



Basics 1

Tips and notes

[START LESSON](#)

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.

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

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



- *I know him.* → Я **его́** знаю́.
- *I know Maria.* → Я знаю́ **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** лю́бит чита́ть

Good luck!

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.

More on the case system

For now, we only study simple

Accusative (direct object of an action)



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.

