RU

LANGUAGE COURSE

Russian Alphabet 2

11 Chapters

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RUSSIAN ALPHABET 2

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Russian Alphabet 2

Course 2 · Chapter 1 · Where the Stress Falls

Ударение — Stress

*Welcome to Russian Alphabet 2. You know all 33 letters, so this course has **no new letters**. Instead it teaches what Russian Alphabet 1 only hinted at: how the letters are really said. It starts with the most important thing of all, stress, because everything else in this course (the weak vowels of Chapters 2 and 3, the hard and soft consonants of Chapters 4 and 5) depends on knowing which syllable is stressed. By the end of this chapter you will know why Russian stress is unusual, why this course keeps showing the accent marks, and how to learn stress with each new word.*

What Stress Is

*In a Russian word of two or more syllables, one syllable is **stressed**: it is said longer, louder and clearer than the others. You already did this in Russian Alphabet 1, where the respellings show the stressed syllable in CAPITALS. A word of one syllable has its stress on its only vowel, so it needs no mark.*

Russian Stress Is Free

*English stress is partly predictable by habit, and French stress is always on the last syllable. **Russian stress is free**: it can fall on the first syllable, the last, or one in the middle, and nothing in the spelling tells you which. You have to learn it with each word.*

Stress on the	Word	Respelling	English
first syllable	**кни́га**	KNEE-guh	book
last syllable	**окно́**	ahk-NOH	window
middle syllable (of three)	**доро́га**	duh-ROH-	road

Stress on the	Word	Respelling	English
		guh	
last syllable (of three)	молоко́	muh-luh-KOH	milk

Look at the last two rows: молоко́ and доро́га both have three syllables, but one is stressed on the last and the other on the middle one. Which is which is a fact about each word.

Stress Can Change the Meaning

Because stress is free, two different words can be spelled with exactly the same letters and differ only in where the stress falls. In ordinary text you cannot see the stress, so the sentence has to tell you which word is meant. Here are four such pairs:

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	за́мок	ZAH-muhk	castle	*stress on the first syllable*
	замо́к	zuh-MOHK	lock	*stress on the last syllable*
2	му́ка	MOO-kuh	torment, agony	*stress on the first syllable*
	мука́	moo-KAH	flour	*stress on the last syllable*
3	до́ма	DOH-muh	at home	*stress on the first syllable*
	дома́	duh-MAH	houses	*stress on the last syllable*
4	а́тлас	AHT-luhs	atlas	*stress on the first syllable*
	атла́с	uht-LAHS	satin	*stress on the last syllable*

Pairs like these are not very common. The point is not to memorise the four pairs, but to see that stress is part of the word, like its spelling.

Stress Can Move Within a Word

The stress of a Russian word can also move when the word changes its form (for example from singular to plural). So you learn the stress of each form that you meet. Two examples, using words from Russian Alphabet 1:

Word	Stress	Form	Respelling
вода́	last syllable	water	vuh-DAH
во́ды	first syllable	waters (plural)	VOH-dih
рука́	last syllable	hand, arm	roo-KAH
ру́ки	first syllable	hands, arms	ROO-kee

Many words keep one stress through all their forms, like ма´ма and ма´мы. Only dictionaries tell you which words move; this course does not teach the patterns.

Marking Stress and the Special Case of Ё

- **In ordinary Russian text,** the stress is not marked: books, signs and websites print plain letters.
- **In learners' materials,** dictionaries and this course, the stress is marked with an acute accent over the vowel (*кни´га*). You already read it that way in Russian Alphabet 1.
- **The letter ё is always stressed,** so a word with ё needs no accent mark; and in ordinary text ё is often printed as plain e, so you have to know the word.
- **A word of one syllable** is stressed on its only vowel: *хлеб*, *дом*, *кот*.

How to Learn Stress

You cannot work stress out from the spelling, so learn each new word *with* its stress: say it aloud with the stressed syllable louder and longer, and write the accent mark when you copy it into your notes. A dictionary marks the stress of every word, and a recording lets you hear it.

Why Stress Matters So Much

Stress also changes how the *vowels* sound: an unstressed vowel is weaker, and some are changed beyond recognition. That is why you cannot say a Russian word correctly without knowing where its stress is. It is the subject of the next two chapters.

Read It — Ten Words With Their Stress

All ten use only letters you know. Read each aloud, putting the stress where the accent mark is, and cover the English first.

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ко́шка	KOHSH-kuh	cat (female)	*stress on the first syllable*
2	кни́га	KNEE-guh	book	*stress on the first syllable*
3	доро́га	duh-ROH-guh	road	*stress on the middle syllable*
4	молоко́	muh-luh-KOH	milk	*stress on the last syllable*
5	хлеб	KHLYEHP	bread	*one syllable; the final б sounds like "p"*
6	слова́	sluh-VAH	words	*stress on the last syllable*
7	спаси́бо	spuh-SEE-buh	thank you	*stress on the middle syllable*
8	же́нщина	ZHEHN-shchih-nuh	woman	*stress on the first syllable*
9	окно́	ahk-NOH	window	*stress on the last syllable*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
10	здра́вствуйте	ZDRAH-stvooy-tyeh	hello (polite)	*stress on the first syllable; the first в is not said*

Not Yet Verified

That stress in Russian is free, is not marked in standard written text, can move between the forms of a word and can distinguish words (замок "lock" and "castle") comes from a web search whose results included a university phonology paper and learner sites (see below). The four pairs, the stress of each word in the tables, the meanings, the respellings and the rule that ё is always stressed (the search confirmed only that ё is always stressed) are from general knowledge; no dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary, which marks the stress of every word, before relying on any of them.

Sources for This Chapter

Search results on Russian word stress (a Leipzig FDSL conference abstract, the gw2ru lesson "Word stress", the Transparent Language Russian blog "Stressed about word stress", a Living Language forum post, and an Indiana University paper on stress oppositions); the sources of Russian Alphabet 1 for the rest.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. What does it mean to say that Russian stress is "free"?

▼ Show answer

The stressed syllable can be any syllable of the word, and the spelling does not show which: you learn the stress with each word.

2. Read each pair aloud, and say how they differ: за́мок and замо́к.

▼ Show answer

ZAH-muhk ("castle") and zuh-MOHK ("lock"). They are spelled the same; only the stress differs, and with it the meaning.

3. Which syllable is stressed in молоко́, дорога́ and кни́га?

▼ Show answer

The last syllable of молоко́ (muh-luh-KOH), the middle one of доро́га (duh-ROH-guh) and the first of кни́га (KNEE-guh).

4. What do вода́ and во́ды show about stress?

▼ Show answer

That the stress can move when a word changes its form: it is on the last syllable of вода́ and on the first of во́ды.

5. Why does the word самолёт (aeroplane) need no accent mark, and why does the word хлеб (bread) need none either?

▼ Show answer

The letter ё is always stressed, so самолёт is stressed on its ё (suh-muh-LYOHT) with no mark needed; and хлеб has only one syllable, so its stress is on the only vowel.

Coming Up in Chapter 2

Now you know where the stress falls. Chapter 2 shows what happens to the vowels *around* it: the unstressed **о** and **а** are weak and sound alike (*молоко́* is not said "mo-lo-KO"), and the chapter teaches how weak they are.

Аканье — The Weakening of O and A

*Chapter 1 showed where the stress falls. This chapter shows what it does to the vowels around it. In Russian Alphabet 1 you met it in passing: the respellings said vuh-DAH for вода́, not "vo-DAH". The reason is that an **unstressed o is not said as "oh"**: it is said like a weak **а**. This is called akanye (аканье), and it is one of the most important facts about Russian pronunciation.*

The Rule: Only the Stressed Vowel Is Full

*In standard Russian, unstressed vowels merge toward neutral sounds, and the spelling does not show it. For **о** and **а** it works like this (the exact description in books is more detailed; this is the simple version this course uses):*

Where the vowel is	How o and a sound	Respelling
stressed	full: o says "oh", a says "ah"	OH, AH
just before the stressed syllable	a short "ah" (both	ah

Where the vowel is	How o and a sound	Respelling
	o and a)	
anywhere else (earlier, or after the stress)	**a very short, weak "uh" (both o and a)**	uh

In plain words: ***o and a sound the same when they are not stressed****. Only their position decides how weak they are.*

> **A Correction to Earlier Respellings**
>
> Russian Alphabet 1 and Chapter 1 wrote "uh" for every weak o and a, because that was the simplest thing to say before you knew the rule. From this chapter on, the vowel *just before* the stress is written "ah" and the others "uh". So *вода́* is more exactly *vah-DAH* and *доро́га* is *dah-ROH-guh*. The difference is small; it is the pattern that matters.

Hearing the Pattern

Four words with the weak vowels labelled. Look at the position of each vowel relative to the stress.

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	вода́	vah-DAH	water	*the o just before the stressed a is a short "ah"*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
2	молоко́	muh-lah-KOH	milk	*first o: two syllables before the stress, so "uh"; second o: just before it, so "ah"*
3	ма́ма	MAH-muh	mum	*the final a comes after the stress, so "uh"*
4	до́ктор	DOHK-tuhr	doctor	*the second o comes after the stress, so "uh"*

Why You Cannot Spell by Ear

Because o and a sound the same when unstressed, вода́ is said like "vahda", yet it is written with an ***o****. So the spelling of an unstressed o or a has to be learned with the word. Russians have a trick that you can use too:* ***move the stress****. If you can find a form of the word in which the doubtful vowel is stressed, you hear which letter it is:*

Word	Doubtful vowel	A form where it is stressed	So the letter is
вода́ (water)	**first vowel, unstressed**	во́ды (waters)	о
голова́ (head)	**first vowel, unstressed**	го́ловы (heads)	о

This only works when a form with moving stress exists (Chapter 1), so it is a help, not a rule. For a word like молоко́ you just have to know the spelling.

Watch Out: Do Not Overdo It

The weak sound is short and quiet, **not** a clear English "uh" like the vowel in "cup". Say it very briefly and let the stressed syllable carry the word. If you give every vowel full value, the word sounds foreign; if you say all unstressed vowels as the same quiet "uh", it sounds right.

A Word on Dialect

The "akanye" pattern is standard in Moscow and most of Russia, but the speech of the north and some other regions keeps o as "oh" even when unstressed (called "okanye"). The course teaches the standard pattern, which is the one you hear on radio, television and in language courses.

Read It — Ten Words With Weak Vowels

Read each aloud, giving only the stressed vowel its full value. Cover the English first.

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	вода́	vah-DAH	water	*o just before the stress: "ah"*
2	голова́	guh-lah-VAH	head	*first o: "uh"; second o: "ah"*
3	молоко́	muh-lah-KOH	milk	*first o: "uh"; second o: "ah"*
4	хорошо́	khuh-rah-SHOH	good, well	*first o: "uh"; second o: "ah"*
5	окно́	ahk-NOH	window	*the o at the start, just before the stress: "ah"*
6	дорога́	dah-ROH-guh	road	*first o: "ah"; the final a after the stress: "uh"*
7	спаси́бо	spah-SEE-buh	thank you	*first a: "ah"; the final o after the stress: "uh"*
8	самолёт	suh-mah-LYOHT	aeroplane	*first a: "uh"; the o just before the stress: "ah"; ë is stressed*
9	го́род	GOH-ruht	city, town	*the o after the stress: "uh"; the final д sounds like "t"*
10	до́ктор	DOHK-tuhr	doctor	*the o after the stress: "uh"*

Not Yet Verified

That unstressed vowels merge toward neutral sounds, that most speakers outside the northern dialects merge unstressed a and o (*akanye*), and that the spelling does not show it, comes from the web search before Chapter 1 (results from a university phonology paper and mirrors of Wikipedia's

"Vowel reduction in Russian"). The three-position description (full, "ah" just before the stress, "uh" elsewhere) is a simplification from general knowledge, as are the words, stress, meanings, respellings, the moving-stress trick for checking spelling and the remark about northern dialects. Check a Russian pronunciation source or a native speaker before relying on any of them; real speech varies, and a recording will teach the weak vowels much better than a description.

Sources for This Chapter

The search results on Russian vowel reduction named in the box above (Wikipedia's "Vowel reduction in Russian" and a university phonology paper); the sources of Russian Alphabet 1 for the rest.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. What happens to о and а when they are not stressed?

▼ Show answer

They sound alike and weak: a short "ah" just before the stressed syllable, and a very short "uh" anywhere else. Only the stressed vowel is said in full.

2. Read aloud: вода́ · молоко́ · хорошо́

▼ Show answer

vah-DAH · muh-lah-KOH · khuh-rah-SHOH ("water", "milk", "good, well").

3. Which of the vowels in го́род is stressed, and how is the second о said?

▼ Show answer

The first о is stressed and said in full (GOH); the second о comes after the stress and is a very short "uh": GOH-ruht.

4. You hear "vah-DAH". How do you know the first vowel is written о and not а?

▼ Show answer

You cannot tell by ear, because unstressed о and а sound the same; you have to know the word, or check a form in which the stress moves onto it: во́ды (waters) shows the letter is о.

5. The word ОКНО́ (window) starts with the letter о. Is it said "oh" or "ah", and why?

▼ Show answer

"Ah": the о is not stressed (the stress is on the last syllable) and it comes just before the stress, so it is a short "ah": ahk-NOH.

Coming Up in Chapter 3

The other weak vowels: **е**, **я** and **и**. Unstressed, they are not "ye", "ya" and "ee" either: they all become a short "ih"-like sound, the second half of the story of Russian vowel reduction.

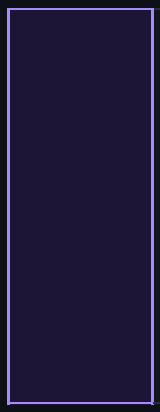
Иканье — The Weakening of Е, Я and И

*In Chapter 2 you saw that an unstressed **о** and **а** sound alike and weak. The same thing happens to three other vowel letters: an unstressed **е**, **я** and **и** all drift toward a short, weak **"ih"**, like the vowel in English bit. This pattern is sometimes called ikanye, and together with the о/а pattern of Chapter 2 it explains why written Russian looks so different from spoken Russian.*

The Rule: The Stressed Vowel Is Full, the Others Go to "ih"

Here is the simple version this course uses. (Real speech varies, and books give more detail.)

Letter	Stressed (full)	Unstressed (weak)
е	**"ye" (леґо: LYEH-tuh)**	"ih"; at the start of a word "yih"
я	**"ya"**	"ih"; at the start of a word "yih"
и	**"ee"**	"ih" (shorter

Letter	Stressed (full)	Unstressed (weak)
		and less clear than "ee")

After a consonant, the soft vowels e, я and и also make that consonant soft, even when they are weak (Chapter 4). In the respellings the soft consonant is simply followed by "ih": сестра´ is sihs-TRAH.

> **The Respellings From Now On**
>
> Russian Alphabet 1 wrote "ee" for a weak и (for example *kee-NOH* for *кино´*). From this chapter on, a weak e, я or и is written "ih": *кино´* is *kih-NOH* and *вино´* is *vih-NOH*. The weak и is not the clear "ee" of English *see*.

Hearing the Pattern

Three words with the weak vowels labelled.

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	сестра´	sihs-TRAH	sister	*the e is just before the stress: "ih", not "ye"*
2	кино´	kih-NOH	cinema	*the и is just before the stress: "ih", not "ee"*
3	семья´	sih-MYAH	family	*the e is just before the stress: "ih"; the stressed я is full: "yah"*

At the Start of a Word

A weak e or я at the start of a word keeps its "y" and gets a short "ih" after it: "yih".

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	еда́	yih-DAH	food	*e at the start, just before the stress*
2	язы́к	yih-ZIHK	tongue, language	*я at the start; the stressed ы is the pulled-back "ih" of Russian Alphabet 1*
3	ещё	yih-SHCHOH	more, still	*e at the start; the stress is on the ё*

Checking the Spelling by Moving the Stress

As with o and a in Chapter 2, you cannot tell by ear whether a weak vowel is written e, я or и, because all three sound like "ih". The same trick helps: find a form in which the doubtful vowel is stressed.

Word	Doubtful vowel	A form where it is stressed	So the letter is
сестра́ (sister)	**first vowel, unstressed**	сёстры (sisters)	e (the ё is an e with dots)
река́ (river)	**first vowel, unstressed**	реки́ (rivers)	e

Again this is a help, not a rule: many words have no such form. Learn the spelling with the word.

Watch Out: It Is Not "ee"

The most common mistake of English speakers is to keep the unstressed и as a clear "ee". Make it short and relaxed: *kih-NOH*, not "kee-NOH". And the mistake in the other direction: do not drop it altogether. It is weak, but it is there.

Read It — Ten Words With Weak Е, Я and И

Read each aloud, giving the stressed vowel its full value and the others the short "ih". Cover the English first.

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	сестра́	sihs-TRAH	sister	*weak e*
2	река́	rih-KAH	river	*weak e*
3	семья́	sih-MYAH	family	*weak e*
4	еда́	yih-DAH	food	*e at the start: "yih"*
5	язы́к	yih-ZIHK	tongue, language	*я at the start: "yih"*
6	ещё	yih-SHCHOH	more, still	*e at the start: "yih"*
7	кино́	kih-NOH	cinema	*weak u*
8	дире́ктор	dih-RYEHK-tuhr	director	*weak u before the stress; the final o after the stress: "uh"*
9	вре́мя	VRYEH-mih	time	*the final я comes after the stress: a very short "ih"*
10	и́мя	EE-mih	name	*the final я comes after the stress: a very short "ih"*

Not Yet Verified

That unstressed vowels merge toward neutral sounds comes from the web search before Chapter 1 (a university phonology paper and mirrors of Wikipedia's "Vowel reduction in Russian", one of whose

addresses uses the name *Ikanye*). I did not read how that source describes е, я and и: the description in this chapter (a short "ih", "yih" at the start of a word, the respellings, the position rules), the words with their stress and meanings, the moving-stress check, and the form сёстры are from general knowledge. Check a Russian pronunciation source or a native speaker before relying on them; the weak vowels vary between speakers and positions, and a recording will teach them much better than a description.

Sources for This Chapter

The search results on Russian vowel reduction named in the box above; the sources of Russian Alphabet 1 and of Chapters 1 and 2 for the rest.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. What happens to е, я and и when they are not stressed?

▼ Show answer

All three become a short, weak "ih" (like the vowel in *bit*); at the start of a word, е and я keep a "y" in front: "yih".

2. Read aloud: сестра́ · кино́ · язы́к

▼ Show answer

sihs-TRAH · kih-NOH · yih-ZIHK ("sister", "cinema", "tongue, language").

3. How is the final я said in вре́мя, and why?

▼ Show answer

As a very short "ih": VRYEH-mih. The я is not stressed (the stress is on the first syllable) and comes after the stress.

4. You hear "rih-KAH". How could you check that the first vowel is written е?

▼ Show answer

Find a form in which the stress moves onto it: ре́ки (rivers) has a stressed е.

5. Write the word for "sister" in Cyrillic, with the stress mark.

▼ Show answer

сестра́ (sihs-TRAH).

Coming Up in Chapter 4

Now the consonants. Chapter 4 teaches the **hard and soft consonants**: how the soft vowels and the soft sign change the consonant before them. From Chapter 4, the English respellings are shown for new words only, not for words you already read in this course.

Russian Alphabet 2

Course 2 · Chapter 4 · Hard and Soft Consonants

Твёрдые и мягкие — Hard and Soft

*The vowels are done: they are strong when stressed and weak when not. Now the consonants, and the feature that one learner guide calls the hardest adjustment in Russian pronunciation for English speakers: most Russian consonants come in a **hard** and a **soft** form, and the difference can change the meaning of a word. You have been meeting it since Russian Alphabet 1, where the soft vowels (**я ё ю е и**) and the soft sign (**ь**) appeared. This chapter explains what they do.*

> **The Respellings From This Chapter**
>
> From this chapter on, the English respellings are given **only for new words**. Words you have already read in this course are shown without a respelling: say them from the letters and the stress marks. If you have forgotten one, look back at the chapter where it appeared.

What Soft Means

*A **soft** consonant is said with the middle of the tongue raised toward the roof of the mouth, which adds a quick "y" colour to the sound. The "ny" of English canyon is close to a soft "n". A **hard** consonant is said without it. In the respellings of this course, a soft consonant at the end of a word has an apostrophe (MAHT'), and a soft consonant before a vowel has a "y" after it (DYEHN', RYAHT).*

Hard	Soft	Pair sounds (approximately)
н	**нь**	n / ny
т	**ть**	t / ty
д	**дь**	d / dy
л	**ль**	l / ly
р	**рь**	r / ry
с	**сь**	s / sy

Hard	Soft	Pair sounds (approximately)
з	зь	z / zy
м	мь	m / my
п б в ф к г х	пь бь вь фь кь гь хь	the same idea, less obvious to English ears

You do not need to memorise the list. What matters is the idea: nearly every consonant has two versions, and the letter that follows tells you which one to say.

How Spelling Marks Softness

The consonant letter is the same in both versions. The letter after it decides:

The consonant is	When it is followed by	Examples
hard	а о у э ы, or another consonant, or nothing at the end	да, дом, стол, мы
soft	я ё ю е и, or ь	дядя, тётя,

The consonant is	When it is followed by	Examples
		день, мать

This is why the vowel pairs of Russian Alphabet 1 matter: а/я, о/ё, у/ю, э/е, ы/и are the same vowel after a hard and after a soft consonant. The soft sign ь does the same job when no vowel follows.

Hard and Soft Make Different Words

Because the difference is spelled, it can change a word completely. These pairs differ only in softness:

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	брат	BRAHT	brother	*hard т*
	брать	BRAHT'	to take	*soft т (ь)*
2	лук	LOOK	onion	*hard л*
	люк	LYOOK	hatch, manhole	*soft л (ю)*
3	рад	RAHT	glad	*hard р; the final д sounds like "t"*
	ряд	RYAHT	row	*soft р (я)*
4	нос	NOHS	nose	*hard н*
	нёс	NYOHS	carried (he carried)	*soft н (ё)*
5	стал	STAHL	became	*hard л*
	сталь	STAHL'	steel	*soft л (ь)*
6	уґол	OO-guhl	corner	*hard л*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
	уґоль	OO-guhl'	coal	*soft л (ь)*
7	был	BIHL	was	*ы after hard б*
	бил	BEEL	hit (he hit)	*и after soft б*

Spot the Soft Consonants

In each word below, find the soft consonants and say what makes them soft. (Words from earlier chapters: no respelling.)

#	WORD	ENGLISH	SOFT CONSONANTS
1	день	day	д (before е) and н (before ь)
2	мать	mother	т (before ь)
3	соль	salt	л (before ь)
4	семья́	family	с (before е) and м (before ь)
5	тётя	aunt	т (before ё): TYOH-tyuh, and the second т (before я)
6	дя́дя	uncle	both д (before я): DYAH-dyuh

Watch Out: Do Not Add a Vowel

A soft consonant is not a consonant followed by a separate "ee" or "ye" syllable. It is one sound with a slight "y" colour: *мать* is MAHT', not "mah-tee". At the end of a word, the soft sign adds no sound of its own; it only changes the sound of the consonant before it.

Not Yet Verified

That Russian consonants are described as hard and soft, and that one learner guide calls this the hardest adjustment for English speakers, comes from the web search before Chapter 1. The pairing of consonants, the account of how the following letter marks softness, the tongue-position description and the "canyon" comparison, the minimal pairs (брат/брать, лук/люк, рад/ряд, нос/нёс, стал/сталь, у́гол/у́голь, был/бил), their meanings, stress and respellings, and the meaning "carried" for нёс are from general knowledge. No dictionary or pronunciation source was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on them; soft consonants are easier to hear than to describe, and a recording will teach them far better than a description.

Sources for This Chapter

The web search results on Russian phonology noted above (a learner guide's overview of Russian pronunciation and academic phonology papers); the sources of the earlier chapters for the rest.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. What marks a consonant as soft in writing?

▼ Show answer

A soft vowel after it (я ё ю е и) or the soft sign ь. A hard vowel (а о у э ы), another consonant, or nothing leaves it hard.

2. Read each pair aloud and say how they differ: лук / люк and рад / ряд.

▼ Show answer

LOOK ("onion") / LYOOK ("hatch"), RAHT ("glad") / RYAHT ("row"). The consonant is hard in the first of each pair and soft in the second, because of the vowel: у/ю and а/я.

3. What is the difference between брат and брать?

▼ Show answer

The soft sign. брат (BRAHT, "brother") has a hard т; брать (BRAHT', "to take") has a soft т.

4. Which consonants are soft in день, and what makes each soft?

▼ Show answer

д is soft because of the following е, and н is soft because of the following ь: DYEHN'.

5. Write in Cyrillic: *row* · *coal* · *steel*

▼ Show answer

ряд · уґоль · сталь

Coming Up in Chapter 5

Some consonants do not take part in the hard and soft pairs: **ж ш ц** are always hard and **ч щ й** are always soft, whatever letter follows. Chapter 5 explains this and why the letter и after ж, ш and ц is said like ы, which you noticed in Russian Alphabet 1.

Всегда твёрдые, всегда мягкие — Always Hard, Always Soft

Chapter 4 said that nearly every consonant comes in a hard and a soft version, and that the letter after it chooses. Six consonants are the exceptions: ***ж ш ц*** *are always hard and* ***ч щ й*** *are always soft, whatever letter follows. They are the letters you met as the "hushing" sounds in Russian Alphabet 1, plus ц and й. This chapter explains why и after ж, ш and ц sounded like ы there, and the spelling rules that follow.*

Always	Letters	What it means
hard	**ж ш ц**	never softened, even before е, и, я, ё, ю or ь
soft	**ч щ й**	never hardened, even before а, о, у, э or ы

Because these six do not change, the vowel after them is not needed to tell you hard from soft, and that changes how the vowels after them are said and spelled.

Why И After Ж, Ш and Ц Sounds Like Ы

*After a hard consonant the vowel is the hard one of its pair (Chapter 4: ы, not и). Since ж, ш and ц are always hard, a written **и** after them is said like **ы**, the pulled-back "ih":*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	жить	ZHIHT'	to live	*и after ж: said like ы*
2	шить	SHIHT'	to sew	*и after ш: said like ы*
3	цифра	TSIH-fruh	digit, figure	*и after ц: said like ы*
4	машина	mah-SHIH-nuh	car, machine	*stress on the и (ши): a hard "shih"*

The и is still written и; only its sound is the hard one. This is the rule you noticed in Russian Alphabet 1 with жизнь and цирк.

After the soft ч and щ, и Is a Plain "ee"

Ч and щ are always soft, so the и after them is the soft one, a clear (or, when unstressed, weak) "ee":

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	щи	SHCHEE	cabbage soup	*stressed и after щ: "ee"*
2	читать	chih-TAHT'	to read	*unstressed и after ч: weak "ih"*

Spelling Rules After the Hushing Letters

*Because ж ш ч щ never change, Russian spelling avoids the letters that would only matter for hard or soft. After **ж, ш, ч, щ** the letters **ы, ю, я** are not written; the letters **и, у, а** are used instead:*

After ж ш ч щ you write	not	Examples
и	**ы**	жизнь, шина

After ж ш ч щ you write	not	Examples
у	**ю**	жук, чуд́о, щуќа
а	**я**	шар, чай, час

So a Russian never writes "чя" or "шы". If you learn this, you also know how not to misspell a word. (Ц is different: it takes ы in a few words, and u in others, as the next section shows.)

Ц Takes Both И and Ы

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	цирк		circus	*и after ц; said like ы*
2	цыплёнок	tsihp-LYOH-nuhk	chick	*ы after ц (the rare spelling); ё is stressed*

The Soft Sign After Ч, Щ, Ш and Ж

*You may see ь after a hushing letter, as in ночь (night), дочь (daughter), вещь (thing), мышь (mouse). Here it does **not** soften anything: ч and щ are already soft, and ш is always hard (so мышь is MIHSH, with a hard ш). The ь marks a grammatical form (these are feminine nouns), and you learn it with the word.*

Ё After Ж and Ш

After the always-hard ж and ш, the letter ё is said like a plain "o": *шёл* ("he went") is SHOHL and *жёлтый* ("yellow") is ZHOHL-tihy. The ё keeps its dots in learners' materials, because it is always stressed, but the sound is "oh", not "yoh".

Watch Out: Do Not Soften Them

English speakers want to soften ш and ж before и, as in "she" or "genie". In Russian, ш and ж stay hard whatever follows, so *шить* is SHIHT' (hard ш, then the pulled-back vowel) and not "sheet". Likewise ч and щ stay soft even before y and a: *чудо* is CHOO-duh, with a soft ч.

Read It — Ten New Words

Read each aloud, then cover the English. (Respellings are for these new words only.)

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	жить	ZHIHT'	to live	*hard ж; the ь softens т*
2	шить	SHIHT'	to sew	*hard ш*
3	машина	mah-SHIH-nuh	car, machine	*stress on ши*
4	цифра	TSIH-fruh	digit	*hard ц*
5	цыплёнок	tsihp-LYOH-nuhk	chick	*ы after ц*
6	читать	chih-TAHT'	to read	*soft ч, soft т*
7	чудо	CHOO-duh	miracle, wonder	*у after ч, not ю*
8	щи	SHCHEE	cabbage soup	*soft щ, plain "ее"*
9	щётка	SHCHYOHT-kuh	brush	*ё after щ: "yoh"*
10	мышь	MIHSH	mouse	*hard ш; the ь softens nothing*

Not Yet Verified

The account of ж ш ц as always hard and ч щ й as always soft, the explanation of why и after ж ш ц is said like ы, the spelling rules after the hushing letters (и, у, а and not ы, ю, я), the remark that ц takes both и and ы, the soft sign after ч щ ш ж, and ё after ж and ш being said like "о", the words and their meanings (жить, шить, маши́на, ци́фра, цыплёнок, чита́ть, чу́до, щи, щётка,

мышь, шёл, жёлтый, щу́ка), stress and respellings, are from general knowledge. The web searches for this course did not cover them. No dictionary or pronunciation source was consulted. Check a Russian grammar, dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of them.

Sources for This Chapter

None beyond the searches listed in the earlier chapters of this course and of Russian Alphabet 1; this chapter's content comes from general knowledge, as the box above says.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Which three consonants are always hard, and which three always soft?

▼ Show answer

Always hard: ж, ш, ц. Always soft: ч, щ, й.

2. How is the и said in ЖИТЬ, and why?

▼ Show answer

Like ы, the pulled-back "ih": ZHIHT'. ж is always hard, and after a hard consonant the vowel is the hard one of its pair.

3. Why is there no "чя" or "шы" in Russian spelling? What is written instead?

▼ Show answer

After ж ш ч щ the letters ы, ю, я are not written; и, у, а are written instead (чай, шить, чудо).

4. Read aloud: мышь · щи · читаѣ́ть · цыплёнок

▼ Show answer

MIHSH ("mouse") · SHCHEE ("cabbage soup") · chih-TAHT' ("to read") · tsihp-LYOH-nuhk ("chick").

5. The word шёл ("he went") has ё. Is it said "yoh"? Why or why not?

▼ Show answer

No: after the always-hard ш the ё is said like a plain "oh": SHOHL.

Coming Up in Chapter 6

Now voice. Chapter 6 teaches the **voiced and voiceless** pairs of consonants (б/п, в/ф, г/к, д/т, ж/ш, з/с): the buzzing and the non-buzzing sounds that you met in the rule about a final д, г, б or ж.

Звонкие и глухие — Voiced and Voiceless

Chapters 4 and 5 were about hard and soft. This chapter is about a second pairing of consonants: ***voiced*** *("ringing", звонкие) and* ***voiceless*** *("deaf", глухие). You have already met the idea in Russian Alphabet 1, where a final д was said like "t" and a final б like "p". This chapter shows which consonants are paired, and Chapter 7 shows when one turns into the other.*

What Voice Is

A ***voiced*** *consonant is said with the vocal cords buzzing: put a finger on your throat and say zzz. A* ***voiceless*** *consonant is said without the buzz: say sss and the buzz stops. Everything else in the mouth is the same for the two members of a pair. English has the same pairs (b/p, v/f, g/k, d/t, z/s), so you already know how to make them.*

The Six Pairs

Voiced	Voiceless	Sounds
б	п	b / p
в	ф	v / f
г	к	g / k
д	т	d / t
ж	ш	zh / sh
з	с	z / s

Remember the pairs by the mouth: each pair is made in the same place. Only the buzz changes.

Pairs That Change the Word

In Russian, the voiced and the voiceless member are different sounds that can make different words. Here are six pairs of words that differ only in this:

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	боч́ка	BOHCH-kuh	barrel	*б: voiced*
	поч́ка	POHCH-kuh	kidney; bud	*п: voiceless*
2	ваз́а	VAH-zuh	vase	*в: voiced*
	фаз́а	FAH-zuh	phase	*ф: voiceless*
3	гора́	gah-RAH	mountain	*г: voiced*
	кора́	kah-RAH	bark (of a tree)	*к: voiceless*
4	доч́ка	DOHCH-kuh	daughter (affectionate)	*д: voiced*
	точ́ка	TOHCH-kuh	dot, full stop	*т: voiceless*
5	жар	ZHAHR	heat	*ж: voiced*
	шар		ball	*ш: voiceless*
6	коза́	kah-ZAH	goat	*з: voiced*
	коса́	kah-SAH	braid (also: scythe)	*с: voiceless*

Consonants With No Partner

Kind	Letters	What it means
always voiced	**л м н р й**	never turn into a voiceless sound
always voiceless	**х ц ч щ**	never turn into a voiced sound

The vowels are all voiced. The letter в is special: it is a member of a pair (в/ф), but in some ways it behaves like the "always voiced" group, which is the subject of Chapter 7.

The Finger Test

Put a finger on your throat and say the pairs in turn: *б, п; в, ф; г, к; д, т; ж, ш; з, с*. You should feel a buzz for the first of each pair and none for the second. Then check the always-voiced *л м н р* (buzz) and the always-voiceless *х ц ч щ* (no buzz).

Watch Out: Do Not Puff

Russian voiceless *п*, *т* and *к* are not said with the little puff of breath that English adds at the start of a word ("pie", "tie", "key"). Say them without it, as in English "spy", "sty" and "sky". The puff would make the word sound foreign.

Read It — Ten New Words

Read each aloud and listen for voiced and voiceless sounds. (Respellings are for these new words only.) The first three end in a voiced letter, and you will see in Chapter 7 why they are respelled with a voiceless one.

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	гриб	GREEP	mushroom	*final б: said like n*
2	глаз	GLAHS	eye	*final з: said like c*
3	лёд	LYOHT	ice	*final д: said like m; ё is stressed*
4	нога́	nah-GAH	leg, foot	*г: voiced*
5	борода́	buh-rah-DAH	beard	*д: voiced*
6	зима́	zih-MAH	winter	*з: voiced*
7	стул	STOOL	chair	*с, м: voiceless; л: always voiced*
8	у́хо	OO-khuh	ear	*х: always voiceless*
9	го́лос	GOH-luhs	voice	*г: voiced; с: voiceless*
10	лес	LYEHS	forest	*soft л (е); с: voiceless*

Not Yet Verified

That voiced obstruents lose their voice at the end of a word, and that в behaves differently from the other voiced consonants (it devoices at the end, takes part in assimilation, but does not make a neighbouring consonant voiced), comes from the web search before Chapter 1 (an article on Russian voicing assimilation, final devoicing and the problem of [v]). The six pairs, which letters are always voiced or voiceless, the pairs of words (бо́чка/по́чка, ва́за/фа́за, гора́/кора́, до́чка/то́чка, жар/шар, коза́/коса́) with their meanings and respellings, the remark about the English puff, and the ten new words are from general knowledge. No dictionary or pronunciation source was consulted. Check a Russian grammar, dictionary or a native speaker before relying on them.

Sources for This Chapter

The web search results on Russian voicing named in the box above (a page on voicing assimilation, final devoicing and the problem of [v], and a general overview of Russian phonology); the sources of

the earlier chapters for the rest.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. Name the six voiced/voiceless pairs.

▼ Show answer

б/п, в/ф, г/к, д/т, ж/ш, з/с (voiced first).

2. Which consonants have no partner, and what kind are they?

▼ Show answer

л м н р й are always voiced; х ц ч щ are always voiceless.

3. How do you tell a voiced from a voiceless consonant with your finger?

▼ Show answer

Put a finger on your throat: a voiced consonant buzzes (like zzz), a voiceless one does not (like sss).

4. Read each pair aloud and say how they differ: гора́ / кора́ and коза́ / коса́.

▼ Show answer

gah-RAH ("mountain") / kah-RAH ("bark") and kah-ZAH ("goat") / kah-SAH ("braid"). The first of each pair has a voiced consonant (г, з) and the second its voiceless partner (к, с).

5. Write in Cyrillic: *vase* · *dot* · *ball* · *heat*

▼ Show answer

ваза́ · то́чка · шар · жар

Coming Up in Chapter 7

When does a voiced consonant stop being voiced? Chapter 7 gives the two rules: at the **end of a word** (гриб said GREEP) and inside **clusters**, where the last consonant of a group decides the voice of the others.

Когда звонкий становится глухим — When a Voiced Consonant Goes Deaf

Chapter 6 gave you the voiced and voiceless pairs. This chapter gives the two rules for when a voiced consonant is said as its voiceless partner. You have met the first in every respelling that ended in a surprise: год said GOHT, друг said DROOK. The second works inside words, and it explains many more.

Rule 1: At the End of a Word

At the end of a word, a voiced consonant is said as its voiceless partner. The spelling does not change:

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	хлеб		bread	*final б said as п*
2	друг		friend	*final г said as к*
3	год		year	*final д said as т*
4	глаз		eye	*final з said as с*
5	муж		husband	*final ж said as ш*
6	кровь	KROHF'	blood	*final в said as ф (the ь softens it)*
7	сад	SAHT	garden	*final д said as т*

The first five words are from earlier chapters, so their respellings are not repeated: say them from the rule.

Checking the Spelling by Adding a Vowel

Because both members of a pair sound the same at the end of a word, you cannot tell by ear whether to write д or т, б or п. As with the weak vowels of Chapters 2 and 3, a form with a vowel ending shows which letter it is, because the consonant is then no longer last:

Word	A form with a vowel ending	So the letter is
год (year)	года (of a year)	д
хлеб (bread)	хлеба (of bread)	б
друг (friend)	друга (of a friend)	г
глаз (eye)	глаза (of an eye)	з
сад (garden)	сада (of a garden)	д

Again, a help rather than a rule: for some words you just need to know. But this one catches many.

Rule 2: Inside a Cluster, the Last Consonant Decides

*When two or more consonants stand together, they are all voiced or all voiceless, and **the last one decides**. If the last is voiceless, the ones before it are said voiceless; if it is voiced, they are said voiced:*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	ло́жка	LOHSH-kuh	spoon	*жк: ж before voiceless к is said as ш*
2	оши́бка	ah-SHIHP-kuh	mistake	*бк: б before voiceless к is said as п*
3	ска́зка	SKAHS-kuh	fairy tale	*зк: з before к is said as с*
4	за́втра	ZAHF-truh	tomorrow	*вт: в before voiceless т is said as ф*
5	всегда́	fsih-GDAH	always	*в before с is said as ф; the last consonants гд are both voiced and stay so*
6	встре́ча	FSTRYEH-chuh	meeting	*в before с, т is said as ф*
7	сде́лать	ZDYEH-laht'	to do, to make	*сд: с before voiced д is said as з*
8	про́сьба	PROHZ'-buh	request	*сб: с before voiced б is said as з*
9	футбо́л	fud-BOHL	football	*тб: т before voiced б is said as д*

In the first group (1 to 6), a voiced consonant before a voiceless one turns voiceless. In the second (7 to 9), a voiceless consonant before a voiced one turns voiced. The rule works both ways.

The Special Case of В

*The letter в belongs to the pair в/ф, but it behaves like the always-voiced consonants in one way: it does **not** change the consonant before it. A consonant before в keeps its own voice:*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	свой	SVOY	one's own	*с stays voiceless before в; it does not become з*
2	твой	TVOY	your (singular)	*т stays voiceless before в; it does not become д*

But в itself is changed by the consonant after it (в before с or т becomes ф, as in всегда́ and за́втра), and by being last in a word (кровь). It is changed, but it does not change others.

> **Watch Out: The Spelling Does Not Change**
>
> These rules change the sound, not the spelling. You write *ошибка* with a б, even though you say a п, and *всегда́* with a в, though you say an ф. Say what you hear, write what you learned, and use the vowel-ending trick for the final consonants when you can.

Read It Again — Ten Words, No Respellings

Here are the cluster words and свой again, without respellings: read each one aloud, applying the rules, and say which rule it needs.

#	WORD	WHICH RULE?	ENGLISH
1	ло́жка	cluster, voiced before voiceless (ж to ш)	spoon
2	оши́бка	cluster (б to п)	mistake
3	ска́зка	cluster (з to с)	fairy tale
4	за́втра	cluster (в to ф)	tomorrow
5	всегда́	cluster (в to ф)	always
6	встре́ча	cluster (в to ф)	meeting
7	сде́лать	cluster, voiceless before voiced (с to з)	to do
8	про́сьба	cluster (с to з)	request
9	футбо́л	cluster (т to д)	football
10	свой	the special case of в	one's own

Not Yet Verified

That word-final voiced obstruents lose their voice, that within a cluster the final obstruent decides the voicing of the whole cluster, and that в is an exception (it devoices at the end and takes part in assimilation but does not trigger voicing assimilation) comes from the web search before Chapter 1 (an article on Russian voicing assimilation, final devoicing and the problem of [v]). I did not read the whole article, and I have simplified the rule: the full rules treat obstruents and sonorants differently and have more detail. The vowel-ending trick, the words and their meanings and respellings (хлеб, друг, год, глаз, муж, кровь, сад, ло́жка, оши́бка, ска́зка, за́втра, всегда́, встре́ча, сде́лать, про́сьба, футбо́л, свой, твой) are from general knowledge. No dictionary or pronunciation source was consulted. Check a Russian grammar, dictionary or a native speaker before relying on them.

Sources for This Chapter

The web search results on Russian voicing named in the box above (a page on voicing assimilation, final devoicing and the problem of [v], and a general overview of Russian phonology); the sources of the earlier chapters for the rest.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. What happens to a voiced consonant at the end of a word?

▼ Show answer

It is said as its voiceless partner (б as п, в as ф, г as к, д as т, ж as ш, з as с), but the spelling does not change.

2. How is ло́жка said, and why?

▼ Show answer

LOHSH-kuh. The ж is voiced, but it comes before the voiceless к, and in a cluster the last consonant decides, so it is said ш.

3. How is футбо́л said, and why?

▼ Show answer

fud-BOHL. The т is voiceless, but it comes before the voiced б, so the cluster is voiced and the т is said д.

4. You hear "SAHT" for "garden". How do you know whether it is written сад or сат?

▼ Show answer

By adding a vowel ending: са́да (of a garden) shows that the letter is д.

5. What is special about в in свой and всегда?

▼ Show answer

In свой, the в does not change the voice of the consonant before it: the с stays voiceless. In всегда́, the в itself is changed by the с after it and is said ф. So в is changed by its neighbours, but it does not change them.

Coming Up in Chapter 8

A few common words are not said as they are written, whatever the rules: **что** ("shtoh"), the г in *-ого* said as "v", and others. Chapter 8 collects the ones you most need.

Не так, как пишется — Not Said as Written

Russian spelling is much closer to the sounds than English or French spelling, but it is not perfect. After the weak vowels (Chapters 2 and 3) and the voice rules (Chapters 6 and 7), a handful of everyday patterns are still said differently from how they are written. This chapter collects the ones you most need. Learn them as words, not as rules, and they will stop surprising you.

1. Что and чн: А Ч That Says Ш

*In the word **что** ("what") the ч is said **ш**: "shtoh". In a few other common words the group чн is said "шн". In most other words чн is said as written, so this is a list to learn.*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	что	SHTOH	what	*written ч, said ш*
2	конечно	kah-NYEHSH-nuh	of course	*чн said "шн"*
3	скучно	SKOOSH-nuh	boring, it is boring	*чн said "шн"*

2. The Г Said as В

*In some very common words the letter **г** is said **в**. The commonest case is the ending **-ого / -его** of adjectives, pronouns and similar words ("-ovo", "-evo"), which you will meet in the grammar courses. Three words to learn now:*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	его́	yih-VOH	his; him	*the г is said в*
2	сего́дня	sih-VOHD-nyuh	today	*the г is said в*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
3	ничего́	nih-chih-VOH	nothing; it is nothing, never mind	*the г is said в*

3. -тся and -ться: a Long ts

*The verb endings **-тся** and **-ться** are both said as one long "ts" followed by a weak vowel: "-tsuh". The ь of -ться is not heard as a separate sound:*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	учи́ться	oo-CHEET-tsuh	to study	*ться said "tsuh"*
2	улыба́ться	ool-ih-BAHT-tsuh	to smile	*ться said "tsuh"*

4. Silent Letters in Clusters

In a few common words, a consonant in a cluster is written but not said. Three to know:

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	со́лнце	SOHN-tsuh	sun	*the л is written but not said*
2	се́рдце	SYEHR-tsuh	heart	*the д is written but not said*
3	пра́здник	PRAHZ-nihk	holiday, festival	*the д is written but not said*

You met the same thing with the first в of здра́вствуйте ("hello") in Chapter 1.

5. Doubled Consonants Are Said Long

*A written double consonant is said as one **long** sound, held a little longer than a single one, not as two separate sounds. You met this with the double с of Росси́я:*

#	WORD	RESPELLING	ENGLISH	NOTE
1	класс	KLAHSS	class	*long с*
2	ва́нна	VAHN-nuh	bath	*long н*
3	гру́ппа	GROOP-puh	group	*long п*
4	суббо́та	soo-BOH-tuh	Saturday	*long б*

Watch Out: Do Not Say Both

A double consonant is one longer sound, not two: *ва́нна* is not "van-na" with a pause, and *класс* is not "klas-s". Hold the sound a little longer, then go on.

How to Use This Chapter

You do not need to learn these as rules. When you meet one of these words, say it the way the respelling shows, and it will become familiar. The rules from Chapters 2, 3, 6 and 7 still apply to these words too: the weak vowels, for example, are as weak in *суббо́та* as in any other word.

Not Yet Verified

That the ч of что is said ш, that чн is said шн in a few words, that г is said в in the endings -ого and -его, that -тся and -ться are said "tsuh", that л in солнце and д in сердце and праздник are silent, that doubled consonants are said long, and the words and their meanings, stress and respellings (что, коне́чно, ску́чно, его́, сего́дня, ничего́, учи́ться, улыба́ться, со́лнце, се́рдце, пра́здник, класс, ва́нна, гру́ппа, суббо́та) are from general knowledge. The web searches for this course did not cover them. No dictionary or pronunciation source was consulted. The list is a selection of common cases, not a complete one. Check a Russian grammar, dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of them.

Sources for This Chapter

None beyond the searches listed in the earlier chapters of this course and of Russian Alphabet 1; this chapter's content comes from general knowledge, as the box above says.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Say each answer out loud first, then click to check.

1. How is ЧТО said, and how is it written?

▼ Show answer

Said SHTOH: the ч is said ш. It is written ч + т + о.

2. Read aloud: его́ · сего́дня · ничего́. What do the three have in common?

▼ Show answer

yih-VOH · sih-VOHD-nyuh · nih-chih-VOH ("his/him", "today", "nothing"). The г is said в in all three.

3. How is the ending of учи́ться said?

▼ Show answer

"tsuh": a long "ts" and a weak vowel, so the word is oo-CHEET-tsuh. The ь is not heard as a separate sound.

4. Which letter is silent in со́лнце and which in се́рдце?

▼ Show answer

The л in со́лнце (SOHN-tsuh) and the д in се́рдце (SYEHR-tsuh).

5. How is the double consonant of суббо́та said?

▼ Show answer

As one long б: soo-BOH-tuh. It is held a little longer than a single б, not said twice.

Coming Up in Chapter 9

The last part of the course is **handwriting**. Chapters 9 and 10 teach the cursive letters, which are different from the printed ones you have read so far. Chapter 9 starts with the letters whose handwritten shape is close to the printed one.

Прописные буквы — Handwritten Letters

Everything so far has been the printed alphabet. Russians, though, write by hand in a different style, ***Russian cursive****, and a handwritten note or a handwritten sign may look quite unlike the print you have learned. Chapters 9 and 10 teach you to read and begin to write it. This chapter takes the letters that are the easy ones: those whose cursive form is close to the printed one.*

What Russian Cursive Is

- Russian cursive is used almost exclusively for handwriting, unlike English handwriting, which mixes cursive with print. Russians do not usually write in printed letters.
- It is much like English and other Latin-alphabet cursive: the letters are joined in a flowing line.
- Several cursive letters look like Latin letters but are not the same (for example the cursive *n* may look like an English *n*, and *m* like an English *m*). Chapter 10 deals with these.

> **How the Cursive Is Shown on This Page**
>
> The handwritten letters on this page are shown in a font called **Marck Script**, a free handwriting-style font that includes Cyrillic. A font is a *model* of cursive, not any one person's handwriting, and the page loads it from the Google Fonts site. If it cannot load, your browser will show a different script font, or plain letters. Real people's hands vary a great deal, so compare what you see here with a copybook (a Russian schoolchild's *прописъ*) when you practise.

Two Groups of Letters

The easiest way to learn Russian cursive is to split the alphabet in two:

Group	Letters	Covered in
Close to print	а б в е ё ж з к н о р с у ф х ц ч ъ ь э ю я	this chapter
Different from print	г д и й л м п т ш щ ы	Chapter 10

This split is from my own judgement of the shapes, helped by the search results on Russian cursive (which name т, п, ш, и, л, м, щ, д and г as the letters that differ). "Close to print" means you can usually recognise the handwritten letter from the printed one; it does not mean the two are identical.

The Close-to-Print Letters

Each row shows the printed letter and the same letter in cursive. Look at the cursive form, and trace it with your finger before you copy it by hand.

PRINT	CURSIVE	SOUND	PRINT	CURSIVE	SOUND
А а		ah	С с		s
Б б		b	У у		oo
В в		v	Ф ф		f

PRINT	CURSIVE	SOUND	PRINT	CURSIVE	SOUND
Е е		ye	Х х		kh
Ё ё		yo	Ц ц		ts
Ж ж		zh	Ч ч		ch
З з		z	Ъ ъ		hard sign
К к		k	Ь ь		soft sign
Н н		n	Э э		eh
О о		oh	Ю ю		yoo
Р р		r	Я я		ya

Watch Out: Look-Alikes in Cursive

Some cursive letters look like Latin letters with another sound, just as in print: the cursive *р* looks like an English p and says "r", the cursive *и* looks like an English H-shape and says "n", and the cursive *у* looks like a y and says "oo". Read them as Russian letters.

Writing Habits

From general knowledge (not checked against a source here): Russian cursive is written leaning to the right, with letters joined along the line, and the stress is never marked in handwriting. A copybook (пропись) shows the stroke order for each letter, which is the best way to learn to write them; this page can show shapes but not the movement of the pen.

Read the Handwriting

Ten words written in cursive, using only the close-to-print letters. Read each, then click the answer.

#	CURSIVE	PRINT	ENGLISH	RESPELLING (NEW WORDS ONLY)
1	*нос*	нос	nose	
2	*сон*	сон	sleep, dream	SOHN
3	*кран*	кран	tap, faucet	KRAHN
4	*банк*	банк	bank	
5	*ухо*	у́хо	ear	
6	*ваза*	ва́за	vase	
7	*рука*	рука́	hand, arm	
8	*жена*	жена́	wife	
9	*цена*	цена́	price	
10	*юбка*	юбка	skirt	

The print column shows the stress marks, which handwriting does not. If a word is hard to read in cursive, read the print form first, then look at the cursive again and notice which letters you recognised.

Not Yet Verified

That Russian cursive is used almost exclusively for handwriting, is much like Latin cursive, and has some letters that look like Latin letters (т like *m*, п like *n*), comes from a web search and a reading of Wikipedia's "Russian cursive" page; that page does *not* say which letters match the print and which differ, nor how to form them, and it carries maintenance tags (needs citations). The two groups of letters, the writing habits (the right slant, joining, no stress marks), the words and their meanings are from my own judgement and general knowledge. I also did not see how Marck Script draws these letters in a browser, so the shapes in the cursive column are whatever the font gives. Compare them with a Russian copybook (пропись) or a handwriting model from a teacher before you rely on them to learn to write.

Sources for This Chapter

Wikipedia, "Russian cursive"; web search results on Russian cursive (the gw2ru article "Russian handwritten text", a Polyglottist Language Academy article on printed against handwritten letters, and a Brigham Young University page on describing the letters of Russian handwriting); the Marck Script font on Google Fonts. I read only the first and the font's page.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Read each cursive word aloud first, then click to check.

1. Read: *нос · сон · кран*

▼ Show answer

нос (nose) · сон (SOHN, "sleep") · кран (KRAHN, "tap").

2. Read: *жена · цена · юбка*

▼ Show answer

жена́ (wife) · цена́ (price) · ю́бка (skirt).

3. Is Russian cursive used mainly for handwriting or mainly for print?

▼ Show answer

Handwriting, almost exclusively. Print uses the printed letters you have learned.

4. Which group of letters is covered in this chapter, and which in the next?

▼ Show answer

This chapter: the letters close to print (а б в е ё ж з к н о р с у ф х ц ч ъ ь э ю я). Chapter 10: the ones that differ (г д и й л м п т ш щ ы).

5. Copy the word ваза by hand five times, in cursive, using a copybook model.

▼ Show answer

There is no single right answer: compare your cursive *ваза* with the model, and look at how each letter joins the next.

Coming Up in Chapter 10

The hard part: the letters whose cursive shape differs from print, **г д и й л м п т ш щ ы**. Several of them look like Latin letters or like each other, and Chapter 10 shows how to tell them apart.

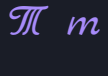
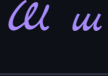
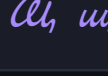
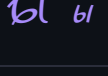
Трудные буквы — The Hard Letters

*Chapter 9 gave you the letters whose handwriting is close to print. This chapter takes the eleven that are not: **г д и й л м п т ш щ ы**. They are where the printed alphabet and handwriting really part company, and also where handwriting becomes ambiguous even for Russians, so the chapter is as much about reading in context as about shapes.*

> **The Same Caution as Chapter 9**
>
> The handwritten letters on this page are shown in the Marck Script font, a model of cursive and not any one person's hand, loaded from Google Fonts. I have not seen how it draws these letters in a browser, so what you see is whatever the font gives. Compare with a Russian copybook (*прописъ*) or a handwriting model from a teacher before you rely on this page to learn to write.

The Eleven Letters

PRINT	CURSIVE	SOUND	WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE
Г г	*Г г*	g	differs from print (details not checked here)
Д д	*Д д*	d	the lowercase can be written like *д* or *∂*
И и	*И и*	ee	contains the same stroke as a dotless Latin *i*, half of a cursive *u*
Й й	*Й й*	y	an *u* with a mark over it
Л л	*Л л*	l	built from the same strokes as и, м, ш, щ
М м	*М м*	m	built from the same strokes as и, л, ш, щ
П п	*П п*	p	may look like a Latin cursive *n*, though it says "p"

PRINT	CURSIVE	SOUND	WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE
Т т		t	looks like a Latin *m*; may have a bar over it
Ш ш		sh	may look like *ш*, so like the т, or like a *m*
Щ щ		shch	a ш with a tail; same strokes as и, л, м, ш
Ы ы		ih (back)	contains the same strokes as и, л, м, ш, щ

The Look-Alike Groups

The letters of the table form two groups that can be confused:

Group	Letters	Why they are confused
made of the same up-and-down strokes	**и л м ш щ ы**	each is a row of short strokes of the same kind (the "minims"), with a hook or tail on some
look like each other and like *m*	**т ш**	in some handwriting both look like *m* or *ш*

Russian readers rely on context here: the word and the sentence tell them which letter is meant. Some people mark the difference, for example with a bar above м (and some with a bar under ш), but this varies from person to person.

Handwriting That Cannot Be Told Apart

*Two examples from the Wikipedia page on Russian cursive show how easily the strokes can be confused: written quickly, **лш** and **ми** can look identical, and **мщу** and **лищу** can be indistinguishable. That is not a defect of the font: it is a feature of the handwriting.*

> **Reading Strategy**
>
> When a handwritten word is unclear, do not read letter by letter. Read the whole word and ask: which Russian word fits these shapes and this sentence? Once you know the word, the letters fall into place. This is also why reading *printed* text first, as you have done in this course, is a good way to learn: you know the words.

Read the Handwriting

Ten words in cursive, all using the hard letters. Read each, then check the print. (Respellings are for the new word only.)

#	CURSIVE	PRINT	ENGLISH	RESPELLING (NEW WORDS ONLY)
1	дом	дом	house	
2	мама	ма́ма	mum	
3	папа	па́па	dad	
4	мир	мир	world, peace	
5	мыло	мы́ло	soap	
6	лампа	ла́мпа	lamp	

#	CURSIVE	PRINT	ENGLISH	RESPELLING (NEW WORDS ONLY)
7	*город*	го́род	city, town	
8	*глаз*	глаз	eye	
9	*шапка*	ша́пка	hat	SHAHP-kuh
10	*щётка*	щётка	brush	

Handwritten Sentences

#	CURSIVE	PRINT	ENGLISH
1	*Это мой дом.*	Э́то мой дом.	This is my house.
2	*Мама дома.*	Ма́ма до́ма.	Mum is at home.
3	*Вот моя шапка.*	Вот моя́ ша́пка.	Here is my hat.

Not Yet Verified

The shape notes in the table that rest on a source (т and ш looking like *m* or *ш*, п like a Latin *n*, д written like *∂* or *∂*, and the group of и, л, м, ш, щ, ы made of the same strokes, with the examples лш/ми and мщу/лицу) come from Wikipedia's "Russian cursive" page, which carries maintenance tags (needs citations), and which does not describe the shapes of г, й or the capitals, nor how to form any letter. The remarks about г and й, the bars over т and under ш, the chosen words and sentences and their meanings, and how the font actually draws the letters are not from a source; I did not see the font's letters in a browser. Check a Russian copybook (прописъ) or a teacher before you rely on this page to learn to write, since stroke order and joining cannot be shown here.

Sources for This Chapter

Wikipedia, "Russian cursive" (the Variants and Ambiguities sections); the search results on Russian cursive named in Chapter 9; the Marck Script font on Google Fonts.

Try It Yourself — Практика

Read each cursive item aloud first, then click to check.

1. Read: *дом · город · глаз*

▼ Show answer

дом (house) · го́род (city) · глаз (eye).

2. Read: *лампа · шапка · щётка*

▼ Show answer

ла́мпа (lamp) · ша́пка (hat) · щётка (brush).

3. Which letters are made of the same strokes and so are easily confused?

▼ Show answer

и, л, м, ш, щ and ы. In some handwriting т and ш also both look like an m.

4. What should you do when a handwritten word is unclear?

▼ Show answer

Read the whole word and the sentence, and ask which Russian word fits the shapes and the context; do not read letter by letter.

5. Read: *Вот моя шапка.*

▼ Show answer

Вот моя́ ша́пка: "Here is my hat."

Coming Up in Chapter 11

The last chapter: **reading practice**. No new material, only real text: unmarked printed text, with stress and the sound rules you now know, a few short handwritten lines, and a recap of what Russian Alphabet 2 taught you. Then the course is complete.

Читаем вместе — Reading Together

No new rules in this chapter. You will read real words and short sentences and apply everything from Chapters 1 to 10: where the stress falls, weak vowels, hard and soft consonants, voice, the words not said as written, and handwriting. Each passage has the stress marked in the first reading; say it aloud before you open the answer.

Recap: What the Course Taught

Chapter	Idea
1	Stress is free, usually unmarked, and the stressed vowel is said clearly
2–3	Unstressed vowels are weak: о, а, е, я, и are reduced
4–5	Consonants are hard or

Chapter	Idea
	soft; ж ш ц are always hard, ч щ й always soft
6–7	Voiced and voiceless pairs; final devoicing; the last consonant of a cluster decides
8	Words not said as written: что, -ого, -ться, silent letters, long doubles
9–10	Cursive: letters close to

print, and the eleven that differ

Words, With Stress Marked

Read each aloud, then click to check the respelling.

1. хлеб · зуб · по́езд

▼ Show answer

KHLYEHP ("bread") · ZOOP ("tooth", the final б said п) · POH-yihst ("train", the final д said т).

2. молоко́ · дорога́ · голова́

▼ Show answer

muh-lah-KOH ("milk") · dah-rah-GAH ("road") · guh-lah-VAH ("head"). The stressed syllable is the last; the o before it is said "ah" and the others "uh".

3. рабо́та · шко́ла · кни́га

▼ Show answer

rah-BOH-tuh ("work") · SHKOH-luh ("school") · KNEE-guh ("book").

4. ло́жка · за́втра · встре́ча

▼ Show answer

LOHSH-kuh ("spoon") · ZAHF-truh ("tomorrow") · FSTRYEH-chuh ("meeting"): the voice rule of Chapter 7 in each.

5. что · сего́дня · коне́чно

▼ Show answer

SHTOH ("what") · sih-VOHD-nyuh ("today") · kah-NYEHSH-nuh ("of course"): the three patterns of Chapter 8.

Short Sentences

#	RUSSIAN	RESPELLING	ENGLISH
1	Что э́то?	SHTOH EH-tuh	What is this?
2	Э́то мой друг.	EH-tuh MOY DROOK	This is my friend.
3	Сего́дня хоро́шая пого́да.	sih-VOHD-nyuh khah-ROH-shuh-yuh pah-GOH-duh	The weather is nice today.
4	Где мой стул?	GDYEH MOY STOOL	Where is my chair?
5	Спаси́бо, всё хорошо́.	spah-SEE-buh, FSYOH khah-rah-SHOH	Thank you, everything is fine.

Check the tricks: in sentence 4 the final д of где is not last, so it stays д; in sentence 5, всё starts with в said ф.

A Handwritten Note

Read the note, then check the print version.

Привет, мама! Сегодня я дома. Вот мой дом, моя шапка и мой друг.

6. Read the note above, aloud.

▼ Show answer

Приве́т, ма́ма! Сего́дня я до́ма. Вот мой дом, моя́ ша́пка и мой друг. "Hello, mum! Today I am at home. Here is my house, my hat and my friend."

Not Yet Verified

All words, sentences, stresses, respellings and translations in this chapter are from my general knowledge. No dictionary, grammar or pronunciation source was consulted, and the cursive is shown in the Marck Script font, which I have not seen in a browser. Several words are new here (зуб, поезд, молоко, дорога, голова, работа, школа, хорошая, погода, спасибо, всё, привет), and the respellings of the long sentences are approximate. The recap restates earlier chapters, whose own boxes list their sources. Check with a Russian grammar, dictionary or native speaker before relying on any of it.

Sources for This Chapter

None beyond those of Chapters 1 to 10 (web searches on Cyrillic, stress, vowel reduction, voicing and Russian cursive, and Wikipedia's "Russian cursive"); the rest is general knowledge.

Course Complete: Where Next

You can now read printed Russian with stress, reduce vowels, handle hard and soft consonants and voicing, and read basic cursive. The next step is words and grammar: a Russian Basic Conversation course, if one is planned, or a dictionary with stress marked, which is the most useful tool you can have. Congratulations on finishing Russian Alphabet 2.