



Basics 2

Tips and notes

[START LESSON](#)

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 ~ by A there is an X → 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.

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").

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.

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



For now, don't worry about the infinitive stem.

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 than you pronounce it with you 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** = [жэ́нщи^ена]
- **сте́на** = [ст^ие́на] or [ст^ии́е́на]

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

Voicing

Some consonants let your voice come

(unvoiced). In Russian there are 6 pairs



- whenever one of these consonants (except В) follows another, the second overrides or reverses the voicing of the first: *сд* = [з^д], *вс* = [ф^с]
- the end of the phrase is unvoiced: *этот клуб* [к^лу^п]
- rules apply between the word boundaries, too
- Х, Ч, Ц, Щ also play this game, even though Russian lacks letters for their voiced partners ([χ], [дж'], [дз], [ж'ж']). They will devoice the preceding consonant or become voiced themselves.

UNLIKE UKRAINIAN, RUSSIAN ONLY USES [χ], [дж'] AND [дз] AS VOICED VARIANTS OF Х, Ч, Ц. UKRAINIAN HAS THEM AS FULL-FLEDGED CONSONANTS—THE ONES THAT ARE AN INTRINSIC PART OF A WORD AND CAN APPEAR ANYWHERE.

