RU

LANGUAGE COURSE

Russian Grammar 3

12 Chapters

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RUSSIAN GRAMMAR 3

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Russian Grammar 3

Chapter 1 · The Infinitive and the First Conjugation

🏃 Your First Verbs — Пе́рвые глаго́лы

*Russian Grammar 1 taught the noun and its six cases, and Russian Grammar 2 taught the words that agree with it. This course teaches the **verb**: the word that says what happens. A Russian verb changes for **person** and **number** (I, you, he, we …), for **tense**, and for **aspect**. This chapter starts with the simplest part, the **infinitive** and the **present tense** of the biggest group of verbs, the **first conjugation**.*

> THE RULE IN ONE BOX
>
> The **infinitive** is the dictionary form and most often ends in **-ть** (**чита́ть**, “to read”). To make the present tense of a first-conjugation verb, **drop -ть** and add the endings **-ю, -ешь, -ет, -ем, -ете, -ют**: **я чита́ю, ты чита́ешь, он чита́ет, мы чита́ем, вы чита́ете, они́ чита́ют**. Russian has **one** present tense, with no “do” and no “am reading”: **Я чита́ю.** means both “I read” and “I am reading”.

The infinitive

The infinitive answers the question *что де́лать?* (“to do what?”). It does not change for person or number. There are three infinitive endings, and this chapter uses the first and by far the commonest one.

ENDING	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH	HOW COMMON
-ть	чита́ть, де́лать, гуля́ть	to read, to do, to walk	the great majority
-ти	идти́, нести́	to go (on foot), to carry	a small group
-чь	мочь, помо́чь	to be able, to help	a small group

The infinitive is used after other verbs and after many adjectives and short forms (Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 7): **Я люблю́ чита́ть.** (*I like reading.*) **Я уме́ю игра́ть.** (*I can play.*) **Он гото́в рабо́тать.** (*He is ready to work.*)

The personal pronouns and the verb

The verb has **six** present forms, one for each of the personal pronouns taught in Russian Grammar 1, Chapter 11.

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1st	**я** (I)	**мы** (we)
2nd	**ты** (you, one person, informal)	**вы** (you, several people, or one person politely)
3rd	**он, она́, оно́** (he, she, it)	**они́** (they)

Remember that *вы* is plural in form and always takes **-ете**, even when it means one person (“Вы чита´ете, Анна?”). The verb tells you the person, so a reply may drop the pronoun, but in ordinary speech the pronoun is usually kept.

First conjugation: the pattern

PRONOUN	ENDING	ЧИТА́ТЬ	ДЕ́ЛАТЬ	ГУЛЯ́ТЬ
я	-ю	чита́ю	де́лаю	гуля́ю
ты	-ешь	чита́ешь	де́лаешь	гуля́ешь
он, она́, оно́	-ет	чита́ет	де́лает	гуля́ет
мы	-ем	чита́ем	де́лаем	гуля́ем
вы	-ете	чита́ете	де́лаете	гуля́ете
они́	-ют	чита́ют	де́лают	гуля́ют

The letter before *-ть* (*-а-* in *чита´ть* and *де´лать*, *-я-* in *гуля´ть*) stays in every form, so you can think of it as part of the stem. The ending is then simply added. In the *я* and *они´* forms the ending is spelt *-ю, -ют* after a vowel. The **stress stays on the same syllable** as in the infinitive for all the verbs in this chapter, which makes them the easiest to learn.

Watch out: the я and они forms end in -ю and -ют

A learner often adds *-у* or *-ут* by habit from other verbs: *я чита́ у* is wrong. After a vowel-letter such as *а* or *я* the endings are *-ю* and *-ют*. The endings *-у* and *-ут* belong to verbs whose stem ends in a consonant (**я пишу́**, Chapter 3).

Everyday first-conjugation verbs

INFINITIVE	SAY IT	ENGLISH	Я	ОНИ́
чита́ть	chee-TAHT	to read	**чита́ю**	**чита́ют**
де́лать	DYEH-laht	to do, to make	**де́лаю**	**де́лают**
рабо́тать	rah-BOH-taht	to work	**рабо́таю**	**рабо́тают**
гуля́ть	goo-LYAHT	to walk, to stroll	**гуля́ю**	**гуля́ют**
ду́мать	DOO-maht	to think	**ду́маю**	**ду́мают**
знать	znaht	to know	**зна́ю**	**зна́ют**
понима́ть	pah-nee-MAHT	to understand	**понима́ю**	**понима́ют**
отдыха́ть	aht-dy-KHAHT	to rest	**отдыха́ю**	**отдыха́ют**
игра́ть	ee-GRAHT	to play	**игра́ю**	**игра́ют**
слу́шать	SLOO-shaht	to listen	**слу́шаю**	**слу́шают**
спра́шивать	SPRAH-shee-vaht	to ask	**спра́шиваю**	**спра́шивают**
отвеча́ть	aht-vee-CHAHT	to answer	**отвеча́ю**	**отвеча́ют**
за́втракать	ZAHF-trah-kaht	to have breakfast	**за́втракаю**	**за́втракают**
обе́дать	ah-BYEH-daht	to have lunch	**обе́даю**	**обе́дают**
у́жинать	OO-zhee-naht	to have dinner	**у́жинаю**	**у́жинают**

INFINITIVE	SAY IT	ENGLISH	Я	ОНИ́
начина́ть	nah-chee-NAHT	to begin	**начина́ю**	**начина́ют**
уме́ть	oo-MYEHT	to know how to, to be able	**уме́ю**	**уме́ют**

Watch out: not every verb in -ать is first conjugation

The suffix before *-ть* is a good clue: verbs in **-ать** and **-ять** are *mostly* first conjugation, as in this chapter, and so are verbs in **-еть** such as **уме́ть**. But a few very common verbs in *-ать* (**слы́шать, держа́ть, дыша́ть**) belong to the second conjugation (Chapter 2). The surest test is the *они́* form: if it ends in **-ут / -ют**, the verb is first conjugation, and if it ends in **-ат / -ят**, it is second. Learn the *они́* form with each new verb.

Using the present tense

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я чита́ю кни́гу.	I read / I am reading a book.	one present tense, with the object in the accusative
Ты зна́ешь А́нну?	Do you know Anna?	a question: only the intonation changes
Она́ рабо́тает до́ма.	She works at home.	habit
Мы обе́даем в час.	We have lunch at one.	routine
Вы понима́ете по-ру́сски?	Do you understand Russian?	*вы*: *-ете*
Они́ гуля́ют в па́рке.	They are walking in the park.	*они́*: *-ют*; *в па́рке* is prepositional
Он не отвеча́ет.	He does not answer.	*не* goes in front of the verb
Что ты ду́маешь?	What do you think?	question word first

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Дети игра́ют в футбо́л.	The children are playing football.	*игра́ть в* + accusative for a game

The present tense in Russian is used for what is true now, for habits, for general truths and for something in progress. It is also used for the near future in a few set cases, and this is taught in Chapter 7. There is **no** separate form for “I am reading” against “I read”, and no “do” for questions and negatives: just put *не* before the verb, or raise the voice for a question.

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and find the six endings.

① What are you doing?

A:

Что ты де´лаешь?

What are you doing?

B:

Я чита´ю. А ты?

I am reading. And you?

A:

Я слу´шаю му´зыку.

I am listening to music.

② At work

A:

Где вы рабо´таете?

Where do you work?

B:

Я рабо´таю в шко´ле. А вы?

I work in a school. And you?

A:

Мы с жено´й рабо´таем до´ма.

My wife and I work at home.

③ The weekend

A:

Что вы де´лаете в воскресе´нье?

What do you do on Sunday?

B:

Мы гуля´ем и отдыха´ем.

We walk and rest.

A:

А я игра́ю в футбо́л.

And I play football.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Infinitive	**-ть** (also *-ти, -чь*)	**чита́ть**
First conjugation endings	**-ю, -ешь, -ет, -ем, -ете, -ют**	**чита́ю, чита́ешь, чита́ет …**
How to form it	**drop -ть, add the ending**	**де́лать → де́лаю**
Test for the conjugation	**они́ -ют / -ут = first**	**они́ чита́ют**
Negative	**не + verb**	**Он не отвеча́ет.**
Question	**intonation, or a question word**	**Ты зна́ешь?**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Conjugate **рабо́тать** in the present tense (all six forms).

▼ Show answer

я рабо́таю, ты рабо́таешь, он рабо́тает, мы рабо́таем, вы рабо́таете, они́ рабо́тают.

2. Complete: **Мы ____ в па́рке.** (гуля́ть)

▼ Show answer

Мы гуля́ем в па́рке. *Мы: -ем.*

3. Complete: **Вы ____ по-ру´сски?** (понима´ть)

▼ Show answer

Вы понима´ете по-ру´сски? *Вы: -ете.*

4. Say in Russian: “I know.” and “He knows.”

▼ Show answer

Я зна´ю. Он зна´ет.

5. Say in Russian: “She does not answer.”

▼ Show answer

Она´ не отвеча´ет. *Не* before the verb.

6. Say in Russian: “What are you (informal) doing?”

▼ Show answer

Что ты де´лаешь? *Ты: -ешь.*

7. Say in Russian: “They are listening to music.”

▼ Show answer

Они´ слу´шают му´зыку. *Они´: -ют*; the object *му´зыку* is accusative.

8. Say in Russian: “I like reading.” Which form of the verb follows *люблю´*?

▼ Show answer

Я люблю´ чита´ть. The infinitive, which never changes. (*Люблю´* belongs to the second conjugation, Chapter 2.)

9. Which of these is first conjugation: **они´ чита´ют** or **они´ говоря´т**?

▼ Show answer

они´ чита´ют: it ends in *-ют*. *Говоря´т* ends in *-ят*, so it is second conjugation.

10. What is wrong with *Я чита´у*?

▼ Show answer

The first-person ending after *а* is *-ю*, so **Я чита´ю.**

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that first-conjugation verbs take *-ю/-у, -ешь, -ет, -ем, -ете, -ют/-ут*; that the infinitive ending *-ть* is dropped before adding the endings; that *читаю, читаешь, читает, читаем, читаете, читают* are the forms of *читать*; that the *они* form in *-ут/-ют* is a quick test for the first conjugation; and that the common suffixes before *-ть* are *а* (*читать*), *я* (*гулять*), *е* (*болеть*), *ова* and *ну* (sources: Wikibooks: Russian grammar, verbs, translate.ru: first conjugation verbs, Russian For Everyone: present tense, Mango Languages: present tense, russianenthusiast.com: present tense, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).

Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the stress on each verb (the search gave it only for *читать*); the conjugations of *делать, гулять* and the verbs in the vocabulary list; that the stress stays fixed for these verbs; that *слышать, держать, дышать* are second conjugation; the respellings; *игра´ть в* + accusative for games; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these.

Coming up in Chapter 2: The Second Conjugation. *говори´ть, люби´ть, ви´деть, слы´шать*; the endings *-ю, -ишь, -ит, -им, -ите, -ят*; the consonant change in the first person (*люблю´*); stress in the present.

The Other Half — Втора́я спряже́ние

Chapter 1 gave the first conjugation (чита́ю, чита́ешь, чита́ет). Russian has a second group of verbs, with different endings in the ты and они́ forms. It is smaller than the first, but it holds some of the commonest verbs in the language: говори́ть, люби́ть, ви́деть, смотре́ть. This chapter teaches the endings, the one consonant change you must watch for, and how the stress moves.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Second-conjugation endings: **-ю, -ишь, -ит, -им, -ите, -ят** (**я говорю́, ты говори́шь, он говори́т, мы говори́м, вы говори́те, они́ говоря́т**). Most of these verbs end in **-ить**, and a few end in **-еть** or **-ать**. After *ж, ч, ш, щ* the spelling rules give **-у** in place of *-ю* and **-ат** in place of *-ят*. In the *я* form only, the last consonant of the stem may **change** (**ви́деть → ви́жу**, **люби́ть → люблю́**). The test is the *они́* form: **-ят / -ат** means second conjugation.

The pattern

PRONOUN	ENDING	ГОВОРИ́ТЬ	СМОТРЕ́ТЬ	СЛЫ́ШАТЬ
я	-ю / -у	говорю́	смотрю́	слы́шу
ты	-ишь	говори́шь	смо́тришь	слы́шишь
он, она́, оно́	-ит	говори́т	смо́трит	слы́шит
мы	-им	говори́м	смо́трим	слы́шим
вы	-ите	говори́те	смо́трите	слы́шите
они́	-ят / -ат	говоря́т	смо́трят	слы́шат

To form the present, drop the infinitive ending (*-ить, -еть, -ать*) and add the six endings. The *я* form takes **-ю**, but **-у** after *ш* (*слы́шу*), because Russian Grammar 1, Chapter 2 taught that *ю*

and *я* are not written after *ж, ч, ш, щ*. The same rule gives **-ат** in *они́ слы́шат* in place of *-ят*.

> **Watch out: ты has -ишь, not -ешь**
>
> The easiest way to tell the groups apart is the vowel: **е** in the first (*ты чита́ешь, вы чита́ете*) and **и** in the second (*ты говори́шь, вы говори́те*). The *они́* forms differ too: *-ют* against *-ят*. If you hear *-ишь* or *-ят*, the verb is second conjugation.

How to tell which conjugation a verb is

The infinitive usually tells you. The rule has a short list of exceptions that you simply learn.

INFINITIVE ENDS IN	USUALLY	EXAMPLES
-ить	second conjugation	**говори́ть, люби́ть, учи́ть, звони́ть**
-ать, -ять	first conjugation (Chapter 1)	**чита́ть, гуля́ть**
-еть	first conjugation (*уме́ть*)	**уме́ть, боле́ть**
exceptions	second conjugation despite the ending	**ви́деть, смотре́ть, слы́шать, держа́ть, дыша́ть**

The usual list of **eleven exceptions**, which are second conjugation although they do not end in *-ить*, is: **гнать, держа́ть, дыша́ть, слы́шать, оби́деть, ви́деть, ненави́деть, зави́сеть, смотре́ть, терпе́ть, верте́ть**. A few verbs go the other way: **брить** (*I shave, я бре́ю*) ends in *-ить* but is first conjugation. The *они́* form is the surest guide, so learn it with each new verb.

The consonant change in the я form

In many second-conjugation verbs, the last consonant of the stem changes **in the я form only**. The other five forms keep the original consonant. There are two kinds of change.

CHANGE	INFINITIVE	Я	ТЫ	ENGLISH
б → бл	люби́ть	люблю́	лю́бишь	to love, like
в → вл	лови́ть	ловлю́	ло́вишь	to catch
в → вл	гото́вить	гото́влю	гото́вишь	to prepare, cook
м → мл	корми́ть	кормлю́	ко́рмишь	to feed
д → ж	ви́деть	ви́жу	ви́дишь	to see
д → ж	сиде́ть	сижу́	сиди́шь	to sit
т → ч	плати́ть	плачу́	пла́тишь	to pay
с → ш	проси́ть	прошу́	про́сишь	to ask for, request
з → ж	вози́ть	вожу́	во́зишь	to convey, carry by vehicle
ст → щ	чи́стить	чи́щу	чи́стишь	to clean

1. After *б, в, м, п, ф* the change adds a **л** (*люблю́, гото́влю*). **2.** After *д, т, с, з, ст* the consonant changes to a **sibilant**: *д → ж, т → ч, с → ш, з → ж, ст → щ*. Verbs whose stem ends in another consonant, or in *ж, ч, ш, щ* already (*говори́ть, смотре́ть, учи́ть, слы́шать*), do not change.

> **Watch out: the change is only in the я form**
>
> **я ви́жу, ты ви́дишь, он ви́дит, они́ ви́дят**. A learner who writes *ты ви́жишь* has carried the change too far. The same applies to *люблю́, лю́бишь* and *плачу́, пла́тишь*. Only *я* is special.

Stress in the present

The stress of a second-conjugation verb follows one of three patterns, and you learn the pattern with the verb.

PATTERN	MEANING	EXAMPLE	FORMS
Fixed on the ending	the stress is on the ending in every form	**говори́ть**	**говорю́, говори́шь, говори́т, говори́м, говори́те, говоря́т**
Fixed on the stem	the stress stays on the same stem syllable	**ви́деть**	**ви́жу, ви́дишь, ви́дит, ви́дим, ви́дите, ви́дят**
Shifting	the ending in *я*, then the stem in all the other forms	**люби́ть**	**люблю́, лю́бишь, лю́бит, лю́бим, лю́бите, лю́бят**

Other verbs in each group: **fixed on the ending звони́ть, сиде́ть**; **fixed on the stem слы́шать, гото́вить, чи́стить**; **shifting учи́ть, смотре́ть, плати́ть, проси́ть**. In the shifting pattern the rule is always the same: the *я* form is stressed on the ending, and every other form is stressed on the stem.

Everyday second-conjugation verbs

INFINITIVE	SAY IT	ENGLISH	Я	ОНИ́
говори́ть	gah-vah-REET	to speak, say	**говорю́**	**говоря́т**
люби́ть	lyoo-BEET	to love, like	**люблю́**	**лю́бят**
ви́деть	VEE-deet	to see	**ви́жу**	**ви́дят**
смотре́ть	smaht-RYET	to look, watch	**смотрю́**	**смо́трят**
слы́шать	SLY-shaht	to hear	**слы́шу**	**слы́шат**
учи́ть	oo-CHEET	to teach; to study (a subject)	**учу́**	**у́чат**
звони́ть	zvah-NEET	to ring, phone	**звоню́**	**звоня́т**
сиде́ть	see-DYET	to sit	**сижу́**	**сидя́т**
гото́вить	gah-TOH-veet	to cook, prepare	**гото́влю**	**гото́вят**
плати́ть	plah-TEET	to pay	**плачу́**	**пла́тят**

INFINITIVE	SAY IT	ENGLISH	Я	ОНИ́
проси́ть	prah-SEET	to ask for, request	**прошу́**	**про́сят**
держа́ть	deer-ZHAHT	to hold, keep	**держу́**	**де́ржат**

Using the verbs

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я говорю́ по-ру́сски.	I speak Russian.	*говорю́*: ending stressed
Ты лю́бишь му́зыку?	Do you like music?	stress shifts to the stem
Она́ ви́дит дом.	She sees the house.	accusative, inanimate
Я ви́жу бра́та.	I see my brother.	animate accusative (Russian Grammar 1)
Мы смо́трим фильм.	We are watching a film.	*смотре́ть* + accusative
Вы слы́шите?	Can you hear?	*-ите*
Они́ гото́вят у́жин.	They are cooking dinner.	*гото́вят*, no change outside *я*
Я учу́ ру́сский язы́к.	I am studying Russian.	*учи́ть* a subject
Мы пла́тим за обе́д.	We are paying for lunch.	*плати́ть за* + accusative
Они́ сидя́т до́ма.	They are sitting at home.	ending stressed throughout

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud and find the second-conjugation endings and the changed consonants.

① Languages

A:

Вы говори́те по-ру́сски?

② The evening

A:

Что вы де́лаете ве́чером?

Do you speak Russian?

B:

Да, я говорю́ немно́го. Я учу́ ру́сский язы́к.

Yes, I speak a little. I am learning Russian.

A:

Вы хорошо́ говори́те!

You speak well!

What do you do in the evening?

B:

Я гото́влю у́жин, а мой муж смо́трит футбо́л.

I cook dinner, and my husband watches football.

A:

А де́ти?

And the children?

B:

Они́ сидя́т до́ма и чита́ют.

They sit at home and read.

③ In a café

A:

Я не слы́шу. Говори́те гро́мче, пожа́луйста.

I cannot hear. Can you speak louder?

B:

Коне́чно. Я плачу́ за ко́фе.

Of course. I am paying for the coffee.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Second conjugation endings	**-ю/-у, -ишь, -ит, -им, -ите, -ят/-ат**	**говорю́, говори́шь, говори́т …**
After ж, ч, ш, щ	**-у and -ат**	**слы́шу, слы́шат**
Test	**они́ -ят / -ат**	**они́ говоря́т**

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Labial stems: б, в, м, п, ф	**+ л in the я form**	**люблю́, гото́влю**
Dental stems	**д, з → ж; т → ч; с → ш; ст → щ**	**ви́жу, плачу́, прошу́, чи́щу**
Where the change applies	**я form only**	**ви́жу, ви́дишь**
The eleven exceptions	**-ать / -еть verbs that are second conjugation**	**слы́шать, ви́деть, смотре́ть**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Conjugate **говори́ть** in the present tense (all six forms).

▼ Show answer

я говорю́, ты говори́шь, он говори́т, мы говори́м, вы говори́те, они́ говоря́т.

2. Conjugate **ви́деть**. Which form is special?

▼ Show answer

я ви́жу, ты ви́дишь, он ви́дит, мы ви́дим, вы ви́дите, они́ ви́дят. Only *я* changes (*д* → *ж*).

3. Say in Russian: “I love music.” and “You (informal) love music.”

▼ Show answer

Я люблю́ му́зыку. Ты лю́бишь му́зыку. The *л* appears in every form, but the stress shifts.

4. Complete: **Они́ ____ фильм.** (смотре́ть)

▼ Show answer

Они́ смо́трят фильм. *-ят*, with the stress on the stem.

5. Complete: **Я ____ у́жин.** (гото́вить)

▼ Show answer

Я гото́влю у́жин. *в* → *вл* in the *я* form.

6. Complete: **Мы ____ за обе́д.** (плати́ть)

▼ Show answer

Мы пла́тим за обе́д. No change in *мы*.

7. Make the *я* form of **проси́ть** and **сиде́ть**.

▼ Show answer

прошу́ (с → ш) and **сижу́** (д → ж).

8. Which conjugation: **они́ слы́шат** or **они́ слу́шают**?

▼ Show answer

слы́шат (hear) is second conjugation; **слу́шают** (listen) is first. Both are in *-ать*.

9. What is wrong with *Ты ви́жишь*?

▼ Show answer

The consonant change happens only in the *я* form: **Ты ви́дишь.**

10. Say in Russian: “I cannot hear.” and “He is looking at the house.” (use *смотре́ть на* + accusative)

▼ Show answer

Я не слы́шу. Он смо́трит на дом.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that second-conjugation verbs take *-ю/-у, -ишь, -ит, -им, -ите, -ят/-ат*, with *-у* and *-ат* after ж, ч, ш, щ; that most end in *-ить* and that *смотреть* is an *-еть* verb with second-conjugation endings; that the consonant change occurs only in the *я* form, with the examples *видеть → вижу* and *любить → люблю*; that *говорить* has no change (sources: translate.ru: second conjugation verbs, pelister.org: second conjugation, elon.io: regular second conjugation, ruslanguage.ru: second conjugation, Harvard handout: verb types, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).

Check carefully: the search said that sources disagree about the exceptions and did not list them. The list of eleven exceptions, and *брить* as an *-ить* verb of the first conjugation, are from my general knowledge only: verify them in a reference grammar before you rely on them.

Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the other consonant changes in the table (*ловить, готовить, кормить, сидеть, платить, просить, возить, чистить*) and the rule for *л* and the sibilants; all stress marks and the three stress patterns; the verb forms in the vocabulary list; the respellings; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these.

Coming up in Chapter 3: Irregular and Special Verbs. *быть* (and its missing present), *хоте́ть, мочь, есть, дать, жить*; verbs in *-овать* (*рисова́ть → рису́ю*), *-ава́ть* (*дава́ть → даю́*) and *-нуть*; *писа́ть → пишу́*.

⭐ The Verbs That Break the Pattern — Осо́бые глаго́лы

*Chapters 1 and 2 gave the two regular conjugations. A small group of verbs follow neither pattern exactly, and these are among the most useful verbs in Russian: быть, хоте́ть, мочь, есть, жить, пить. Several larger groups are not really irregular, but they have a different **stem** in the present from the one in the infinitive: verbs in -овать, verbs in -авать, and verbs whose stem ends in a consonant (писа́ть → пишу́). This chapter lays them all out in one place.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

быть ("to be") has **no present tense**: **Я до́ма. хоте́ть** is mixed: first-conjugation endings in the singular, second in the plural. **-овать / -евать** verbs drop *-ова-* and add *-у-*: **рисова́ть → рису́ю**. **-авать** verbs drop *-ва-*: **дава́ть → даю́**. Verbs whose present stem ends in a consonant take **-у / -ут** and a **-ёшь** (stressed) or **-ешь** pattern: **писа́ть → пишу́, пи́шешь**, **жить → живу́, живёшь**. Learn each irregular verb with its *я* and *они́* forms.

Быть: to be, with no present

Russian does not use *быть* in the present tense. It simply leaves it out, so a sentence can consist of two nouns, or a pronoun and an adjective.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я студе́нт.	I am a student.	no verb at all
Она́ до́ма.	She is at home.	place
Мы гото́вы.	We are ready.	short adjective (Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 7)

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Москва́ — столи́ца Росси́и.	Moscow is the capital of Russia.	a dash may stand in writing
Э́то мой друг.	This is my friend.	*э́то* in place of a verb

The past and the future of *быть* do exist, and they are taught in full in Chapters 4 and 7. For reference, here they are:

TENSE	FORMS	EXAMPLE
Present	**none**	**Он до́ма.** (He is at home.)
Past	**был, была́, бы́ло, бы́ли**	**Он был до́ма.** (He was at home.)
Future	**бу́ду, бу́дешь, бу́дет, бу́дем, бу́дете, бу́дут**	**Он бу́дет до́ма.** (He will be at home.)

> **Watch out: есть is not the present of быть**
>
> *Есть* turns up in sentences about having and existing (**У меня́ есть сестра́.**, *I have a sister*), and it is the old third-person form of *быть*. It is not used to say "am, is, are": *Я есть студе́нт* is wrong. Possession and existence are taught in Chapter 11. Do not confuse it with the verb **есть** "to eat", below.

Хоте́ть: to want

Хоте́ть is a **mixed** verb: the three singular forms have first-conjugation endings, and the three plural forms have second-conjugation endings. The *т* becomes *ч* in the singular.

PRONOUN	ХОТЕ́ТЬ	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
я	**хочу́**	**Я хочу́ пить.**	I want to drink.
ты	**хо́чешь**	**Ты хо́чешь ко́фе?**	Do you want coffee?
он, она́	**хо́чет**	**Она́ хо́чет спать.**	She wants to sleep.

PRONOUN	ХОТЕ́ТЬ	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
мы	хоти́м	Мы хоти́м домо́й.	We want to go home.
вы	хоти́те	Вы хоти́те чай?	Do you want tea?
они́	хотя́т	Они́ хотя́т гуля́ть.	They want to walk.

Хоте́ть takes either an **infinitive** (*Я хочу́ чита́ть.*) or an object in the **accusative** or the **genitive** (*Я хочу́ чай / чаю.*). With a noun that names a quantity of something, the genitive is common.

Мочь: to be able, can

Мочь is first conjugation, and the *г* of the stem changes to *ж* in most forms. Like all *-чь* verbs, it takes an infinitive.

PRONOUN	МОЧЬ	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
я	могу́	Я могу́ помо́чь.	I can help.
ты	мо́жешь	Ты мо́жешь рабо́тать?	Can you work?
он, она́	мо́жет	Он не мо́жет рабо́тать.	He cannot work.
мы	мо́жем	Мы мо́жем гуля́ть.	We can walk.
вы	мо́жете	Вы мо́жете говори́ть ме́дленнее?	Can you speak more slowly?
они́	мо́гут	Они́ мо́гут рабо́тать до́ма.	They can work at home.

Есть, дать, жить, пить

PRONOUN	ЕСТЬ (TO EAT)	ЖИТЬ (TO LIVE)	ПИТЬ (TO DRINK)
я	ем	живу́	пью

PRONOUN	ЕСТЬ (TO EAT)	ЖИТЬ (TO LIVE)	ПИТЬ (TO DRINK)
ты	ешь	живёшь	пьёшь
он, она́	ест	живёт	пьёт
мы	еди́м	живём	пьём
вы	еди́те	живёте	пьёте
они́	едя́т	живу́т	пьют

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я ем суп.	I am eating soup.	*есть*: *ем, ешь, ест*
Мы еди́м в рестора́не.	We eat in a restaurant.	*мы*, *вы*, *они́*: second-conjugation endings
Где ты живёшь?	Where do you live?	*живёшь*: *ё* is always stressed
Они́ живу́т в Москве́.	They live in Moscow.	*они́*: *-ут*
Он пьёт чай, а я пью ко́фе.	He drinks tea, and I drink coffee.	*пить*: ь before the vowel

Дать and дава́ть: to give

Russian has **two** verbs for “to give”, one for each aspect (Chapter 5). **Дава́ть** is imperfective and has a present tense. **Дать** is perfective: its forms look like a present tense but mean the **future** (“I will give”).

PRONOUN	ДАВА́ТЬ (PRESENT)	ДАТЬ (FUTURE)
я	даю́	дам
ты	даёшь	дашь
он, она́	даёт	даст

PRONOUN	ДАВА́ТЬ (PRESENT)	ДАТЬ (FUTURE)
мы	даём	дади́м
вы	даёте	дади́те
они́	даю́т	даду́т

Other verbs in **-авать** behave like *дава́ть*: the *-ва-* is dropped in the present and the endings are the first conjugation with *ё*: **встава́ть → встаю́, встаёшь** (to get up), **продава́ть → продаю́, продаёшь** (to sell), **узнава́ть → узнаю́, узнаёшь** (to recognise). The infinitive keeps *-ва-*, and the present drops it.

Verbs in -овать and -евать

Verbs in **-овать** and **-евать** are all first conjugation. In the present the *-ова-* (or *-ева-*) becomes **-у-**, and the usual endings follow. When the infinitive stress falls on *-ова-*, it moves to *-у-*.

INFINITIVE	Я	ТЫ	ОНИ́	ENGLISH
рисова́ть	рису́ю	рису́ешь	рису́ют	to draw
танцева́ть	танцу́ю	танцу́ешь	танцу́ют	to dance
путеше́ствовать	путеше́ствую	путеше́ствуешь	путеше́ствуют	to travel
сове́товать	сове́тую	сове́туешь	сове́туют	to advise
чу́вствовать	чу́вствую	чу́вствуешь	чу́вствуют	to feel

Consonant stems: писать, искать

Some first-conjugation verbs have a consonant in the present that the infinitive does not show. Often the stem changes in **every** present form (unlike the second conjugation, where only *я* changes). The endings are **-у, -ешь, -ет, -ем, -ете, -ут**, and after *ж, ч, ш, щ* the spelling rule requires *у*, not *ю*.

PRONOUN	ПИСА́ТЬ (TO WRITE)	ИСКА́ТЬ (TO LOOK FOR)	ПЛА́КАТЬ (TO CRY)
я	пишу́	ищу́	плачу́
ты	пи́шешь	и́щешь	пла́чешь
он, она́	пи́шет	и́щет	пла́чет
мы	пи́шем	и́щем	пла́чем
вы	пи́шете	и́щете	пла́чете
они́	пи́шут	и́щут	пла́чут

Compare the stress with the second conjugation: *пишу́* is stressed on the ending, and the other forms on the stem, the same shifting pattern as *люблю́, лю́бишь*. The change here is **с → ш** (*писа́ть*), **ск → щ** (*иска́ть*) and **к → ч** (*пла́кать*).

Other common verbs to know

INFINITIVE	Я	ТЫ	ОНИ́	ENGLISH
мыть	мою́	мо́ешь	мо́ют	to wash
ждать	жду	ждёшь	ждут	to wait (for)
брать	беру́	берёшь	беру́т	to take
звать	зову́	зовёшь	зову́т	to call

> **Watch out: ё is always stressed**
>
> Wherever you see *ё*, the stress is on it: **живёшь, пьёшь, даёшь, берёшь**. Learn the *ты* form of an irregular verb with its stress and its *ё* together, because the spelling gives the stress away. Many Russian texts print *е* instead of *ё*, so you must know the verb to read it correctly.

Verbs in -нуть

Many verbs end in **-нуть**. Most of the common ones are **perfective** and mean "do something once", so their *я / ты / они́* forms have a **future** meaning (Chapter 7). They conjugate like *-ешь* verbs, and in the past they come in **two types**.

INFINITIVE	Я	ТЫ	PAST (M. / F.)	IMPERFECTIVE PARTNER
кри́кнуть (shout once)	**кри́кну**	**кри́кнешь**	**кри́кнул, кри́кнула**	**крича́ть**
толкну́ть (give a push)	**толкну́**	**толкнёшь**	**толкну́л, толкну́ла**	**толка́ть**
исче́знуть (disappear)	**исче́зну**	**исче́знешь**	**исче́з, исче́зла**	**исчеза́ть**

Watch out: sometimes the -ну drops in the past

The **"once" verbs** (*кри́кнуть, толкну́ть, дви́нуть*) keep *-ну* in the past: **кри́кнул**. Verbs where *-нуть* is part of the original stem (*исче́знуть, привы́кнуть*) usually lose it in the masculine, and the feminine, neuter and plural keep a consonant stem: **исче́з, исче́зла, исче́зли**. You cannot tell the types apart from the infinitive, so learn the past form with the verb.

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and notice the irregular forms.

① At a restaurant

A:

Что вы хоти́те?

What would you like?

B:

Я хочу́ суп и чай.

I want soup and tea.

A:

② Where do you live?

A:

Где ты живёшь?

Where do you live?

B:

Я живу́ в Эдинбу́рге. А ты?

I live in Edinburgh. And you?

A:

А ваш друг?

And your friend?

B:

Он ест рыбу и пьёт ко́фе.

He is eating fish and drinking coffee.

Мы живём в Москве́.

We live in Moscow.

③ Can you help?

A:

Вы мо́жете мне помо́чь? Я ищу́ кни́гу.

Can you help me? I am looking for a book.

B:

Коне́чно. Я могу́ дать вам слова́рь.

Of course. I can give you a dictionary.

Quick reference

VERB	Я	ТЫ	ОНИ́
быть	no present tense; past *был*, future *бу́ду*		
хоте́ть	хочу́	хо́чешь	хотя́т
мочь	могу́	мо́жешь	мо́гут
есть	ем	ешь	едя́т
жить	живу́	живёшь	живу́т
пить	пью	пьёшь	пьют
дава́ть / дать	даю́ / дам	даёшь / дашь	даю́т / даду́т

VERB	Я	ТЫ	ОНИ́
рисова́ть	рису́ю	рису́ешь	рису́ют
писа́ть	пишу́	пи́шешь	пи́шут

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Say in Russian: “I am a teacher.” Which word is missing from the English?

▼ Show answer

Я учи́тель. (or *учи́тельница* for a woman.) The English “am” has no Russian word in the present.

2. Conjugate **хоте́ть** in all six forms. Which forms are first conjugation, which second?

▼ Show answer

хочу́, хо́чешь, хо́чет, хоти́м, хоти́те, хотя́т. The singular is first conjugation, the plural second.

3. Say in Russian: “Can you (informal) help me?”

▼ Show answer

Ты мо́жешь мне помо́чь? *Мне* is the dative of *я*.

4. Complete: **Он ____ чай, а я ____ ко́фе.** (пить)

▼ Show answer

Он пьёт чай, а я пью ко́фе.

5. Say in Russian: “We live in Moscow.” and “They live in Moscow.”

▼ Show answer

Мы живём в Москве´. Они´ живу´т в Москве´.

6. Say in Russian: “I am eating soup.” and “We are eating soup.”

▼ Show answer

Я ем суп. Мы еди´м суп.

7. Make the present of **рисова´ть** and **танцева´ть** in the *они´* form.

▼ Show answer

они´ рису´ют, **они´ танцу´ют**. *-ова-* and *-ева-* become *-у-*, with the stress on it.

8. Make the *я* and *они´* forms of **дава´ть**.

▼ Show answer

даю´, **даю´т**. The *-ва-* is dropped.

9. Complete: **Я ____ письмо´, а ты ____ ма´ршрут.** (писа´ть, иска´ть)

▼ Show answer

Я пишу´ письмо´, а ты и´щешь ма´ршрут. The consonant changes in every form.

10. Why can you not say *Я есть студе´нт*?

▼ Show answer

Russian does not use *быть* in the present, so the sentence is simply **Я студе´нт.** *Есть* is used for having and existing, and as the verb “to eat”.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that *хотеть* has first-conjugation endings in the singular and second in the plural (*хочу, хочешь, хочет, хотим, хотите, хотят*), with *т* → *ч* in the singular; that *есть* gives *ем, ешь*; that *жить* and *писать* belong to the group of first-conjugation verbs with consonant stems, with *я живу*; that *мочь* and *жить* are stem-changers (sources: polyglotclub.com: present tense, Russian For Everyone: most common irregular verbs,

mezhdunami.ku.edu: conjugation, sublearn.com: irregular present tense verbs, russianenthusiast.com: present tense, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).

Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the complete forms of *мочь, есть, жить, пить, дать, давать* (the search gave only the *я* form of some and no table for the others); *рисовать, танцевать* and the rule for *-овать* and *-евать* verbs; the *-авать* group; *писать, искать, плакать* and the consonant changes; *мыть, ждать, брать, звать*; the stress marks on all of them, including the shifting of the stress in *-овать* verbs; that *дать* is perfective with future meaning; the use of *есть* for possession; the infinitive and genitive after *хотеть*; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. The *-нуть* section was added later, after a second web search (added 2026-11-17) found that the "once" type (*крикнуть, толкнуть, двинуть*) keeps *-ну* in the past (*крикнул*) and that the original-stem type drops the *н* (sources: Wiktionary: -нуть, russianenthusiast.com: past tense, from search results only). The search did not cover *исчезнуть* (*исчез, исчезла*), *привыкнуть*, the present forms, the stress marks, or the imperfective partners, which are from general knowledge. No dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these.

Coming up in Chapter 4: The Past Tense. One stem (the infinitive minus *-ть*), the endings *-л, -ла, -ло, -ли*; verbs without *-л* in the masculine (*нёс, мог*); the past of *быть*; word order and negation (*не было*).

⏪ What Happened — Проше́дшее вре́мя

*After the present tense (Chapters 1 to 3), the **past** is a relief. It has **no personal endings** at all and it does not depend on the conjugation. You take the infinitive, drop -ть, and add an ending that shows only the **gender and number** of the subject. One form serves for "I read", "I was reading" and "I have read". The choice between a completed and an unfinished action is made by **aspect**, which is the subject of Chapters 5 and 6.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Past tense = **infinitive minus -ть** + **-л** (masculine), **-ла** (feminine), **-ло** (neuter), **-ли** (plural): **чита́ть → чита́л, чита́ла, чита́ло, чита́ли**. The ending agrees with the **subject** in gender and number, not in person: *я, ты, он* all take *-л* (if the speaker or listener is male). *Вы* is always plural: **вы чита́ли**. A few verbs have no *-л* in the masculine (**нёс, мог**). The past of *быть* is **был, была́, бы́ло, бы́ли**.

The pattern

SUBJECT	ENDING	ЧИТА́ТЬ	ГОВОРИ́ТЬ	ВИ́ДЕТЬ
я, ты, он (male)	**-л**	чита́л	говори́л	ви́дел
я, ты, она́ (female)	**-ла**	чита́ла	говори́ла	ви́дела
оно́ (neuter)	**-ло**	чита́ло	говори́ло	ви́дело
мы, вы, они́	**-ли**	чита́ли	говори́ли	ви́дели

The vowel before *-л* comes from the infinitive: *-ать → -ал*, *-ить → -ил*, *-еть → -ел*, *-ять → -ял*. The **conjugation does not matter**: **чита́ть → чита́л** (first) and **говори́ть → говори́л** (second) are made the same way. Consonant changes in the present do not appear in the past: **люби́ть → люби́л** (not *любл-*), **писа́ть → писа́л** (not *пиш-*).

Watch out: the pronoun matters, because the verb has no person

Я чита́л. (a man) and **Я чита́ла.** (a woman) differ, and *ты* works in the same way. So in the past the pronoun is not optional: *Чита́л* alone leaves you unable to tell the person. Use **-ли** for *вы* even when you address one person: **Вы чита́ли, А́нна?** (not *чита́ла*).

Agreement with the subject

The verb agrees with whatever the subject is, not only with a pronoun. This is the same agreement as in Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 1, applied to the verb.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Брат чита́л кни́гу.	My brother read a book.	masculine noun: *-л*
Сестра́ чита́ла кни́гу.	My sister read a book.	feminine noun: *-ла*
Де́ти чита́ли кни́гу.	The children read a book.	plural: *-ли*
Мы с А́нной чита́ли.	Anna and I read.	*мы с* + instrumental: plural verb
Окно́ бы́ло откры́то.	The window was open.	neuter: *-ло*

Regular verbs from every group

INFINITIVE	MASC.	FEM.	PLURAL	ENGLISH
де́лать	**де́лал**	**де́лала**	**де́лали**	did, made
рабо́тать	**рабо́тал**	**рабо́тала**	**рабо́тали**	worked
смотре́ть	**смотре́л**	**смотре́ла**	**смотре́ли**	watched
люби́ть	**люби́л**	**люби́ла**	**люби́ли**	loved, liked
хоте́ть	**хоте́л**	**хоте́ла**	**хоте́ли**	wanted
писа́ть	**писа́л**	**писа́ла**	**писа́ли**	wrote

INFINITIVE	MASC.	FEM.	PLURAL	ENGLISH
рисова́ть	рисова́л	рисова́ла	рисова́ли	drew
дава́ть	дава́л	дава́ла	дава́ли	gave
есть	ел	е́ла	е́ли	ate

Stress in the past

For most verbs the stress stays where it is in the infinitive (*чита́л, чита́ла, чита́ли*). A set of common verbs moves the stress in the feminine, and some also in the neuter and plural. The table gives the commonest.

INFINITIVE	MASC.	FEM.	NEUT.	PLURAL	ENGLISH
быть	был	была́	бы́ло	бы́ли	was, were
жить	жил	жила́	жи́ло	жи́ли	lived
пить	пил	пила́	пи́ло	пи́ли	drank
брать	брал	брала́	бра́ло	бра́ли	took
звать	звал	звала́	зва́ло	зва́ли	called
спать	спал	спала́	спа́ло	спа́ли	slept

The pattern for these verbs is: **masculine and plural** have the stress on the stem, the **feminine** on the ending (*-а́*). Learn the feminine form of every common verb, because it shows where the stress goes.

Verbs without -л in the masculine

Verbs whose infinitive ends in **-ти** or **-чь** do not have the *-л* in the masculine singular. The feminine, neuter and plural forms are regular (the *-л-* is there), and the base is the same as in the present stem.

INFINITIVE	MASC.	FEM.	NEUT.	PLURAL	ENGLISH
нести́	**нёс**	**несла́**	**несло́**	**несли́**	carried
мочь	**мог**	**могла́**	**могло́**	**могли́**	was able
помо́чь	**помо́г**	**помогла́**	**помогло́**	**помогли́**	helped (once)
идти́	**шёл**	**шла́**	**шло́**	**шли́**	went (on foot)

Watch out: the masculine can look like a noun

Мог and *нёс* end in a consonant, so a learner who expects *-л* will write *могл* or *нёсл*. These are wrong. The feminine *могла́* and the plural *могли́* are regular. Learn the masculine of each verb in *-ти* and *-чь* as an irregular form. The verb *идти́* is a verb of motion and is taught in full in Russian Grammar 4: it appears here only because its past is so common.

The past of быть, and не было

The past of *быть* is regular in form (*был, была́, бы́ло, бы́ли*), and it brings back the verb that the present tense leaves out.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Вчера́ я был до́ма.	Yesterday I was at home.	a man speaking
Вчера́ она́ была́ в шко́ле.	Yesterday she was at school.	feminine
Мы бы́ли в кино́.	We were at the cinema.	plural
Вчера́ бы́ло хо́лодно.	Yesterday it was cold.	impersonal: neuter *бы́ло*
У меня́ была́ маши́на.	I had a car.	*была́* agrees with the thing possessed
У меня́ был брат.	I had a brother.	masculine *был*
У нас бы́ли кни́ги.	We had books.	plural *бы́ли*

The present *нет* (“there is no”) becomes **не́ было** in the past, always neuter, with the thing that is absent in the **genitive**. The stress moves onto *не*: **не́ было**.

PRESENT	PAST	ENGLISH
Здесь нет ба́нка.	Здесь не́ было ба́нка.	There is / was no bank here.
У меня́ нет вре́мени.	У меня́ не́ было вре́мени.	I have / had no time.
Его́ нет до́ма.	Его́ не́ было до́ма.	He is / was not at home.

The ordinary negative (“was not” for a person who is the subject) is **не + был**: **Он не был до́ма.** and **Она́ не была́ до́ма.** The stress usually moves back onto *не* in the other forms: **не́ был, не́ были**, but the feminine keeps it on the ending: **не была́**.

Reflexive verbs in the past

Verbs ending in **-ся** keep it in the past, after the ending: **-лся, -лась, -лось, -лись**. The *-ся* becomes **-сь** after a vowel. Reflexive verbs are the subject of Chapter 9.

INFINITIVE	MASC.	FEM.	PLURAL	ENGLISH
учи́ться	учи́лся	учи́лась	учи́лись	studied
занима́ться	занима́лся	занима́лась	занима́лись	was occupied with

Time words for the past

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
вчера́	yesterday	
позавчера́	the day before yesterday	
неда́вно	recently	
давно́	a long time ago	

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
ра́ньше	earlier, before	the comparative from Chapter 8
в про́шлом году́	last year	*в* + prepositional (Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 10)
неде́лю наза́д	a week ago	*наза́д* after the time, accusative
два го́да наза́д	two years ago	number rules of Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 9

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud and find the gender of each past form.

① Yesterday

A:

Что ты де´лал вчера´?

What did you do yesterday? (to a man)

B:

Я рабо´тал до´ма, а ве´чером смотре´л фильм.

I worked at home, and in the evening I watched a film.

A:

А я был в шко´ле. У нас бы´ло мно´го рабо´ты.

And I was at school. We had a lot of work.

② Where were you?

A:

Где ты была´? Я звони´л.

Where were you? I rang. (to a woman)

B:

Меня´ не´ было до´ма. Я гуля´ла в па´рке.

I was not at home. I was walking in the park.

③ A year ago

A:

Где вы жи´ли год наза´д?

Where did you live a year ago?

B:

Мы жи́ли в Москве́. Моя́ сестра́ жила́ там то́же.

We lived in Moscow. My sister lived there too.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Past endings	**-л, -ла, -ло, -ли**	**чита́л, чита́ла, чита́ло, чита́ли**
How to form it	**infinitive − ть + ending**	**говори́ть → говори́л**
Agreement	**gender and number of the subject; вы = plural**	**Вы чита́ли.**
No -л in the masculine	**verbs in -ти, -чь**	**нёс, мог**
быть	**был, была́, бы́ло, бы́ли**	**Она́ была́ до́ма.**
Absence	**не́ было + genitive**	**Не́ было вре́мени.**
Reflexive	**-лся, -лась, -лось, -лись**	**учи́лась**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Put **чита́ть** into the past for *он, она́, оно́, они́*.

▼ Show answer

он чита́л, она́ чита́ла, оно́ чита́ло, они́ чита́ли.

2. Say in Russian: “I spoke Russian.” (once as a man, once as a woman)

▼ Show answer

Я говори́л по-ру́сски. Я говори́ла по-ру́сски. Gender, not person.

3. Say in Russian: “Anna, did you (polite) read the book?”

▼ Show answer

А́нна, вы чита́ли кни́гу? *Вы* always takes *-ли*.

4. Say in Russian: “We lived in Moscow.” and “She lived in Moscow.”

▼ Show answer

Мы жи́ли в Москве́. Она́ жила́ в Москве́. The feminine is stressed on the ending.

5. Make the masculine and feminine past of **мочь**.

▼ Show answer

мог, могла́. No *-л* in the masculine.

6. Say in Russian: “Yesterday it was cold.”

▼ Show answer

Вчера́ бы́ло хо́лодно. Neuter *бы́ло*, with no subject.

7. Put into the past: **У меня́ нет вре́мени.**

▼ Show answer

У меня́ не́ было вре́мени. *Нет* becomes *не́ было*, with the genitive.

8. Say in Russian: “I had a sister.” and “I had a brother.”

▼ Show answer

У меня́ была́ сестра́. У меня́ был брат. *Был* agrees with the person or thing possessed.

9. Say in Russian: “She studied at the university.” (*учи́ться в университе́те*)

▼ Show answer

Она́ учи́лась в университе́те. *-лась*, because *-ся* becomes *-сь* after a vowel.

10. Say in Russian: “A week ago we were at home.”

▼ Show answer

Неде́лю наза́д мы бы́ли до́ма. *Наза́д* goes after the time expression.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that the past tense is made by dropping *-ть* and adding an ending for masculine, feminine, neuter and plural subjects; that it shows the gender of the subject and does not change for person; that the past of *быть* is *был, была́, бы́ло, бы́ли*; and that for verbs in *-ти* and *-чь* the masculine does not take the *-л* and the stem has to be remembered (sources: Russian For Everyone: past tense, Mango Languages: past tense, russianenthusiast.com: past tense, storylearning.com: Russian past tense, ruslanguage.ru: the past tense of verbs, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).
Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the forms *нёс, мог, помог, шёл* and their feminine, neuter and plural forms (the search did not list them); *не было* with the genitive of absence and the past of *у меня есть* (the search returned nothing on this); the stress marks on *жила, пила, брала, звала, спала* and the moved stress in *не было*; the past of *есть* (*ел, ела*); the past of reflexive verbs; the time words and *назад*; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these, and note that I left *ждать* out of the stress table because I am unsure of its stress.

Coming up in Chapter 5: Aspect: Imperfective and Perfective. The idea of aspect; how pairs are made (prefix, suffix, different stem); the commonest pairs (*де́лать / сде́лать, чита́ть / прочита́ть, писа́ть / написа́ть*); how to recognise each aspect; no present for the perfective.

🔀 Two Verbs for One Idea — Вид глаго́ла

*Here is the idea that makes Russian verbs feel different from English ones. Nearly every Russian verb comes **twice**: once as an **imperfective** (the action as a process, a habit or a state) and once as a **perfective** (the action as a single completed event, with a result). The two forms are called **aspects**. This chapter explains what they are and how to recognise and make the pairs. Chapter 6 shows how to choose between them.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Imperfective (answers *что де́лать?*): the action in progress, repeated, or as a fact. It has a **past**, a **present** and a **compound future** (*бу́ду + infinitive*). **Perfective** (answers *что сде́лать?*): the action completed, with its result. It has a **past** and a **simple future**, but **no present**. A perfective verb is usually made from the imperfective by a **prefix** (**де́лать → сде́лать**), or the imperfective is made from the perfective by a **suffix** (**реши́ть → реша́ть**), or the two have **different stems** (**говори́ть / сказа́ть**).

What the two aspects mean

	IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
Question	**что де́лать?**	**что сде́лать?**
Idea	process, repeated, habit, state	one completed event, a result
Example verb	**чита́ть** (to read, be reading)	**прочита́ть** (to read through, finish reading)
Past	**Я чита́л кни́гу.**	**Я прочита́л кни́гу.**
Past meaning	I was reading / I used to read the book	I read the whole book

	IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
Present	**Я чита́ю.** (I read, I am reading)	**none**
Future	**Я бу́ду чита́ть.** (compound)	**Я прочита́ю.** (simple; *I will read it through*)

The English translations differ only slightly, and this is the difficulty: English speakers have no aspect to guide them. The question to ask is whether the speaker is thinking of the **action itself** (imperfective) or of its **completion and result** (perfective).

How pairs are made

1. With a prefix: imperfective → perfective

The commonest way is to add a prefix to the imperfective. There is **no rule** for which prefix a verb takes: you learn each pair. The commonest prefixes are *по-, с-, на-, про-, вы-, при-, за-, у-*.

IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE	ENGLISH
де́лать	**сде́лать**	to do, make
чита́ть	**прочита́ть**	to read
писа́ть	**написа́ть**	to write
пить	**вы́пить**	to drink
есть	**съесть**	to eat
гото́вить	**пригото́вить**	to cook, prepare
ви́деть	**уви́деть**	to see
слы́шать	**услы́шать**	to hear
звони́ть	**позвони́ть**	to phone
плати́ть	**заплати́ть**	to pay

IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE	ENGLISH
смотре́ть	посмотре́ть	to watch, look
рисова́ть	нарисова́ть	to draw
обе́дать	пообе́дать	to have lunch

2. With a suffix: perfective → imperfective

Some perfective verbs come first (often they already have a prefix), and the imperfective is made by adding a **suffix**: *-ыва-/-ива-*, *-а-* or *-ва-*. The conjugation (and the stress) often changes with it.

IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE	ENGLISH
реша́ть	реши́ть	to decide, solve
расска́зывать	рассказа́ть	to tell
спра́шивать	спроси́ть	to ask
отвеча́ть	отве́тить	to answer
открыва́ть	откры́ть	to open
закрыва́ть	закры́ть	to close
получа́ть	получи́ть	to receive
начина́ть	нача́ть	to begin
встава́ть	вста́ть	to get up
забыва́ть	забы́ть	to forget
помога́ть	помо́чь	to help
понима́ть	поня́ть	to understand
покупа́ть	купи́ть	to buy

3. With different stems

A few of the commonest verbs have two entirely different words, one for each aspect. They must be learnt as pairs.

IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE	ENGLISH
говори́ть	сказа́ть	to say, tell
брать	взять	to take
иска́ть	найти́	to look for / to find
класть	положи́ть	to put, lay

> **Watch out: a prefix does not always make a pair**
>
> Adding a prefix sometimes creates a **new verb** with its own meaning, not just the perfective of the old one: **писа´ть** (to write) has the pair **написа´ть**, but **переписа´ть** means "to copy out, rewrite", which is a different verb (with its own imperfective *перепи´сывать*). In the same way, *де´лать* and *переде´лать* share a root but do not form an aspect pair. Always take a pair from a dictionary, which lists the imperfective and perfective together.

The perfective has no present tense

A perfective verb presents the action as complete, and a completed action is not "happening now". So the endings that look like a present tense are used for the **future**. They are the same endings as in Chapters 1 to 3.

PRONOUN	ЧИТА́ТЬ (PRESENT)	ПРОЧИТА́ТЬ (FUTURE)	СКАЗА́ТЬ (FUTURE)
я	чита́ю	прочита́ю	скажу́
ты	чита́ешь	прочита́ешь	ска́жешь
он, она́	чита́ет	прочита́ет	ска́жет
мы	чита́ем	прочита́ем	ска́жем

PRONOUN	ЧИТА́ТЬ (PRESENT)	ПРОЧИТА́ТЬ (FUTURE)	СКАЗА́ТЬ (FUTURE)
вы	чита́ете	прочита́ете	ска́жете
они́	чита́ют	прочита́ют	ска́жут

So **Я прочита́ю кни́гу.** means “I will read the book (through)”, never “I am reading it”. Other perfective futures to know: **сде́лаю, напишу́, позвоню́, уви́жу, возьму́**. The simple and compound futures are the subject of Chapter 7.

> **Watch out: a present-looking form of a perfective verb is a future**
>
> The most common mistake of English speakers is to use *Я сде́лаю* to mean “I am doing”. It means “I will do (and finish) it”. For “I am doing” use the imperfective **Я де́лаю**. The two look identical in the first person, so only the infinitive, *де́лать* against *сде́лать*, tells you the aspect.

The past tense is made from both

In the past tense both aspects look alike and are formed in the same way as in Chapter 4. Each of the two forms is used for a different idea.

IMPERFECTIVE PAST	PERFECTIVE PAST	ENGLISH
Я чита́л кни́гу.	Я прочита́л кни́гу.	I was reading the book / I read (all of) the book
Она́ писа́ла письмо́.	Она́ написа́ла письмо́.	She was writing a letter / She wrote (finished) a letter
Мы обе́дали.	Мы пообе́дали.	We were having lunch / We had lunch (and finished)
Он ви́дел её.	Он уви́дел её.	He saw her (was seeing her) / He caught sight of her

Verbs without a pair

A few verbs have only one aspect, or they do not pair easily. Verbs of state and feeling tend to be imperfective only: **быть, жить, люби́ть, хоте́ть, знать**. Their meaning (a lasting state) does not fit a completed event. A few borrowed verbs (*использовать*, *организовать*) can serve as both aspects. Chapters 6 to 11 deal with the aspect pairs in context.

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and notice which aspect each verb is.

① A finished letter

A:

Ты написа́л письмо́?

Have you written the letter?

B:

Нет, я ещё пишу́. Я напишу́ за́втра.

No, I am still writing. I will write it tomorrow.

② A book

A:

Что ты чита́л вчера́?

What were you reading yesterday?

B:

Я чита́л но́вую кни́гу. Я её прочита́л!

I was reading a new book. I have read it!

③ A decision

A:

Ты реши́л?

Have you decided?

B:

Да, я реши́л. Я куплю́ э́ту маши́ну.

Yes, I have decided. I will buy this car.

Quick reference

ITEM	IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
Question	**что де́лать?**	**что сде́лать?**
Meaning	process, habit, state	completed once, result
Past	yes	yes
Present	yes	**no**
Future	бу́ду + infinitive	simple (same endings as present)
Pairs	prefix, suffix or different stem; learn from a dictionary	

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Which is imperfective and which perfective: **писа´ть** and **написа´ть**?

▼ Show answer

писа´ть is imperfective; **написа´ть** is perfective (it has the prefix *на-*).

2. Give the perfective of **де´лать**, **пить** and **звони´ть**.

▼ Show answer

сде´лать, вы´пить, позвони´ть.

3. Give the imperfective of **реши´ть** and **откры´ть**.

▼ Show answer

реша´ть, открыва´ть. A suffix makes the imperfective.

4. Give the perfective of **говори´ть** and **брать**.

▼ Show answer

сказа´ть, взять. Different stems.

5. Does **Я прочита´ю кни´гу.** mean “I am reading” or “I will read”?

▼ Show answer

“I will read (it through).” A perfective has no present, so the present-looking form is the future.

6. Say in Russian: “I am doing the work.” Which aspect?

▼ Show answer

Я де´лаю рабо´ту. The imperfective, because the action is in progress.

7. Say in Russian: “I will do the work.” (and finish it)

▼ Show answer

Я сде´лаю рабо´ту. Perfective future.

8. Make the perfective future of **написа´ть** for *я*, *ты* and *они´*.

▼ Show answer

напишу´, напи´шешь, напи´шут. The same endings and consonant change as in *писа´ть*.

9. Why is **переписа´ть** not the perfective of **писа´ть**?

▼ Show answer

The prefix *пере-* changes the meaning (“to copy out”), so it is a different verb with its own imperfective *перепи´сывать*.

10. Which of these verbs usually has no perfective partner: **люби´ть, написа´ть, откры´ть**?

▼ Show answer

люби́ть. It names a lasting feeling, not a completed event. (The other two are perfective verbs with imperfective partners.)

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that most verbs come in imperfective and perfective pairs (*читать / прочитать*, *делать / сделать*); that there is no rule for which prefix a verb takes, the common ones being *по-*, *с-*, *о-*, *на-*, *про-*; that some pairs differ by a suffix (*решать / решить*); that a prefix can also create a new verb rather than a pair (*делать / переделать*); that perfective verbs have only a past and a future, and that a present-looking form such as *я прочитаю* is a future (sources: Mango Languages: aspect pairs, gw2ru.com: imperfective and perfective verbs, gw2ru.com: aspect of the verb, Russian For Everyone: aspect, italki.com: perfective and imperfective aspects, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).
Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the individual pairs in the tables and their stress marks (the search confirmed only *читать / прочитать*, *делать / сделать* and *решать / решить*); the three-way grouping of prefix, suffix and different stem; the forms of *сказать* in the future; the claim that verbs of state (*быть, жить, любить, хотеть, знать*) have no true perfective partner, and the remark on bi-aspectual verbs such as *использовать*; the contrasts in the past-tense table; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Aspect pairs are exactly where a dictionary is needed, so check each pair there before relying on it.

Coming up in Chapter 6: Aspect in Use. Repeated, habitual or in progress against completed once; duration against result; negation and aspect; after *начина́ть, конча́ть, переста́ть*; questions and everyday contrasts.

🎯 Which One Do I Pick? — Как вы́брать вид

*Chapter 5 explained what the two aspects are. This chapter is about **choosing** between them in the past tense, where the choice is most often made. There is no single test, but a short list of cases covers most sentences. The central question is: **am I talking about the action, or about its result?***

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Use the **imperfective** for an action **in progress** (**Я чита́л кни́гу.**), **repeated or habitual** (**Я ка́ждый день чита́л.**), with a stated **duration** (**Я чита́л два часа́.**), or simply as a **fact** that it happened (**Ты чита́л э́ту кни́гу?**). Use the **perfective** for **one completed action with its result** (**Я прочита́л кни́гу.**), for a **sequence** of completed actions, and for something that happens **suddenly** or **at a moment**. After **начина́ть, продолжа́ть, конча́ть, переста́ть** the infinitive is always **imperfective**.

The imperfective: process, repetition, duration, fact

USE	RUSSIAN	ENGLISH
In progress	Когда́ ты позвони́л, я смотре́л фильм.	When you rang, I was watching a film.
Repeated	Я ка́ждый день пил ко́фе.	I drank coffee every day.
Habit	Ра́ньше она́ ча́сто писа́ла мне.	She used to write to me often.
Duration	Мы рабо́тали весь день.	We worked all day.
Duration	Он чита́л два часа́.	He read for two hours.
Fact / ever	Ты был в Москве́?	Have you been to Moscow?
Fact / ever	Вы чита́ли э́ту кни́гу?	Have you read this book?

The perfective: result, sequence, moment

USE	RUSSIAN	ENGLISH
Completed, result	**Я прочита́л кни́гу.**	I read the book (to the end).
Completed, result	**Она́ написа́ла письмо́.**	She wrote the letter.
Sequence	**Я вста́л, поза́втракал и позвони́л ма́ме.**	I got up, had breakfast and rang my mother.
Sudden	**Вдруг он позвони́л.**	Suddenly he rang.
Within a time	**Я прочита́л кни́гу за два часа́.**	I read the book in two hours.
Result still visible	**Кто́-то откры́л окно́.**	Someone has opened the window. (it is open now)

In a **sequence**, each completed action finishes before the next begins: the perfective makes the order of events clear. If the actions run *at the same time*, use the imperfective: **Он чита́л, а я смотре́л фильм.** (*He was reading and I was watching a film.*)

Duration or result: за and the accusative

The same action can be measured in two ways. The imperfective answers "**for** how long?" with a bare accusative (*два часа́*). The perfective answers "**in** how long?", that is, how much time it took to finish, with **за** + accusative.

IMPERFECTIVE (FOR)	PERFECTIVE (IN)
Я чита́л кни́гу два часа́. *I read (was reading) the book for two hours.*	**Я прочита́л кни́гу за два часа́.** *I read the book in two hours.*
Она́ писа́ла письмо́ час. *She was writing the letter for an hour.*	**Она́ написа́ла письмо́ за час.** *She wrote the letter in an hour.*

Signal words

Many time words come with one aspect almost every time. They are a good first guide, but they are not a rule: think about the meaning as well.

USUALLY IMPERFECTIVE	USUALLY PERFECTIVE
всегда́ (always)	**уже́** (already)
обы́чно (usually)	**наконе́ц** (at last)
ча́сто (often)	**вдруг** (suddenly)
ре́дко (rarely)	**сра́зу** (at once)
иногда́ (sometimes)	**за + time** (*за час*, in an hour)
ка́ждый день, ка́ждую неде́лю	**вовремя** (on time)
до́лго (for a long time), **весь день**	**в пять часо́в** (at five o'clock, one event)
ещё (still), **всё вре́мя**	

> **Watch out: ещё and уже, not yet and already**
>
> **Я ещё чита´ю.** (I am still reading: process, imperfective.) **Я уже´ прочита´л.** (I have already read it: completed, perfective.) Compare also **Ты уже´ позавтракал?** (*Have you had breakfast yet?*) and **Нет, я ещё не завтракал.** (*No, I have not had breakfast yet.*), where the negative uses the imperfective.

Negation and aspect

The same negative sentence can be imperfective or perfective, with a different meaning. The **imperfective** negative says that the action did not take place at all. The **perfective** negative says that the action was expected or attempted but was not completed or did not happen on this occasion.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	MEANING
Я не чита́л э́ту кни́гу.	I have not read this book.	never read it, not at all
Я не прочита́л э́ту кни́гу.	I did not finish this book.	started or meant to, did not complete it
Он не отвеча́л на пи́сьма.	He never answered the letters.	habitual or general
Он не отве́тил на письмо́.	He did not answer the letter.	one letter, one occasion
Я не звони́л.	I did not ring.	I made no call
Я не позвони́л.	I did not manage to ring.	I forgot or failed to

Questions and everyday contrasts

A question in the past often follows the same logic: the imperfective asks "*did it happen at all?*" and the perfective asks "*is it done?*".

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH
Что ты де́лал вчера́?	What were you doing yesterday? (the activity)
Что ты сде́лал вчера́?	What did you get done yesterday? (the results)
Ты звони́л ма́ме?	Did you ring your mother (at some point)?
Ты позвони́л ма́ме?	Have you rung your mother (as you were going to)?
Ты за́втракал?	Did you have breakfast? (a general question)
Ты поза́втракал?	Have you finished breakfast?

Phase verbs: начина́ть, продолжа́ть, конча́ть,

переста́ть

Verbs that mean beginning, continuing, finishing or stopping are always followed by an **imperfective infinitive**, in any tense. They talk about the stages of an activity, and an activity is a process.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я нача́л чита́ть.	I began to read.	*нача́л* perfective, *чита́ть* imperfective
Он продолжа́ет рабо́тать.	He goes on working.	never *порабо́тать* here
Они́ ко́нчили говори́ть.	They finished speaking.	
Она́ переста́ла писа́ть мне.	She stopped writing to me.	
Дождь переста́л.	The rain stopped.	*переста́ть* on its own

> **Watch out: do not put the perfective after начать**
>
> *Я нача́л прочита́ть* is wrong. You say **Я нача́л чита́ть.** The same applies to *продолжа́ть*, *конча́ть / ко́нчить* and *переста́ть*. The infinitive names the activity, not its completion.

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and decide why each verb has the aspect it has.

① Have you finished?

A:

Ты уже́ прочита́л э́ту кни́гу?

Have you already read this book?

B:

② Last night

A:

Что ты де́лал вчера́ ве́чером?

What were you doing last night?

B:

Нет, я ещё чита´ю. Я нача´л вчера´.

No, I am still reading. I began yesterday.

A:

А я прочита´л её за два дня.

And I read it in two days.

Я смотре´л фильм, и вдруг позвони´л друг.

I was watching a film, and suddenly a friend rang.

A:

И ты отве´тил?

And did you answer?

B:

Нет, я не отве´тил.

No, I did not answer.

③ A busy morning

A:

Что ты сде´лал у´тром?

What did you get done this morning?

B:

Я вста´л, поза´втракал, написа´л письмо´ и позвони´л ма´ме.

I got up, had breakfast, wrote a letter and rang my mother.

Quick reference

MEANING	ASPECT	EXAMPLE
In progress	**imperfective**	**Я чита́л, когда́ он позвони́л.**
Repeated, habit	**imperfective**	**Я ка́ждый день чита́л.**
For how long	**imperfective**	**Я чита́л два часа́.**
Did it happen at all	**imperfective**	**Ты чита́л э́ту кни́гу?**

MEANING	ASPECT	EXAMPLE
Completed, result	**perfective**	**Я прочита́л кни́гу.**
Sequence	**perfective**	**Я вста́л, поза́втракал …**
In how long	**perfective + за**	**за два часа́**
After начать, продолжать, перестать	**imperfective infinitive**	**Я нача́л чита́ть.**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Choose the aspect: **Я ка´ждый день (писа´л / написа´л) письмо´.**

▼ Show answer

писа´л. *Ка´ждый день* signals repetition: imperfective.

2. Choose the aspect: **Наконе´ц он (де´лал / сде´лал) рабо´ту.**

▼ Show answer

сде´лал. *Наконе´ц* goes with a completed result.

3. Say in Russian: “I read the book for two hours.” and “I read the book in two hours.”

▼ Show answer

Я чита´л кни´гу два часа´. Я прочита´л кни´гу за два часа´.

4. What is the difference between **Я не чита´л э´ту кни´гу.** and **Я не прочита´л э´ту кни´гу.**?

▼ Show answer

The first: I have never read it. The second: I did not finish it (or did not get round to reading it through).

5. Say in Russian: “I got up, had breakfast and rang my mother.”

▼ Show answer

Я вста́л, поза́втракал и позвони́л ма́ме. A sequence of completed actions: perfective.

6. Choose the infinitive: **Он нача́л (рабо́тать / порабо́тать).**

▼ Show answer

рабо́тать. After *нача́ть* the infinitive is imperfective.

7. Say in Russian: “She stopped writing to me.”

▼ Show answer

Она́ переста́ла писа́ть мне. *Писа́ть* stays imperfective.

8. Say in Russian: “What were you doing yesterday?” and “What did you get done yesterday?”

▼ Show answer

Что ты де́лал вчера́? Что ты сде́лал вчера́?

9. Say in Russian: “When you rang, I was watching a film.”

▼ Show answer

Когда́ ты позвони́л, я смотре́л фильм. The ring is a single event (perfective), the watching a background process (imperfective).

10. Say in Russian: “Have you already had breakfast?” and “No, I have not had breakfast yet.”

▼ Show answer

Ты уже́ поза́втракал? Нет, я ещё не за́втракал. *Уже́* with the perfective, *ещё не* with the imperfective.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that the imperfective is the aspect for ongoing, habitual and repeated actions and for actions where the result is not the point; that time words such as *обычно, часто, каждый день* require the imperfective; that the perfective is used for completed actions, results, single occurrences and sequences; that after *начать* the following verb is imperfective (sources: Mango Languages: the imperfective aspect, Mango Languages: the perfective aspect, russianenthusiast.com: verb aspect, pelister.org: verb aspect, gw2ru.com: aspect of the verb, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).

Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the contrast in negation (*не читал* against *не прочитал*), which the search did not address directly; the *за* + accusative construction against the bare accusative for duration; the signal-word list and the claim that *уже* goes with the perfective and *ещё не* with the imperfective; the remark that *продолжать, кончать, перестать* always take an imperfective infinitive (the search confirmed only *начать*); the distinction of the questions; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. Aspect choice is subtle and has exceptions, so treat these rules as a guide and check any doubtful sentence with a dictionary or a native speaker. No dictionary was consulted.

Coming up in Chapter 7: The Future Tense. Compound future (*бу́ду* + *infinitive*) for the imperfective, simple future for the perfective (*сде́лаю*); plans, promises and predictions; the future of *быть*; use after *е́сли* and *когда́*.

⏩ What Will Happen — Бу́дущее вре́мя

*The future tense falls out of everything you already know. Chapter 5 said that a **perfective** verb has no present, so its present-looking forms are the future. An **imperfective** verb has no simple future of its own, so it borrows the future of быть. The result is **two futures**, chosen by aspect, which this chapter sets out.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Compound future (imperfective): **бу́ду, бу́дешь, бу́дет, бу́дем, бу́дете, бу́дут** + the **imperfective infinitive**: **Я бу́ду чита́ть.** (I will be reading.) **Simple future** (perfective): the perfective verb conjugated with the usual endings: **Я прочита́ю.** (I will read it through.) **Never** use *бу́ду* with a perfective verb. *Быть* itself: **Я бу́ду до́ма.** In a clause after **е́сли** or **когда́** that refers to the future, Russian uses the **future** tense where English uses the present.

The compound future: бу́ду + imperfective infinitive

PRONOUN	БЫТЬ (FUTURE)	+ ЧИТА́ТЬ	+ РАБО́ТАТЬ
я	бу́ду	бу́ду чита́ть	бу́ду рабо́тать
ты	бу́дешь	бу́дешь чита́ть	бу́дешь рабо́тать
он, она́	бу́дет	бу́дет чита́ть	бу́дет рабо́тать
мы	бу́дем	бу́дем чита́ть	бу́дем рабо́тать
вы	бу́дете	бу́дете чита́ть	бу́дете рабо́тать
они́	бу́дут	бу́дут чита́ть	бу́дут рабо́тать

Бу́ду is a plain first-conjugation form of *быть*. The endings are the six that you learnt in Chapter 1 (*-у, -ешь, -ет, -ем, -ете, -ут*), and the stress is always on the first syllable. The

infinitive that follows never changes.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
За́втра я бу́ду рабо́тать до пяти́.	Tomorrow I will be working until five.	duration: imperfective
Мы бу́дем игра́ть в футбо́л.	We will play (be playing) football.	activity
Он бу́дет звони́ть ка́ждый день.	He will ring every day.	repeated action
Что ты бу́дешь де́лать?	What will you do (be doing)?	asking about plans

The simple future: the perfective

The perfective verb is conjugated like the present tense of the matching imperfective, with the same endings. The meaning is a single action, completed, with a result. Here are the commonest perfective verbs in the future.

PERFECTIVE	Я	ТЫ	ОНИ́	ENGLISH
сде́лать	**сде́лаю**	**сде́лаешь**	**сде́лают**	will do
прочита́ть	**прочита́ю**	**прочита́ешь**	**прочита́ют**	will read
написа́ть	**напишу́**	**напи́шешь**	**напи́шут**	will write
позвони́ть	**позвоню́**	**позвони́шь**	**позвоня́т**	will ring
уви́деть	**уви́жу**	**уви́дишь**	**уви́дят**	will see
сказа́ть	**скажу́**	**ска́жешь**	**ска́жут**	will say
купи́ть	**куплю́**	**ку́пишь**	**ку́пят**	will buy
взять	**возьму́**	**возьмёшь**	**возьму́т**	will take
помо́чь	**помогу́**	**помо́жешь**	**помо́гут**	will help

PERFECTIVE	Я	ТЫ	ОНИ́	ENGLISH
реши́ть	решу́	реши́шь	реша́т	will decide
нача́ть	начну́	начнёшь	начну́т	will begin
забы́ть	забу́ду	забу́дешь	забу́дут	will forget
дать	дам	дашь	даду́т	will give

Watch out: no бу́ду with a perfective

Я бу´ду прочита´ть is wrong. A perfective verb already contains the future, so you say **Я прочита´ю.**, and for the imperfective you say **Я бу´ду чита´ть.** A quick test: if the infinitive is the perfective (*прочита´ть*), conjugate it; if it is the imperfective (*чита´ть*), put *бу´ду* in front.

Choosing the future

The same logic as in Chapter 6 applies to the future: **process or completion**.

IMPERFECTIVE (COMPOUND)	PERFECTIVE (SIMPLE)
Я бу́ду писа́ть письмо́. *I will be writing a letter. (the activity)*	Я напишу́ письмо́. *I will write the letter. (and finish it)*
Я бу́ду звони́ть тебе́ ка́ждый день. *I will ring you every day.*	Я позвоню́ тебе́ за́втра. *I will ring you tomorrow. (once)*
Что ты бу́дешь де́лать в суббо́ту? *What will you be doing on Saturday?*	Что ты сде́лаешь? *What will you do about it? (the result)*

The perfective future is the usual form for **promises** and **decisions at the moment of speaking**: **Я позвоню´.** (*I'll ring.*) **Я помогу´.** (*I'll help.*) The two futures can also stand side by side in one sentence: **Я бу´ду рабо´тать до пяти´, а потом пообе´даю.** (*I will be working until five, and then I will have lunch.*)

The future of быть

On its own, *бу́ду* works like *быть* in the other tenses: place, state and weather.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
За́втра я бу́ду до́ма.	Tomorrow I will be at home.	place
За́втра бу́дет хо́лодно.	It will be cold tomorrow.	impersonal
У меня́ бу́дет вре́мя.	I will have time.	possession, with *бу́дет* agreeing with the thing
У нас бу́дут го́сти.	We will have guests.	plural *бу́дут*
За́втра не бу́дет дождя́.	There will be no rain tomorrow.	negative: *не бу́дет* + genitive

Future after если and когда

In English you say "*If you ring, I will answer*" with the present in the *if* clause. Russian uses the **future** in both clauses.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Е́сли ты позвони́шь, я отве́чу.	If you ring, I will answer.	perfective future in both clauses
Когда́ я зако́нчу, я позвоню́.	When I finish, I will ring.	future after *когда́*
Е́сли ты бу́дешь рабо́тать, я то́же бу́ду рабо́тать.	If you work, I will work too.	compound future in both

Negation, and talking about the future in other ways

Negation goes before the verb as usual: **Я не бу́ду чита́ть.** (*I will not read; I will not be reading*.) With the perfective, a negative future often means refusal or a firm statement of what

will not happen: **Я не скажу́.** (*I will not tell.*)

The **present tense** is also used for a fixed plan or arrangement, especially with a time word, and especially with verbs of motion (taught in Russian Grammar 4): **За́втра мы рабо́таем.** (*We are working tomorrow.*) You can also say what is about to happen with **скоро** (soon) and a perfective future: **Скоро я позвоню́.**

Time words for the future

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
сего́дня ве́чером	this evening	
за́втра	tomorrow	
послеза́втра	the day after tomorrow	
ско́ро	soon	
пото́м	then, later	
на сле́дующей неде́ле	next week	*на* + prepositional
в сле́дующем году́	next year	*в* + prepositional (Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 10)
че́рез неде́лю	in a week	*че́рез* + accusative
че́рез два часа́	in two hours	number rules of Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 9

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and say which future each verb is.

① Plans

② A promise

A:

Что ты бу´дешь де´лать за´втра?

What will you be doing tomorrow?

B:

Я бу´ду рабо´тать до´ма. А ты?

I will be working at home. And you?

A:

Я бу´ду отдыха´ть, а ве´чером позвоню´ тебе´.

I will be resting, and in the evening I will ring you.

A:

Ты напи´шешь мне?

Will you write to me?

B:

Да, я напишу´ че´рез неде´лю.

Yes, I will write in a week.

A:

А е´сли ты забу´дешь?

And if you forget?

B:

Я не забу´ду!

I will not forget!

③ Next year

A:

Где вы бу´дете жить в сле´дующем году´?

Where will you live next year?

B:

Мы бу´дем жить в Москве´. Я куплю´ кварти´ру.

We will live in Moscow. I will buy a flat.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Compound future	**бу́ду … + imperfective infinitive**	Я бу́ду чита́ть.
Simple future	**perfective with present endings**	Я прочита́ю.

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Never	**бу́ду + perfective**	*Я бу́ду прочита́ть* is wrong
Future of быть	**бу́ду, бу́дешь, бу́дет, бу́дем, бу́дете, бу́дут**	**За́втра бу́дет хо́лодно.**
Absence	**не бу́дет + genitive**	**Не бу́дет дожда́.**
After если, когда	**future in both clauses**	**Е́сли ты позвони́шь, я отве́чу.**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Put **рабо´тать** into the compound future for *я, ты, мы, они´*.

▼ Show answer

я бу´ду рабо´тать, ты бу´дешь рабо´тать, мы бу´дем рабо´тать, они´ бу´дут рабо´тать.

2. Say in Russian: “I will read the book.” (and finish it)

▼ Show answer

Я прочита´ю кни´гу. Perfective future.

3. Say in Russian: “I will be reading all evening.”

▼ Show answer

Я бу´ду чита´ть весь ве´чер. Compound future: a duration.

4. What is wrong with *Я бу´ду написа´ть письмо´*?

▼ Show answer

Бу́ду cannot go with a perfective. Say **Я напишу́ письмо́.** or **Я бу́ду писа́ть письмо́.**

5. Say in Russian: “Tomorrow it will be cold.” and “There will be no rain.”

▼ Show answer

За́втра бу́дет хо́лодно. Не бу́дет дождя́.

6. Say in Russian: “We will have guests.”

▼ Show answer

У нас бу́дут го́сти. Plural *бу́дут*, because *го́сти* is plural.

7. Say in Russian: “If you ring, I will answer.”

▼ Show answer

Е́сли ты позвони́шь, я отве́чу. Future in both clauses.

8. Say in Russian: “When I finish, I will ring.”

▼ Show answer

Когда́ я зако́нчу, я позвоню́.

9. Say in Russian: “I will not tell you.”

▼ Show answer

Я не скажу́ вам. (or *тебе́*). A firm refusal.

10. Say in Russian: “I will ring you in two hours.”

▼ Show answer

Я позвоню́ тебе́ че́рез два часа́. *Че́рез* + accusative for “in (a time)”.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that the compound future is the future of *быть* plus an imperfective infinitive, and the simple future is the conjugated perfective verb; that *буду* is never used with a perfective; that the compound form describes a process or habit and the simple form a completed result (*Я буду писать* against *Я напишу*) (sources: russianenthusiast.com: future tense, storylearning.com: Russian future tense, polyglottistlanguageacademy.com: simple and compound forms, Mango Languages: talking about the future, Wikibooks: future tense, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).
Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: that Russian uses the future after *если* and *когда* (the search found nothing on this); *не будет* with the genitive; the perfective negative as refusal; the present for fixed plans; *через* + accusative; the perfective future forms in the table and their stress marks (including *возьму, помогу, начну, куплю, дам*); the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these.

Coming up in Chapter 8: Imperatives. Forming the imperative (*чита́й, чита́йте; скажи́, скажи́те*); aspect in commands and requests; negative commands; *дава́й, пусть*; polite and impolite forms.

📣 Commands and Requests — Повели́тельное наклоне́ние

*The **imperative** is the form of the verb you use to tell, ask or invite someone to do something: "read!", "wait!", "come in!". In Russian it has **one stem** and a small set of endings, but the choice of ending depends on the stem, and the choice of aspect changes the tone of the request. This chapter teaches the forms, the aspect rules and the two ways of saying "let's" and "let him".*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Take the **они́** form of the present (or the perfective future), drop its ending, and add: **-й** if the stem ends in a **vowel** (**чита́ют → чита́й**); **-и** if the stem ends in a consonant and the **я form is stressed on the ending** (**говорю́ → говори́**); **-ь** if the stem ends in a consonant and the **я form is stressed on the stem** (**отве́чу → отве́ть**). For **вы**, or to be polite to one person, add **-те**: **чита́йте, говори́те, отве́тьте**. A **perfective** imperative asks for one completed action; an **imperfective** one gives a general or repeated command, an invitation, or a prohibition.

Forming the imperative

STEM ENDS IN	ENDING	INFINITIVE	ТЫ	ВЫ
vowel	**-й / -йте**	чита́ть	чита́й	чита́йте
vowel	**-й / -йте**	де́лать	де́лай	де́лайте
vowel	**-й / -йте**	рабо́тать	рабо́тай	рабо́тайте
consonant, ending stressed	**-и / -ите**	говори́ть	говори́	говори́те
consonant, ending stressed	**-и / -ите**	сказа́ть	скажи́	скажи́те
consonant, ending stressed	**-и / -ите**	написа́ть	напиши́	напиши́те

STEM ENDS IN	ENDING	INFINITIVE	ТЫ	ВЫ
consonant, ending stressed	**-и / -ите**	**смотре́ть**	**смотри́**	**смотри́те**
consonant, ending stressed	**-и / -ите**	**позвони́ть**	**позвони́**	**позвони́те**
consonant, stem stressed	**-ь / -ьте**	**отве́тить**	**отве́ть**	**отве́тьте**
consonant, stem stressed	**-ь / -ьте**	**вста́ть**	**вста́нь**	**вста́ньте**
consonant, stem stressed	**-ь / -ьте**	**забы́ть**	**забу́дь**	**забу́дьте**

The *-me* form is both the **plural** (addressing several people) and the **polite singular**, in the same way as *вы*: **Скажи´те, пожа´луйста, где ба´нк?** Use the *ты* form only for a friend, a child, a relative or a pet. When in doubt, use *-me* and add **пожа´луйста**.

> **Watch out: two consonants take -и**
>
> If the stem ends in **two consonants**, the ending is usually **-и** in place of -ь: **по´мнить → по´мни** (“remember”), **купи´ть → купи´**. The shortcut “look at the я form” works for nearly every common verb, but check unfamiliar ones in a dictionary: the rule has exceptions.

Irregular and special imperatives

INFINITIVE	ТЫ	ВЫ	ENGLISH
быть	**будь**	**бу́дьте**	be
пить	**пей**	**пе́йте**	drink
есть	**ешь**	**е́шьте**	eat
дать	**дай**	**да́йте**	give
дава́ть	**дава́й**	**дава́йте**	give (go on giving); let’s
встава́ть	**встава́й**	**встава́йте**	get up
мыть	**мой**	**мо́йте**	wash

INFINITIVE	ТЫ	ВЫ	ENGLISH
ждать	жди	жди́те	wait
взять	возьми́	возьми́те	take
идти́	иди́	иди́те	go (on foot)

Verbs in **-авать** (*дава́ть, встава́ть, узнава́ть*) keep the suffix: **дава́й, встава́й**. Taking the *они́* form of such verbs (*даю́т*) would give the wrong stem, so learn them as a group. The verb *идти́* is a verb of motion and belongs to Russian Grammar 4: it is shown here only because its imperative is so common.

Aspect in commands

Both aspects have an imperative, and the aspect changes what the command means.

PERFECTIVE: DO IT ONCE, GET IT DONE	IMPERFECTIVE: A GENERAL, REPEATED OR POLITE INSTRUCTION
Откро́йте окно́. *Open the window. (now, once)*	**Открыва́йте окно́ ка́ждое у́тро.** *Open the window every morning.*
Напиши́ письмо́. *Write the letter. (and finish it)*	**Пиши́ мне ча́ще.** *Write to me more often.*
Позвони́ мне за́втра. *Ring me tomorrow.*	**Звони́ мне ка́ждый день.** *Ring me every day.*
Скажи́те, пожа́луйста. *Tell me, please. (one question)*	**Говори́те ме́дленнее.** *Speak more slowly. (how, not what)*

The imperfective is also the normal choice for **invitations** and **polite offers** in everyday life, where the speaker invites someone to do something they would do anyway: **Входи́те, пожа́луйста.** (*Do come in.*) **Сади́тесь.** (*Sit down.*) **Бери́те.** (*Help yourself.*) A perfective in the same place sounds more like an order. (*Сади́тесь* is a reflexive verb: Chapter 9.)

Negative commands

A **negative** command is normally **не + imperfective**. It forbids the action in general.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Не открыва́йте окно́.	Do not open the window.	imperfective: a prohibition
Не говори́те так.	Do not talk like that.	
Не кури́!	Do not smoke.	
Не забу́дь позвони́ть!	Don't forget to ring!	perfective: a warning against doing it by accident
Не опозда́йте.	Do not be late.	perfective: a warning

> **Watch out: не + perfective is a warning, not a ban**
>
> **Не откро´йте окно´!** would mean something like "make sure you do not open the window (by mistake)". For a plain prohibition use the imperfective: **Не открыва´йте.** Perfective negative commands are used for things done by accident or forgetfulness, such as *Не забу´дь*, *Не опозда´й*.

Signs and official notices often use the **infinitive** as a command: **Не кури´ть!** (*No smoking.*) **Не входи´ть.** (*Do not enter.*)

Let's and let him: давай(те) and пусть

Russian has no third-person imperative. For **"let's"** use **дава´й** (to one friend) or **дава´йте** (to several, or politely) with the *мы* form of a **perfective** verb, or with an **imperfective infinitive** for an activity. For **"let him, let her, let them"** use **пусть** with a verb in the *он, она´, они´* form.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Дава́йте нача́ть.	Let's begin.	*нача́ть*: the infinitive form

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Дава́йте начнём.	Let’s begin.	perfective *мы* form
Дава́й посмо́трим фильм.	Let’s watch a film.	perfective *мы* form
Дава́й чита́ть.	Let’s read (for a while).	imperfective infinitive
Пусть он позвони́т мне.	Let him ring me.	third person, perfective future
Пусть де́ти игра́ют.	Let the children play.	third person plural, present

Reflexive imperatives

A verb ending in *-ся* keeps the particle in the imperative: *-ся* becomes *-сь* after a vowel. So **сади́ться** gives **сади́сь** (*ты*) and **сади́тесь** (*вы*), and **учи́ться** gives **учи́сь, учи́тесь**. The details are in Chapter 9.

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and say which commands are polite and which friendly.

① Come in

A:

Входи́те, пожа́луйста!
Сади́тесь.
Do come in! Sit down.

B:

Спаси́бо.
Thank you.

A:

Бери́те чай. Не стесня́йтесь.
Help yourself to tea. Don’t be shy.

② Between friends

A:

Позвони́ мне за́втра. И не забу́дь!
Ring me tomorrow. And don’t forget!

B:

Не забу́ду. Пиши́ мне то́же.
I won’t forget. Write to me too.

③ In a class

A:

Дава́йте нача́ть. Откро́йте кни́ги и чита́йте.

Let’s begin. Open your books and read.

B:

Говори́те ме́дленнее, пожа́луйста.

Speak more slowly, please.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Vowel stem	**-й / -йте**	**чита́й, чита́йте**
Consonant stem, я form stressed on the ending	**-и / -ите**	**говори́, говори́те**
Consonant stem, я form stressed on the stem	**-ь / -ьте**	**отве́ть, отве́тьте**
Polite or plural	**add -те**	**скажи́те**
Irregular	**learn each**	**будь, пей, ешь, дай, жди**
Negative command	**не + imperfective**	**Не открыва́йте.**
Let’s	**дава́й(те) + мы form / infinitive**	**Дава́йте начнём.**
Let him	**пусть + он / она́ / они́ form**	**Пусть он позвони́т.**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Make the *ты* and *вы* imperatives of **рабо́тать**.

▼ Show answer

рабо́тай, рабо́тайте. The stem ends in a vowel: *-й*.

2. Make the *ты* and *вы* imperatives of **сказа́ть**.

▼ Show answer

скажи́, скажи́те. The *я* form *скажу́* is stressed on the ending: *-и*.

3. Say in Russian: “Tell me, please.” (polite)

▼ Show answer

Скажи́те, пожа́луйста.

4. Say in Russian: “Ring me tomorrow.” (to a friend)

▼ Show answer

Позвони́ мне за́втра.

5. Say in Russian: “Write to me more often.” (to a friend) Which aspect?

▼ Show answer

Пиши́ мне ча́ще. Imperfective: repeated action.

6. Say in Russian: “Do not open the window.” (polite)

▼ Show answer

Не открыва́йте окно́. *Не* + imperfective.

7. Say in Russian: “Don’t forget!” (to a friend)

▼ Show answer

Не забу́дь! A perfective warning.

8. Give the *ты* imperative of **быть**, **пить** and **дать**.

▼ Show answer

будь, пей, дай.

9. Say in Russian: “Let’s watch a film.”

▼ Show answer

Дава́й посмо́трим фильм. (*Дава́йте* if you are being polite.)

10. Say in Russian: “Let him ring me.”

▼ Show answer

Пусть он позвони́т мне. *Пусть* + the *он* form.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that the imperative stem comes from the *они* form and the stress follows the *я* form; that vowel stems take *-й / -йте*, consonant stems with the *я* form stressed on the ending take *-и / -ите*, and those stressed on the stem take *-ь / -ьте*; that verbs such as *отдавать* take *-вай* and so are an exception to the *они* rule; that *не* + imperfective is a prohibition and *не* + perfective a warning (*не кури*, *не упади*); that there is no third-person imperative, so *пусть* is used, and that *давай(те)* takes a perfective future or an imperfective infinitive; that *быть* → *будь*, *есть* → *ешь*, *ждать* → *жди* and *идти* → *иди* are irregular (sources: Mango Languages: the imperative mood, russianenthusiast.com: imperative mood, elon.io: imperative formation, pelister.org: the imperative, Cornell: Russian grammar, the imperative, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).
Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the stress marks and the imperative forms of the individual verbs in the tables (the search gave only a few); the rule about two consonants taking *-и* and the example *помни*; the imperative of *пить, дать, мыть, взять* (*пей, дай, мой, возьми*); the use of the imperfective for invitations and polite offers; the infinitive as a command on signs; the reflexive imperatives; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written

for this course. No dictionary was consulted. The imperative has many exceptions, so check unfamiliar verbs in a dictionary or with a native speaker.

Coming up in Chapter 9: Reflexive Verbs. *-ся / -сь*; true reflexives (*мы́ться*), reciprocal (*встреча́ться*), passive and intransitive (*начина́ться, учи́ться*); pairs such as *учи́ть / учи́ться*; reflexive in each tense.

🔁 Verbs with -ся — Возвра́тные глаго́лы

Many Russian verbs end in ***-ся*** *(or* ***-сь****): учи́ться, мы́ться, начина́ться, смея́ться. This small particle began as a word meaning "oneself", but today it covers much more than "myself". Some reflexive verbs act on the subject, some are mutual, some say that something happens, and some simply have no other form. This chapter teaches how to form them in every tense and how to recognise the four meanings.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A reflexive verb is the ordinary verb plus **-ся** after a **consonant** and **-сь** after a **vowel**: **я мою́сь, ты мо́ешься, он мо́ется, мы мо́емся, вы мо́етесь, они́ мо́ются**. In the past: **мы́лся, мы́лась, мы́лось, мы́лись**. The **-ся** is always the **last** part of the verb and it never takes an object. A reflexive verb never has a direct object in the accusative. The four meanings are **reflexive** (*мы́ться*), **reciprocal** (*встреча́ться*), **passive or "happens"** (*начина́ться*) and **inherently reflexive** (*смея́ться*).

Forms in every tense

PRONOUN	УЧИ́ТЬСЯ (STUDY)	МЫ́ТЬСЯ (WASH)	ЗАНИМА́ТЬСЯ (BE BUSY WITH)
я	учу́сь	мою́сь	занима́юсь
ты	у́чишься	мо́ешься	занима́ешься
он, она́	у́чится	мо́ется	занима́ется
мы	у́чимся	мо́емся	занима́емся
вы	у́читесь	мо́етесь	занима́етесь
они́	у́чатся	мо́ются	занима́ются

TENSE	RULE	EXAMPLE
Present	ordinary endings + *-ся / -сь*	**Я учу́сь. Ты у́чишься.**
Past	*-лся* (masc.), *-лась, -лось, -лись*	**Он учи́лся. Она́ учи́лась. Они́ учи́лись.**
Future (compound)	*бу́ду* + the infinitive in *-ться*	**Я бу́ду учи́ться.**
Future (simple, perfective)	perfective + *-ся / -сь*	**Мы встре́тимся за́втра.**
Imperative	*-ся* after a consonant, *-сь* after a vowel	**Учи́сь! Учи́тесь!**

Watch out: -тся and -ться sound the same

In the third person the ending is **-тся** (**он у´чится**), and in the infinitive it is **-ться** (**учи´ться**). Both are pronounced alike, as *-ца*, so the spelling must be learnt. A reliable check: ask *что де´лать?* (infinitive, *-ться*) or *что де´лает?* (third person, *-тся*). The infinitive keeps the soft sign: **Я хочу´ учи´ться.** but **Он у´чится.**

Four meanings of -ся

1. Reflexive: the subject acts on itself

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
мы́ться	to wash oneself	**Я мою́сь у́тром.**
одева́ться	to get dressed	**Де́ти одева́ются.**
умыва́ться	to wash one's face	**Он умыва́ется.**
купа́ться	to bathe, swim	**Мы купа́емся в мо́ре.**
бри́ться	to shave	**Он бре́ется.**

2. Reciprocal: people do something to each other

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	EXAMPLE
встреча́ться	to meet (each other)	**Мы ча́сто встреча́емся.**
здоро́ваться	to greet each other	**Они́ здоро́ваются.**
проща́ться	to say goodbye	**Мы проща́емся.**
знако́миться	to get to know each other	**Мы знако́мимся.**
перепи́сываться	to write to each other	**Они́ перепи́сываются.**

These need a plural subject, or a phrase with *с* + instrumental: **Я встреча´юсь с дру´гом.** (*I am meeting a friend.*) **Мы с дру´гом встреча´емся.** (*My friend and I are meeting.*)

3. Passive or “happens”: something is done, or occurs

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Уро́к начина́ется в де́вять.	The lesson begins at nine.	*начина́ться*
Фильм конча́ется в де́сять.	The film ends at ten.	*конча́ться*
Магази́н открыва́ется в во́семь.	The shop opens at eight.	*открыва́ться*
Магази́н закрыва́ется в семь.	The shop closes at seven.	*закрыва́ться*
Кни́га продаётся здесь.	The book is sold here.	passive
Э́то называ́ется «кни́га».	This is called “book”.	*называ́ться*
Университе́т нахо́дится в це́нтре.	The university is in the centre.	*находи́ться*: “to be located”

Only **imperfective** verbs form this passive with *-ся* (*продаётся*, *открыва´ется*). The thing that opens, begins or sells is the subject, and the agent (who does it) is usually not named.

4. Inherently reflexive: verbs that exist only with -ся

Some verbs have **no** form without *-ся*, and the particle carries no "self" meaning at all. You simply learn them with the particle.

RUSSIAN	Я	ОНИ́	ENGLISH
смея́ться	смею́сь	смею́тся	to laugh
улыба́ться	улыба́юсь	улыба́ются	to smile
боя́ться	бою́сь	боя́тся	to be afraid of
наде́яться	наде́юсь	наде́ются	to hope
нра́виться	(нра́влюсь)	нра́вятся	to please, be liked
по́льзоваться	по́льзуюсь	по́льзуются	to use
интересова́ться	интересу́юсь	интересу́ются	to be interested in

Several of these govern a case (Chapter 10): **боя´ться** + genitive (*Я бою´сь соба´ки.*), **занима´ться**, **интересова´ться** and **по´льзоваться** + instrumental (*Я занима´юсь спо´ртом. Я по´льзуюсь компью´тером.*), and **улыба´ться** + dative (*Она´ улыба´ется мне.*).

Pairs: with and without -ся

Many verbs come in pairs: the plain one takes a **direct object** (accusative), and the one with *-ся* has **no object** because the action is not carried over to anything else.

PLAIN (WITH AN OBJECT)	WITH -СЯ (NO OBJECT)
Я учу́ ру́сский язы́к. *I am studying Russian (as a subject).* Also: *I teach.*	**Я учу́сь в университе́те.** *I study at the university.*
Я начина́ю рабо́ту. *I begin the work.*	**Рабо́та начина́ется.** *The work begins.*
Я открыва́ю дверь. *I open the door.*	**Дверь открыва́ется.** *The door opens.*

PLAIN (WITH AN OBJECT)	WITH -СЯ (NO OBJECT)
Я одева́ю ребёнка. *I dress the child.*	Я одева́юсь. *I get dressed.*
Я мою́ посу́ду. *I wash the dishes.*	Я мою́сь. *I wash (myself).*

Watch out: учить and учиться

учи´ть takes an **object**: you teach someone or study (learn) a subject: **Я учу´ ру´сский язы´к. учи´ться** has **no object**: you study somewhere or at something: **Я учу´сь в шко´ле.** *Я учу´сь ру´сский язы´к* is wrong. With an infinitive, *учи´ться* means "to learn to": **Я учу´сь чита´ть.**

-ся against себя´

Only some verbs have a *-ся* form that means "oneself". For the others you use the pronoun **себя´** (Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 11): **Я ви´жу себя´ в зе´ркале.** (*I see myself in the mirror.*) *Ви´деться* would mean "to see each other" or "to meet", not "to see oneself". Do not add *-ся* to a verb to make it mean "myself": check that the reflexive form exists. A few verbs use *себя´* permanently, such as **чу´вствовать себя´** (*to feel*): **Я чу´вствую себя´ хорошо´.**

Perfective reflexive verbs

The reflexive verbs have perfective partners, and the particle is carried across. Their perfective futures are formed in the usual way, with *-ся / -сь*.

IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE	FUTURE OF THE PERFECTIVE
встреча́ться	встре́титься	встре́чусь, встре́тишься, встре́тится, встре́тимся, встре́титесь, встре́тятся
начина́ться	нача́ться	начнётся (it will begin)

IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE	FUTURE OF THE PERFECTIVE
одева́ться	оде́ться	оде́нусь
умыва́ться	умы́ться	умо́юсь

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and say which of the four meanings each -ся verb has.

① A student

A:

Где ты у´чишься?

Where do you study?

B:

Я учу´сь в университе´те. Я занима´юсь исто´рией.

I study at the university. I am studying history.

A:

Тебе´ нра´вится?

Do you like it?

② Arranging to meet

A:

Когда´ мы встре´тимся?

When shall we meet?

B:

Уро´к начина´ется в де´вять. Встре´тимся в во´семь.

The lesson begins at nine. Let's meet at eight.

③ At the shop

A:

Когда´ открыва´ется магази´н?

When does the shop open?

B:

Он открыва´ется в де´вять и закрыва´ется в семь.

It opens at nine and closes at seven.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Particle	**-ся after a consonant, -сь after a vowel**	**учи́лся, учи́лась**
Present	**ordinary endings + -ся / -сь**	**мою́сь, мо́ешься**
Past	**-лся, -лась, -лось, -лись**	**мы́лся**
Infinitive and 3rd person	**-ться and -тся (both sound like -ца)**	**учи́ться, у́чится**
Reflexive	acts on the subject	**мы́ться**
Reciprocal	to each other	**встреча́ться**
Passive / happens	imperfective only	**начина́ться**
Inherent	no form without -ся	**смея́ться, боя́ться**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Conjugate **учи́ться** for *я, ты, они́*.

▼ Show answer

я учу́сь, ты у́чишься, они́ у́чатся.

2. Put **учи́ться** into the past for a man, a woman and a group.

▼ Show answer

учи́лся, учи́лась, учи́лись. *-ся* after the consonant *л*, *-сь* after a vowel.

3. Say in Russian: “I study at the university.” and “I study Russian.”

▼ Show answer

Я учу́сь в университе́те. Я учу́ ру́сский язы́к. The first has no object, the second has.

4. Say in Russian: “The lesson begins at nine.”

▼ Show answer

Уро́к начина́ется в де́вять.

5. Say in Russian: “We meet every day.”

▼ Show answer

Мы встреча́емся ка́ждый день. A reciprocal verb.

6. Say in Russian: “I am meeting a friend tomorrow.” (perfective future)

▼ Show answer

За́втра я встре́чусь с дру́гом. *С* + instrumental.

7. Say in Russian: “She is afraid of the dog.” (*боя́ться* + genitive)

▼ Show answer

Она́ бои́тся соба́ки.

8. Say in Russian: “I do sport.” (*занима́ться* + instrumental)

▼ Show answer

Я занима́юсь спо́ртом.

9. Why is *Я учу́сь ру́сский язы́к* wrong?

▼ Show answer

Учи́ться takes no direct object. Say **Я учу́ ру́сский язы́к.** or **Я учу́сь в шко́ле.**

10. Say in Russian: “The shop opens at nine.” and “I open the door.”

▼ Show answer

Магази´н открыва´ется в де´вять. Я открыва´ю дверь. The first has *-ся* and no object, the second an object.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that the particle is *-ся* after a consonant and *-сь* after a vowel; that reflexive verbs cover a reflexive meaning (*мыться, одеваться, умываться*), a reciprocal meaning (*встречаться, целоваться*), a passive or change-of-state meaning, and verbs that exist only with *-ся* (*смеяться, надеяться, бояться*); and that only imperfective verbs form the passive with *-ся* (sources: translate.ru: reflexive verbs, Mango Languages: reflexive verbs, Bucknell: reflexive verbs, polyglottistlanguageacademy.com: -ся and -сь, sublearn.com: reflexive verbs, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).
Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the past-tense forms (*-лся, -лась*), which the search did not address; the full present forms and stress marks of the verbs in the tables; the imperative with *-ся / -сь*; the pair *учить / учиться*; the cases governed by *бояться, заниматься, интересоваться, пользоваться, улыбаться*; the perfective futures; the contrast with *себя* and *видеться*; the spelling note on *-тся* and *-ться*; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Check a Russian dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these.

Coming up in Chapter 10: Verbs and Their Cases. Verbs that govern the genitive, dative and instrumental (*ждать, боя´ться, помога´ть, звони´ть, занима´ться, по´льзоваться*); verbs with prepositions (*ду´мать о, говори´ть с, ждать на*); *что* against *кого´*.

🔗 Which Case After the Verb? — Управле́ние глаго́лов

*In English, an object just follows the verb: "help him", "wait for the bus". In Russian, each verb **demands a particular case** for its object, sometimes with a fixed preposition. The default is the accusative (чита́ть кни́гу), but many common verbs take the genitive, dative or instrumental instead, and these are exactly the ones where English guesses lead you wrong. This chapter links the verb back to the case system of Russian Grammar 1.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A verb has its own **government**: the case (and preposition) of its object. The default is the **accusative**. A good number of verbs take the **genitive** (**боя́ться соба́ки**), the **dative** (**помога́ть дру́гу**) or the **instrumental** (**занима́ться спо́ртом**), and many take a **preposition + case** (**ду́мать о тебе́**, **отвеча́ть на вопро́с**). English does not tell you which: **learn each verb together with its case**, and check a dictionary, which lists the government after the verb.

Questions that name each case

CASE	QUESTION (PERSON / THING)	EXAMPLE
Accusative	кого́? что?	Я люблю́ бра́та. Я чита́ю кни́гу.
Genitive	кого́? чего́?	Я боюсь соба́ки.
Dative	кому́? чему́?	Я помога́ю бра́ту.
Instrumental	кем? чем?	Я занима́юсь спо́ртом.
Prepositional	о ко́м? о чём?	Я ду́маю о тебе́.

To find what a verb needs, ask the question that matches the object. *Кого́ ты ждёшь?* (*Whom are you waiting for?*) shows the accusative of an animate noun, which looks like the genitive (*Я жду бра́та*). The animate-masculine rule of Russian Grammar 1 applies here as it does after any verb.

Verbs with the accusative

Most transitive verbs take a direct object in the accusative, as in Chapters 1 to 9.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я слу́шаю му́зыку.	I am listening to music.	*слу́шать* + acc., where English has "to"
Он слу́шает ма́му.	He listens to his mother.	animate accusative
Я смотрю́ фильм.	I am watching a film.	*смотре́ть* + acc. for a film or programme
Я жду авто́бус.	I am waiting for the bus.	*ждать* + acc. for a particular thing or person
Я жду ма́му.	I am waiting for Mum.	animate accusative

Verbs with the genitive

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я бою́сь соба́ки.	I am afraid of the dog.	*боя́ться* + genitive
Я жду отве́та.	I am waiting for an answer.	*ждать* + genitive for something abstract or unspecified
Я жела́ю вам сча́стья.	I wish you happiness.	*жела́ть* + genitive (and the dative of the person)
Он про́сит по́мощи.	He asks for help.	*проси́ть* + genitive of an abstract noun
Я не зна́ю отве́та.	I do not know the answer.	a negated verb may take the genitive of the object

Ждать takes the **accusative** for a definite person or thing (*жду авто́бус*, *жду ма́му*) and the **genitive** for something abstract or general (*жду отве́та*, *жду письма́*). Both are often heard. *Ждать* needs **no preposition**: you do not say *ждать для*.

Verbs with the dative

In Russian, you help, ring, believe, advise, give to and show something *to* a person, and the person is in the dative.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Он помога́ет сестре́.	He helps his sister.	*помога́ть* + dative, no preposition
Я звоню́ ма́ме.	I am ringing my mother.	*звони́ть* + dative
Я ве́рю тебе́.	I believe you.	*ве́рить* + dative
Я сове́тую вам отдохну́ть.	I advise you to rest.	*сове́товать* + dative
Я дарю́ ма́ме цветы́.	I am giving my mother flowers.	recipient in the dative, gift in the accusative
Он пока́зывает дру́гу фотогра́фию.	He shows his friend a photograph.	same pattern
Она́ улыба́ется мне.	She smiles at me.	*улыба́ться* + dative

Verbs with the instrumental

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Я занима́юсь спо́ртом.	I do sport.	*занима́ться* + instrumental
Он интересу́ется исто́рией.	He is interested in history.	*интересова́ться* + instrumental
Мы по́льзуемся словарём.	We use a dictionary.	*по́льзоваться* + instrumental

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Она́ увлека́ется му́зыкой.	She is keen on music.	*увлека́ться* + instrumental
Я горжу́сь сы́ном.	I am proud of my son.	*горди́ться* + instrumental
Она́ рабо́тает учи́тельницей.	She works as a teacher.	a job: *рабо́тать* + instrumental
Я хочу́ стать врачо́м.	I want to become a doctor.	*стать* + instrumental
Она́ владеет ру́сским языко́м.	She speaks Russian well.	*владе́ть* + instrumental

Watch out: the instrumental of a job and a state

After *быть* in the past or future, after *стать* (“to become”) and after *рабо́тать* for a job, the noun is in the **instrumental**: **Он был врачо́м.** (*He was a doctor.*) but in the present with no verb it is the nominative: **Он врач.** The verb that causes the instrumental is the verb of becoming, working or being in the past.

Verbs with a preposition

Many verbs need a fixed **preposition** + case. The preposition is part of the verb’s government, and it usually differs from English.

VERB	GOVERNMENT	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
ду́мать	**о** + prepositional	**Я ду́маю о тебе́.**	I am thinking about you.
говори́ть	**о** + prep. (about), **с** + instr. (to)	**Мы говори́м о фи́льме. Он говори́т с бра́том.**	We talk about the film. He talks to his brother.
спра́шивать	**у** + genitive	**Я спра́шиваю у бра́та.**	I ask my brother.
смотре́ть	**на** + accusative (look at)	**Я смотрю́ на дом.**	I am looking at the house.

VERB	GOVERNMENT	EXAMPLE	ENGLISH
отвеча́ть	**на** + accusative	**Он отвеча́ет на вопро́с.**	He answers the question.
наде́яться	**на** + accusative	**Я наде́юсь на тебя́.**	I am counting on you.
жа́ловаться	**на** + accusative	**Он жа́луется на пого́ду.**	He complains about the weather.
плати́ть	**за** + accusative	**Я плачу́ за обе́д.**	I am paying for lunch.
благодари́ть	**за** + accusative	**Благодарю́ за по́мощь.**	Thank you for the help.
гото́виться	**к** + dative	**Я гото́влюсь к экза́мену.**	I am preparing for the exam.
обраща́ться	**к** + dative	**Я обраща́юсь к врачу́.**	I turn to the doctor.
скуча́ть	**по** + dative	**Я скуча́ю по тебе́.**	I miss you.
зави́сеть	**от** + genitive	**Э́то зави́сит от пого́ды.**	It depends on the weather.
состоя́ть	**из** + genitive	**Кла́сс состои́т из двадцати́ студе́нтов.**	The class consists of twenty students.
игра́ть	**в** + accusative (games), **на** + prepositional (instruments)	**Мы игра́ем в футбо́л. Он игра́ет на гита́ре.**	We play football. He plays the guitar.

English against Russian

These are the cases where an English speaker is most likely to choose the wrong government.

ENGLISH	RUSSIAN	WHAT DIFFERS
help *someone*	**помога́ть кому́**	dative, not accusative

ENGLISH	RUSSIAN	WHAT DIFFERS
ring *someone*	**звони́ть кому́**	dative, not accusative
be afraid of *something*	**боя́ться чего́**	genitive, no preposition
wait for *someone*	**ждать кого́**	no preposition
listen to *music*	**слу́шать му́зыку**	accusative, no *to*
think *about* someone	**ду́мать о ком**	о + prepositional
play *football*	**игра́ть в футбо́л**	в + accusative
be interested *in* history	**интересова́ться исто́рией**	instrumental, no preposition

Watch out: do not copy the English preposition

A learner who translates word for word says *Я боюсь от собаки* or *Я звоню маму*. Both are wrong: **Я бою́сь соба́ки.** and **Я звоню́ ма́ме.** Learn each verb with its case in one piece, as you would learn a vocabulary item, and use the dictionary's abbreviations (+ *acc.*, + *dat.*, + *gen.*, + *instr.*).

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and name the case after each verb.

① Hobbies

A:

Чем вы занима́етесь?

What do you do (what are you busy with)?

B:

Я занима́юсь спо́ртом, а моя́ жена́ увлека́ется му́зыкой.

I do sport, and my wife is keen on music.

A:

② An exam

A:

Ты гото́вишься к экза́мену?

Are you preparing for the exam?

B:

Да. Я бою́сь э́того экза́мена. Помоги́ мне, пожа́луйста.

Yes. I am afraid of this exam. Help me, please.

A:

Она́ игра́ет на гита́ре?

Does she play the guitar?

Хорошо́, я помогу́ тебе́.

All right, I will help you.

③ Waiting

A:

Кого́ вы ждёте?

Whom are you waiting for?

B:

Я жду дру́га и ду́маю о фи́льме.

I am waiting for a friend and thinking about the film.

Quick reference

CASE	VERBS	EXAMPLE
Accusative	**слу́шать, смотре́ть, ждать**	**Я слу́шаю му́зыку.**
Genitive	**боя́ться, жела́ть, проси́ть (помощи)**	**Я бою́сь соба́ки.**
Dative	**помога́ть, звони́ть, ве́рить, сове́товать**	**Я помога́ю дру́гу.**
Instrumental	**занима́ться, интересова́ться, по́льзоваться**	**Я занима́юсь спо́ртом.**
Preposition + case	**ду́мать о, отвеча́ть на, гото́виться к**	**Я ду́маю о тебе́.**

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Say in Russian: “I am helping my brother.”

▼ Show answer

Я помога́ю бра́ту. *Помога́ть* + dative.

2. Say in Russian: “I am afraid of the dog.”

▼ Show answer

Я бою́сь соба́ки. *Боя́ться* + genitive.

3. Say in Russian: “I am ringing my mother.”

▼ Show answer

Я звоню́ ма́ме. *Звони́ть* + dative.

4. Say in Russian: “He is interested in history.”

▼ Show answer

Он интересу́ется исто́рией. *Интересова́ться* + instrumental.

5. Say in Russian: “We use a dictionary.”

▼ Show answer

Мы по́льзуемся словарём. *По́льзоваться* + instrumental.

6. Say in Russian: “I am thinking about you.”

▼ Show answer

Я ду́маю о тебе́. *О* + prepositional.

7. Say in Russian: “She answers the question.”

▼ Show answer

Она́ отвеча́ет на вопро́с. *На* + accusative.

8. Say in Russian: “I am preparing for the exam.”

▼ Show answer

Я гото́влюсь к экза́мену. *К* + dative.

9. Say in Russian: “She works as a teacher.” and “He wants to become a doctor.”

▼ Show answer

Она́ рабо́тает учи́тельницей. Он хо́чет стать врачо́м. Instrumental after *рабо́тать* and *стать*.

10. Say in Russian: “We play football.” and “He plays the guitar.”

▼ Show answer

Мы игра́ем в футбо́л. Он игра́ет на гита́ре. *В* + accusative for a game, *на* + prepositional for an instrument.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that *помогать* takes the dative with no preposition (*помогать другу*); that *бояться* takes the genitive (*бояться собаки*); that *заниматься* and *пользоваться* take the instrumental (*пользоваться телефоном*); that *думать о* takes the prepositional (*думать о тебе*); and that a sizeable group of common verbs demand the dative, genitive, instrumental or a particular preposition (sources: elon.io: verb government overview, elon.io: verbs governing instrumental or genitive, elon.io: government of reflexive verbs, Cornell: Russian grammar, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).
Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: *ждать* with the accusative and the genitive; *отвечать на, готовиться к* and the rest of the preposition table (*надеяться на, жаловаться на, платить за, благодарить за, обращаться к, скучать по, зависеть от, состоять из, спрашивать у*); the dative verbs *звонить, верить, советовать, дарить, показывать, улыбаться*; the genitive verbs *желать, просить*; the instrumental verbs *увлекаться, гордиться, владеть, работать (кем), стать*; *слушать* and *смотреть* with the accusative; *играть в* and *играть на*; all stress marks; the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. Government is exactly the kind of fact to confirm in a dictionary, so check each verb there before relying on it.

Coming up in Chapter 11: Modal and Impersonal Constructions. *мочь, уме́ть, хоте́ть, до́лжен, на́до*; impersonal sentences (*Мне хо́лодно, Меня́ зову́т, Мне нра́вится*); *у меня́ есть* in three tenses; *нет* and *не́ было*; *не́чего, не́кого* revisited.

🧭 Can, Must, Want, and “It Is Cold” — Мо´дальные и безли´чные констру´кции

Two kinds of sentence in this chapter work differently from the ones you have built so far. ***Modal*** *constructions say that someone can, must or wants to do something, and they are followed by an infinitive.* ***Impersonal*** *constructions have* ***no nominative subject****: the person is in the* ***dative*** *(“to me it is cold”) or the thing owned is the grammatical subject (“at me there is a brother”). Both are among the most useful patterns in everyday Russian.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Personal modals take a nominative subject and agree with it: **Я могу´ рабо´тать. Она´ должна´ рабо´тать. Impersonal modals** (*на´до, ну´жно, мо´жно, нельзя´*) never change, and the person goes in the **dative**: **Мне на´до рабо´тать.** Feelings and states also take the dative: **Мне хо´лодно.** To say “I have” use **у меня´ есть** + the thing (*есть* is dropped in the past and future: *был, бу´дет*); to say “I have no” use **у меня´ нет** + **genitive** (past *не´ было*, future *не бу´дет*).

Personal modal verbs: мочь, уметь, хотеть

PRONOUN	МОЧЬ (CAN, BE ABLE)	ХОТЕ́ТЬ (WANT)	УМЕ́ТЬ (KNOW HOW TO)
я	могу́	хочу́	уме́ю
ты	мо́жешь	хо́чешь	уме́ешь
он, она́	мо́жет	хо́чет	уме́ет
мы	мо́жем	хоти́м	уме́ем
вы	мо́жете	хоти́те	уме́ете
они́	мо́гут	хотя́т	уме́ют

PRONOUN	МОЧЬ (CAN, BE ABLE)	ХОТЕ́ТЬ (WANT)	УМЕ́ТЬ (KNOW HOW TO)
Past	мог, могла́, могло́, могли́	хоте́л, хоте́ла, хоте́ло, хоте́ли	уме́л, уме́ла, уме́ло, уме́ли

All three are followed by an **infinitive**: **Я могу́ рабо́тать. Он хо́чет спать. Она́ уме́ет пла́вать.** The future uses *бу́ду* only with an imperfective infinitive and the verb itself is rarely needed: you say **Я смогу́** (a perfective, *I shall be able*) instead of *Я бу́ду мочь*.

> **Watch out: мочь or уметь?**
>
> **мочь** means **is able, is possible** in a given situation: **Я могу́ приня́ть ду́ш.** (*I can have a shower: there is hot water.*) **уме́ть** means **has learnt how to**, a skill: **Я уме́ю води́ть маши́ну.** A person who can swim but is not allowed in the pool today *уме́ет* but cannot: **Я уме́ю пла́вать, но сего́дня не могу́.**

должен and the impersonal words

до́лжен (*must, ought, is obliged*) is a short adjective, and it **agrees with the subject**: **Он до́лжен рабо́тать. Она́ должна́ рабо́тать. Мы должны́ рабо́тать.** The impersonal words never change and use the dative for the person.

WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE
на́до	it is necessary	**Мне на́до рабо́тать.** I have to work.
ну́жно	it is necessary, needed	**Нам ну́жно идти́.** We need to go.
мо́жно	it is allowed, possible	**Здесь мо́жно сиде́ть.** You may sit here.
нельзя́	it is not allowed, impossible	**Здесь нельзя́ кури́ть.** You may not smoke here.

TENSE	RULE	EXAMPLE
Present	на́до / ну́жно / мо́жно / нельзя́	**Мне на́до рабо́тать.**
Past	add *бы́ло*	**Вчера́ мне на́до бы́ло рабо́тать.**

TENSE	RULE	EXAMPLE
Future	add *бу́дет*	**За́втра мне на́до бу́дет рабо́тать.**
должен, past	*до́лжен был, должна́ была́, должны́ бы́ли*	**Она́ должна́ была́ рабо́тать.**
должен, future	*бу́ду до́лжен* (agrees)	**Мы бу́дем должны́ рабо́тать.**

> **Watch out: do not write Она должен**
>
> A frequent mistake is *Она должен учиться*. **до́лжен** has a form for each gender, so the correct sentence is **Она́ должна́ учи́ться.** *На́до* and *ну́жно* never change: *Ей на́до учи́ться*, not *Она надо*.

Impersonal sentences: the dative

To say how *someone* feels, Russian puts the person in the **dative** and uses an adverb or the verb in a fixed form. There is no nominative subject.

NOMINATIVE	DATIVE
я	мне
ты	тебе́
он / она́	ему́ / ей
мы	нам
вы	вам
они́	им

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Мне хо́лодно.	I am cold.	literally “to me it is cold”
Ему́ жа́рко.	He is hot.	

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH	NOTE
Нам ве́село.	We are having fun.	
Ей ску́чно.	She is bored.	
Мне нра́вится э́тот го́род.	I like this city.	the thing liked is the subject and the verb agrees with it
Мне нра́вятся э́ти фи́льмы.	I like these films.	plural subject, plural verb
Меня́ зову́т А́нна.	My name is Anna.	literally “they call me Anna” (accusative *меня́*)

In the past and future the verb *быть* is added in its neuter form: **Вчера́ мне бы́ло хо́лодно.** (*Yesterday I was cold.*) **За́втра нам бу́дет ве́село.** (*Tomorrow we shall have fun.*)

у меня есть, и нет

Russian has no verb “to have” for possession. You say **у + genitive of the owner** and the thing owned is the grammatical subject.

TENSE	I HAVE	I DO NOT HAVE
Present	**У меня́ есть брат.**	**У меня́ нет бра́та.**
Past (masculine)	**У меня́ был брат.**	**У меня́ не́ было бра́та.**
Past (feminine)	**У меня́ была́ сестра́.**	**У меня́ не́ было сестры́.**
Past (plural)	**У меня́ бы́ли друзья́.**	**У меня́ не́ было друзе́й.**
Future	**У меня́ бу́дет брат.**	**У меня́ не бу́дет бра́та.**

When the thing is there, the past and future verb **agrees with it** (*был брат, была сестра, были друзья*). When it is not there, the verb is always the neuter *не́ было* or the singular *не*

бу́дет, and the noun is in the **genitive**. The present *есть* is often dropped in conversation (*У меня́ брат*), but *нет* is always said.

нечего and некого

You met **не́чего** (“nothing to”) and **не́кого** (“nobody to”) in Russian Grammar 2, Chapter 11. They belong here because they are impersonal as well: the person is in the dative and the verb is an infinitive.

RUSSIAN	ENGLISH
Мне не́чего чита́ть.	I have nothing to read.
Нам не́чего де́лать.	We have nothing to do.
Ему́ не́кого спроси́ть.	He has nobody to ask.
Мне не́ с кем говори́ть.	I have nobody to talk to.
Ей не́ о чём ду́мать.	She has nothing to think about.

When a preposition is needed it **separates** the two parts, so you write it between *не* and the question word: *не с кем*, *не о чём*.

In Use

Read the exchanges aloud, and say which sentences are personal and which are impersonal.

① A skill

A:

Ты уме́ешь игра́ть в ша́хматы?

Can you play chess?

B:

Нет, не уме́ю, но я хочу́ учи́ться игра́ть.

② Feeling cold

A:

Тебе́ хо́лодно?

Are you cold?

B:

Да, мне о́чень хо́лодно. Мне на́до закры́ть окно́.

No, I cannot, but I want to learn to play.

Yes, I am very cold. I need to close the window.

A:

Закро́й.

Close it.

③ Family

A:

У тебя́ есть брат?

Have you got a brother?

B:

Да, у меня́ есть брат. У меня́ нет сестры́.

Yes, I have a brother. I have no sister.

A:

А у него́ есть маши́на?

And does he have a car?

B:

Нет, у него́ нет маши́ны.

No, he does not have a car.

Quick reference

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Can (situation)	**мочь + infinitive**	**Я могу́ рабо́тать.**
Can (skill)	**уме́ть + infinitive**	**Я уме́ю пла́вать.**
Want	**хоте́ть + infinitive**	**Я хочу́ спать.**
Must	**до́лжен (agrees)**	**Она́ должна́ идти́.**

ITEM	FORM	EXAMPLE
Necessary, allowed	**dative + на́до, мо́жно, нельзя́**	Мне на́до идти́.
Feelings	**dative + adverb**	Мне хо́лодно.
I have	**у меня́ есть / был / бу́дет**	У меня́ был брат.
I have no	**нет / не́ было / не бу́дет + genitive**	У меня́ нет бра́та.
Nothing to	**dative + не́чего + infinitive**	Мне не́чего чита́ть.

Practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Say in Russian: “I can work.” and “She wants to sleep.”

▼ Show answer

Я могу́ рабо́тать. Она́ хо́чет спать.

2. Say in Russian: “He knows how to swim.” Which verb, and why?

▼ Show answer

Он уме́ет пла́вать. *Уме́ть*, because swimming is a learnt skill.

3. Put **мочь** into the past for a man and a woman.

▼ Show answer

мог, могла́.

4. Say in Russian: “She must work.” (use *до́лжен*)

▼ Show answer

Она́ должна́ рабо́тать. *Должна́*, not *до́лжен*.

5. Say in Russian: “I have to work.” and “Yesterday I had to work.”

▼ Show answer

Мне на́до рабо́тать. Вчера́ мне на́до бы́ло рабо́тать.

6. Say in Russian: “You may not smoke here.”

▼ Show answer

Здесь нельзя́ кури́ть.

7. Say in Russian: “I am cold.” and “Yesterday I was cold.”

▼ Show answer

Мне хо́лодно. Вчера́ мне бы́ло хо́лодно.

8. Say in Russian: “I have a sister.” and “I do not have a sister.”

▼ Show answer

У меня́ есть сестра́. У меня́ нет сестры́. *Нет* takes the genitive.

9. Say in Russian: “I had a brother.” and “I did not have a brother.”

▼ Show answer

У меня́ был брат. У меня́ не́ было бра́та.

10. Say in Russian: “I have nothing to read.” and “I have nobody to talk to.”

▼ Show answer

Мне не́чего чита́ть. Мне не́ с кем говори́ть.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): that personal modals (*мочь*, *должен*) take a nominative subject while impersonal predicates take a dative experiencer (*Мне можно войти?*); that impersonal sentences have no nominative subject and use the dative for states (*мне холодно*); that *можно, нельзя, надо* do not decline; that *должен* agrees with its subject (*Она должна*

учиться, not *должен*); and that *уметь* is used for learnt skills and *мочь* for general ability (sources: Mango Languages: impersonal sentences, russianenthusiast.com: modal verbs and expressions, sublearn.com: modal verbs, Wikipedia: Russian grammar, Springer: modal predicates in Russian, from search results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).

Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: the full present and past forms of *мочь, хотеть, уметь* and the stress marks; the past and future of *надо, нужно, можно, нельзя* and of *должен*; the future *смогу*; the constructions *у меня есть, был, будет* and *нет, не было, не будет* with the genitive, and the agreement rules in the past; the dative pronouns; *мне нравится / нравятся* and *меня зовут*; *нечего* and *некого* with a separated preposition (*не с кем, не о чём*); the example sentences and dialogs, which were written for this course. The search found nothing on the past and future of *не было / некого / нечего*. No dictionary was consulted. Check a dictionary or a native speaker before relying on any of these.

Coming up in Chapter 12: Putting It Together. A review of the whole verb: conjugations, past and future, aspect, imperatives, reflexives and verbs with cases, in short texts and mixed exercises; a checklist of what Russian Grammar 3 has covered; and what comes next in Russian Grammar 4.

🧩 The Whole Verb at a Glance — Глаго́л: повторе́ние

You now have every part of the Russian verb that an elementary learner needs. This last chapter puts the parts side by side, shows them working together in two short texts, and gives you mixed exercises that draw on all eleven earlier chapters.

🎓 COURSE COMPLETE

You have finished **Russian Grammar 3**. You can conjugate verbs in the present, past and future, choose between the two aspects, give commands, use reflexive verbs, put the right case after a verb, and say what you can, must and want to do. Russian Grammar 4 takes the verb further, into the verbs of motion, participles and gerunds.

One verb, every form

FORM	ЧИТА́ТЬ (1ST CONJ.)	ГОВОРИ́ТЬ (2ND CONJ.)
Infinitive	**чита́ть**	**говори́ть**
Present, я / ты	**чита́ю, чита́ешь**	**говорю́, говори́шь**
Present, они́	**чита́ют**	**говоря́т**
Past	**чита́л, чита́ла, чита́ли**	**говори́л, говори́ла, говори́ли**
Imperfective future	**бу́ду чита́ть**	**бу́ду говори́ть**
Perfective (pair)	**прочита́ть**	**сказа́ть**
Perfective future, я	**прочита́ю**	**скажу́**
Imperative, ты / вы	**чита́й, чита́йте**	**говори́, говори́те**

QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT TO DO	CHAPTER
What are the endings?	**-ешь type or -ишь type**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapters 1–3
Past or future?	**-л, -ла, -ло, -ли; or бу́ду + infinitive; or perfective endings**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapters 4 and 7
One finished action or a process?	**perfective or imperfective**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapters 5 and 6
Telling someone to act?	**-й, -и, -ь, plus -те**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapter 8
Does the verb end in -ся?	**no object; -ся / -сь**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapter 9
Which case follows?	**look up the government**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapter 10
Can, must, want, feel?	**modal verb or dative impersonal**	Russian Grammar 3, Chapter 11

Two short texts

Read each text aloud. Then find every verb and say its tense, its aspect and whether it is reflexive.

① Yesterday

Вчера́ я рабо́тал до́ма. Пото́м я позвони́л дру́гу.

Yesterday I worked at home. Then I rang a friend.

Он сказа́л: «Дава́й встре́тимся!» Мы встре́тились в кафе́ и до́лго разгова́ривали.

② Tomorrow

За́втра я бу́ду рабо́тать. Ве́чером я позвоню́ ма́ме.

Tomorrow I shall be working. In the evening I shall ring my mother.

Мне на́до купи́ть пода́рок, но у меня́ не бу́дет вре́мени.

I need to buy a present, but I shall have no time.

He said, “Let’s meet!” We met in a café and talked for a long time.

Mixed practice

Say or write the answer first, then click to check.

1. Put **чита́ть** into the past for a woman.

▼ Show answer

Она́ чита́ла.

2. Say in Russian: “We shall be working.”

▼ Show answer

Мы бу́дем рабо́тать. Imperfective future.

3. Give the perfective future, *я* form, of **написа́ть**.

▼ Show answer

напишу́.

4. Say in Russian: “I read the newspaper every day.” Which aspect?

▼ Show answer

Я ка́ждый день чита́ю газе́ту. Imperfective: a repeated action.

5. Say in Russian: “Tell me, please.” (polite)

▼ Show answer

Скажи́те, пожа́луйста.

6. Say in Russian: “She studied at the university.”

▼ Show answer

Она́ учи́лась в университе́те. Reflexive, no object.

7. Say in Russian: “I am helping my brother.”

▼ Show answer

Я помога́ю бра́ту. *Помога́ть* + dative.

8. Say in Russian: “She must work.”

▼ Show answer

Она́ должна́ рабо́тать.

9. Say in Russian: “I am hot.”

▼ Show answer

Мне жа́рко. Dative impersonal.

10. Say in Russian: “I have no time.”

▼ Show answer

У меня́ нет вре́мени. *Нет* + genitive.

What comes next

Russian Grammar 4 is planned to cover the parts of the verb that were left out here: the **verbs of motion** (*идти́ / ходи́ть, е́хать / е́здить* and their prefixes), **participles** and **gerunds**. Each of these builds on aspect and on the case system you have already learnt.

Not Yet Verified

Checked (one web search on 2026-11-17): only the description of what comes next: that verbs of motion come in pairs of multidirectional and unidirectional forms, that unprefixed verbs of motion are imperfective, and that participles share features of verbs (tense, aspect, voice) and of adjectives (gender, number, case) (sources: russianenthusiast.com: verbs of motion, Mezzo Guild: verbs of motion, russianenthusiast.com: participles, Sussex: Tolstoy grammar reference, from search

results only, the pages themselves were not read in full).

Not covered by the search, from general knowledge: everything else in this chapter. The summary tables repeat material from Chapters 1 to 11, and each of those chapters has its own verification box, which says what was and was not checked. Some items were deliberately left out because the forms could not be verified, for example the *-нуть* verbs in Chapter 3. The forms, stress marks, example sentences and the two short texts were written for this course. No dictionary was consulted. A dictionary or a native speaker should be the final check.

Course complete. Next: **Russian Grammar 4**, when its outline is requested: verbs of motion, participles and gerunds.