. Modern spelling does not make this distinction: **-ые**, **-ие** are the endings for all genders.

Example:

глупы я шутки glupyĭ ^ˈ a ^ˈ shutki	→	глупые шутки glupye shutki
другі я статьи drugĭĭ ^ˈ a ^ˈ stat'i	→	другие статьи drugie stat'i
оставші я ся развалины ostavshĭĭ ^ˈ a ^ˈ si ^ˈ a ^ˈ razvaliny	→	оставши е ся развалины ostavshiesi ^ˈ a ^ˈ razvaliny

4. Genitive singular feminine pronoun

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Pre-reform orthography had a special form of the genitive singular feminine pronoun (ея). Modern spelling has еѐ.

ея		еѐ (eë)
еі̣ а̣	→	еѐ (eë)

III. Other spelling variations

[Is this section necessary at this point? In any case, it needs to be expanded.]

Unlike the above examples, the following changes are not always systematic. These variations, though relatively minor, can be found in publications well into the Soviet period. They are listed here as issues that may require special attention.

1. О vs. е (ѐ) after ч, ж, ш, щ

Pre-reform (and early Soviet) spelling sometimes has о after ч, ж, ш, щ in stressed position, where modern spelling has е (ѐ).

Example:

чортъ		черт (чѐрт)
chort	→	chert (chѐrt)

щолкать		щелкать
shcholkat'	→	shchelkat'

2. Э before и

Old orthography sometimes had э before и in words of foreign origin, where modern orthography has е.

Example:

кліѐнт		клиѐнт
klіѐnt	→	klient

гіѐна		гиѐна
gīѐna	→	giena

[Other changes?]