

Russian, Step by Step, Root by Root

A gentle, etymology-driven introduction to Russian

Adhithya Rajasekaran

Starter edition — thirteen cumulative chapters of short lessons.

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Preface

This book teaches Russian one word at a time, and it teaches each word by taking it apart. It assumes no Russian and no Cyrillic. Every section takes one small expression, introduces only the letters, sounds, or grammar that expression needs, connects it to history you may already know, and ends by asking for it back.

Russian is a Slavic language, a cousin of English far enough back that the family resemblance survives in surprising places — *three* is *tri*, *sister* is *sestrá* — and it is worth knowing which resemblances are real and which are traps. This book flags both.

Stress matters enormously in Russian, and ordinary Cyrillic does not print it. So the romanization here marks the stressed vowel with an acute accent, and then gradually yields to the script as you come to read it.

This is a starter edition: thirteen chapters, complete in themselves, with more being written. Chapters 1 and 2 were written straight into L^AT_EX; chapters 3 to 13 are generated from the same lesson files the audio course reads, so the printed page and the spoken lesson cannot drift apart.

How to use this book

Every numbered section is one word, or one small phrase, and takes a few minutes — the length of a queue, an errand, or the walk to the bus. Read them in order the first time through: each section stands on the ones before it, and nothing is used before it has been taught. After that the book becomes reference, and you can open it anywhere.

Say the Russian out loud wherever you can. The prompts under *Your turn* are written to be spoken, and saying a word is most of what makes it stay. The questions under *Before you move on* carry their own answers in brackets: cover them, answer from memory, then look.

Nothing here is gated behind the alphabet. Each lesson introduces exactly the letters and sounds its own word needs, so you are reading real

words from the first page rather than drilling a chart.

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Contents

Preface	iii
1 Greetings and courtesy	1
1.1 privét	1
1.2 zdárvstvuyte	3
1.3 da	5
1.4 nyet	7
1.5 spasíbo	8
1.6 pozhálusta	10
1.7 Practice	12
1.8 v, r	14
1.9 s, n	15
1.10 b, d	16
1.11 p, i	18
1.12 e, t	19
1.13 Practice	21
1.14 privét	21
1.15 privét	22
1.16 privét	22
2 Introducing yourself	23
2.1 ya	23
2.2 ty, vy	24
2.3 vy	26
2.4 menyá zovút	27
2.5 kak vas zovút	29
2.6 kak / comment / como	30
2.7 óchen priyátno	31
2.8 Practice	32

2.9	Practice	34
2.10	Practice	35
3	Six Verbs, and the One You Never Say	37
3.1	byt'	37
3.2	zhit'	39
3.3	znat'	40
3.4	govorit'	42
3.5	videt'	43
3.6	idtí	45
4	Verbs of the Mind and the Page	47
4.1	dúmat'	47
4.2	ponimát'	49
4.3	chitát'	50
4.4	pisát'	52
5	Taking, Asking, Helping, Loving	55
5.1	brat'	55
5.2	spráshivat'	57
5.3	pomogát'	58
5.4	lyubít'	60
6	Water, Coffee, Tea, and Bread	63
6.1	vodá	63
6.2	kófe	65
6.3	chai	66
6.4	khleb	68
7	Friend and Siblings	71
7.1	drug	71
7.2	podrúga	73
7.3	brat	74
7.4	sestrá	75
8	Family	77
8.1	sem'yá	77

9	Eyes, Ears, Mouth, and Nose	79
9.1	úkho	79
9.2	nos	80
9.3	rot	81
9.4	glaz	83
10	Heart	85
10.1	sérdtse	85
11	Parting Words	89
11.1	da svidániya	89
11.2	paká	91
11.3	da skórava	92
11.4	da záfra	94
11.5	da fstréchi	95
11.6	spakóynay nóchi	96
12	Mother and Father	99
12.1	máma	99
12.2	pápa	101
12.3	mat'	102
12.4	atéts	103
13	Milk, Cheese, Juice, and Soup	107
13.1	malakó	107
13.2	syr	109
13.3	sok	110
13.4	sup	111
14	Eleven Letters, Sorted Into Three Kinds	113
14.1	u	113
14.2	z	114
14.3	k	115
14.4	l	116
14.5	m	116
14.6	y	117
14.7	zh	118
14.8	ch	119
14.9	sh	120
14.10	(soft sign)	120

14.11	ya	121
15	The Two Letters You Already Knew, and Six You Did Not	123
15.1	a	123
15.2	o	124
15.3	g	125
15.4	kh	126
15.5	f	127
15.6	ts	128
15.7	y	129
15.8	yu	129
15.9	Practice	130
16	And, Or, and Neither	133
16.1	i	133
16.2	... i	135
16.3	íli	136
16.4	ni ... ni	137
16.5	tózhe	138
17	But, Twice Over	141
17.1	no	141
17.2	a	143
17.3	adín	144
17.4	drugóy	145
17.5	tochka, vopros, vosklitsanie	147
18	One Word, and a Whole Sentence After It	149
18.1	shto	149
18.2	..., shto	151
18.3	ya dúmayu, shto	152
18.4	ya ne znáyu, shto	153
18.5	tire	154
19	Why, Because, When	157
19.1	pachemú	157
19.2	patamú shto	159
19.3	kagdá	160
19.4	kagdá ...,	162

19.5	zapyatáya	163
20	The Verb That Takes Another Verb	165
20.1	khatét	165
20.2	ya khachú chitát	167
20.3	shtóby	168
20.4	moch	169
20.5	náda	171
21	Excuse Me, and Say It Again	173
21.1	izvinítye	173
21.2	prastítye	175
21.3	paftarítye	176
21.4	myédlenna	178
21.5	pamagítye	179
22	The Words That Ask, and the Word That Points Back	181
22.1	kto	181
22.2	kakóy	183
22.3	skólka	184
22.4	katóryy	185
22.5	li	187
23	One to Five, and an Answer to Skolko	189
23.1	dva	189
23.2	tri	190
23.3	chetýre	191
23.4	pyat	192
23.5	Practice	192
24	Six to Ten, and the Pairs That Shaped Each Other	195
24.1	shest	195
24.2	sem	196
24.3	vósem	197
24.4	dévyat	197
24.5	désyat	198
24.6	Practice	199

25	Twenty, a Hundred, and the Number That Named a Family	201
25.1	dváďtsat	201
25.2	sto	202
25.3	Practice	203
26	Which One: the Ordinals, Said and Written	205
26.1	pérvy	205
26.2	vtoróy trétiy	206
26.3	pérvy	207
26.4	Practice	208
26.5	Practice	208
27	Reading — Six Words, Six Lines, and a First Passage	211
27.1	voda, khleb, chai, kofe, sup, syr	211
27.2	privet, spasibo, pozhaluysta	212
27.3	privet! menya zovut Anna.	213
	Pronunciation & Cyrillic Reference	215
	Glossary	219
	Review Questions	227
	Answer Key	231
	A note on sources	235
	Index	237

Chapter 1

Greetings and courtesy

Modes: 👁 eyes (7) ✍ pen (9) 🗣 Hands-free start: first 7 of 16 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone in Russian, respond courteously, and close the exchange naturally.

Complete RU-C01-practice, the canonical closing checkpoint, and demonstrate the chapter promise: greet someone in Russian, respond courteously, and close the exchange naturally.

1.1 привет (privét) — “hi,” the everyday hello

Your first Russian word and Cyrillic letters. Several shapes are **false friends** that look Latin but sound different; meet them head-on.

The letters in this word

(If you already read Cyrillic, skim this.) Russian is written **left to right**, like English. Six letters spell **привет**:

- п = “p” — think Greek **pi** (Π), not Latin p.
- р = “r” — a rolled r. **FALSE FRIEND:** it looks like Latin *p* but says *r* (it’s Greek **rho**).
- и = “ee” (as in *meet*) — like a backwards Latin N.
- в = “v” — **FALSE FRIEND:** looks like Latin *B* but says *v*.

- **е** = “ye” (as in *yes*) — looks like Latin e, but carries a *y*-glide.
- **т** = “t” — like Latin T.

Left to right: **п · р · и · в · е · т** = *p-r-i-v-ye-t* →

привет = **privét** (stress on the second syllable; Russian never writes its stress marks, so you learn the stress *with* the word).

Two false friends in one short word — **п**=r and **в**=v — are the two you’ll trip on most. Fix them now and half of Cyrillic stops fooling you.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

привет is built from **при-** (“at, to, up against”) + the old root **-вет** (“to speak, to counsel”). The picture is *a word brought to you* — a greeting handed over.

That root **-вет** is quietly everywhere in Russian, and it hides a word you already know in English:

- **со-вет** (*sovét*) = “a speaking-together” → **council, advice**. Borrowed into English as **Soviet** — the *Soviet* Union was literally the *Council* Union.
- **от-вет** (*otvét*) = “a speaking-back” → **an answer**.
- **об-ет** (*obét*) = “a vow.”

So **привет** is a cousin of **Soviet** — the same “speak” root, one a friendly hello, the other the most famous Russian word in English.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Russian *privét*, Spanish *hola*, French *salut*, German *hallo*, and English *hi* fill the casual slot. Russian draws the line sharply: use **привет** with friends and the next lesson’s formal greeting with everyone else.

Why it’s said this way

привет is **informal** — warm, but only for people you’d address casually. To a stranger, an elder, a shopkeeper, or your boss, it can sound too familiar; there you reach for **здравствуйте**. Russian draws the formal/informal line more strictly than English does, and greetings

are where you first feel it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- p · r · i · v · ye · t → “privét,” stress the *vyet*
- which letter looks like Latin B but says “v” (В), and which looks like Latin p but says “r” (р)
- “привет” to a friend

Before you move on

Read **привет**. What do **В** and **р** each sound like (v and r — the two false friends)? Is it formal or informal? (Informal — friends only.) And what famous English word shares its **-вет** “speak” root? (*Soviet*, from **совет**, “a council.”)

1.2 здравствуйте (zdrávstvuyte) — “be healthy,” the formal hello

You can say **привет** to a friend. Now the word for everyone else — longer, older, and worth the effort.

What to know first

- the **привет** lesson — this is its formal opposite, and it reuses **В=v**, **е=ye**, **т=t**, **р=r** from there.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) It’s a long word, but you already know six of its letters. The new ones:

- **з** = “z” — looks like the digit **3**.
- **д** = “d” — from Greek **delta** (Δ).

- **a** = “a” (as in *father*) — the one vowel that looks *and* sounds like Latin a.
- **c** = “s” — **FALSE FRIEND**: looks like Latin *C* but says *s* (Greek **sigma**).
- **y** = “oo” (as in *boot*) — **FALSE FRIEND**: looks like Latin *y* but says *oo*.
- **й** = “y” — a short glide (и wearing a little breve $\breve$).

Now read across: з · д · р · а · в · с · т · в · у · й · т ·
е.

A pronunciation mercy: that first **в** is **silent** here — natives say “*zdrás-tvuy-tye*,” dropping the *v* in -ВСТВ-. Nobody articulates all those consonants.

здравствуй~~те~~ = zdrávstvuyte (“ZDRAST-vooy-tye”)

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

здравствуй~~те~~ is a wish for **health**. Its core is **здоровье** (*zdoróvye*, “health”) / **здоров** (*zдорóv*, “healthy”) — so the greeting literally means “**be healthy!**” You are, politely, wishing wellness on the person in front of you.

- **-те** on the end is the **plural/polite ending** — the same *-te* that makes a command respectful. Drop it and you get the informal singular **здравствуй**.

An honest note on cousins: Russian **здоровье** (“health”) is **not** related to English *health* — they come from different roots (English *health/whole/hale* is Germanic). The *idea* is the shared one: many languages greet by wishing **health** (Latin *salve* = “be well,” the ancestor of Spanish *hola*’s cousin *salud*) or **peace** (Arabic *salām*, Hebrew *shalom*). Russian picked health.

Grammar Lens — Russian’s formal *you* is plural

The **-те** ending here is your first taste of a rule that runs through Russian: **politeness = plural**. To address one person formally, Russian uses the *plural* “you” (**вы**, *vy*) and plural verb endings — exactly like French *vous* or the *usted* idea in Spanish. So

здравствуй-те is “be healthy” said to a **ВЫ** — one respected person, addressed as if plural.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ZDRAST-vooy-tye” — let the first **В** go silent
- which two false friends appear here (**с** = s, **у** = oo)
- “здравствуйте” to a stranger; “привет” to a friend

Before you move on

Read **здравствуйте**. What does it literally wish? (Health — “be healthy.”) Formal or informal, and how do you know? (Formal — the polite plural **-те**.) What do **с** and **у** each sound like? (s and oo — two false friends.)

1.3 да (da) — “yes”

Two greetings so far, one casual and one formal. The next two words are the shortest in the chapter and the most used in the language.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) Just two, both already familiar from **здравствуйте**: **д** (d, from Greek delta Δ) + **а** (a, as in *father*).

да = **da** — short, clear, stressed. The easiest word in the language to read.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

да is an old Slavic **да** that has always meant “yes.” But it moonlights: Russians sprinkle **да** through speech as a soft “**and** / **so** / **well...**” or a tag —

- «Ну да» (*nu da*) = “well, yeah.”

- «**Да?**» on the end of a sentence = “...right?” (like French *n’est-ce pas?*).

So the first word you can *say* is also one of the most common little glue-words in the language.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Every language improvised its own “yes,” and you can hear where each one came from:

- Russian **да** — an old Slavic affirmative.
- Spanish **sí** — Latin *sic*, “thus, so.”
- French **oui** — Latin *hoc ille*, “that’s it.”
- German **ja** — old Germanic *ja*.
- Latin **ita** or **sic** — “thus, so.”

Notice how many languages say “yes” with a word that means “**so / thus**” (*sí, sic, ita*). Russian’s **да** is its own thing — but its side-job as a “so/and” word rhymes with that pattern.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**да**”
- “**ну да**” (nu da) — “well, yeah”
- which letter is **д** (d) and which is **а** (a)

Before you move on

Read **да**. Two letters — name their sounds (d, a). Besides “yes,” what else does **да** do in a sentence? (Works as a soft “and / well... / right?”)

1.4 НЕТ (nyet) — “no,” literally “there-is-not”

Say **да**. One syllable, no trap in it. Its opposite has a trap.

What to know first

- **да** — its opposite, learned together as a pair.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) Three letters: **н** · **е** · **т**.

- **н** = “**n**” — **FALSE FRIEND**: it looks exactly like Latin *H* but says *n*.
- **е** = “ye” (the *y*-glide vowel from **привет**).
- **т** = “t”.

нет = **nyet** (“nyeht”) — one syllable, stressed, with a soft *y* onset.

That **н=n** is the last of the big four false friends (**в=v**, **р=r**, **с=s**, **н=n**). Learn those four and Cyrillic stops disguising itself as Latin.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

нет is a **compression of a whole clause**. It comes from **не** + **(е)сть** — “**not is**”, i.e. “*there is not*.”

- **не** (*nye*) — the negator, “**not**.”
- **есть** (*yesht*) — “is / there is” (its ancestor is the same verb as English *is*).

So Russian’s “no” is really “**not-is**” — a denial of existence, worn down to a single syllable. (Its longer form **нету**, *nyétu*, “there isn’t any,” still shows the seam.)

And that little **не** is one of the deepest words in the whole Indo-European family — the ancient negation ***ne**. You already own a dozen of its English children:

не ↔ English **no, not, none, never, nay, neither** ↔
Latin **nōn** ↔ Sanskrit **na** ↔ French **non**.

When you say **нет**, you are pronouncing a cousin of *no* that has meant “not” for six thousand years.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Unlike “yes” — where every language improvised — the world’s “no” is astonishingly **one word**, stretched across the whole family. Russian **нет** carries **не**; English says **no** and **not**; Latin said *nōn*, French says *non*, Sanskrit said *na*. All of them are the same ancient **ne*, and **нет** is Russia’s share of it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nyet”
- which letter looks like Latin H but says “n” (н)
- “да... нет” — yes, then no

Before you move on

Read **нет**. What clause is it worn down from? (**не** + **есть**, “not is.”) What does **н** sound like — and what does it *look* like? (Says n, looks like Latin H.) Name two English cousins of **не**. (no, not, never, none, nay...)

1.5 спасибо (spasíbo) — “God save you,” now just “thanks”

You can greet someone. Now thank them — and this word has a whole sentence folded inside it.

What to know first

- **привет** for **с**=s (false friend), and to contrast **б** (b) with the **в** (v) you met there.

The letters in this word

(Skim if you read Cyrillic.) Six letters: **с · п · а · с · и · б · о**.

- **с** = “s” (the false friend — looks like C), **п** = “p”, **а** = “a”, **и** = “ee”, **о** = “o”.
- **б** = “b” — meet the partner that ends the confusion: **б** is *b*, while the very similar-looking **в** is *v*. One has an open belly (**б** = b), the other stacks two bowls (**в** = v).

A sound note: the first **о** is *unstressed*, so it **reduces** toward “a” — natives say “*spa-SEE-ba*.” Unstressed Russian **о** almost always softens to an *a*-ish sound. Stress lands on **-си-**.

спасибо = **spasíbo** (“spa-SEE-ba”)

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

спасибо is a **frozen prayer**. It is a worn-down contraction of **спаси Бог** (*spasí Bog*) — “**God save [you]**”:

- **спаси** — “save!”, the command form of **спасти** (“to save, rescue”).
- **Бог** (*Bog*) — “**God**.”

Over centuries **спаси Бог** fused and shed its final consonant into today’s **спасибо**. You are, etymologically, blessing whoever helped you.

Courtesy words are often fossilised blessings — Spanish **adiós** is *a Dios*, English **goodbye** is *God be with ye*. **спасибо** belongs to that family: a little “God save you,” said so often the prayer wore invisible.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- Russian **спасибо** — “**God save you**.”
- Spanish **gracias** — Latin *gratia*, “grace.”
- French **merci** — Latin *merces*, “reward, mercy.”
- German **danke** — “think of, be mindful.”
- English **thank you** — “think”: I’ll hold you in thought.

Every culture built “thanks” from a different metaphor — grace, reward, mindful thought — and Russian built it from a **blessing**.

Why it’s said this way

Because it began as **спаси Бог**, older or very devout speakers sometimes still feel the “God” in it; a few religious communities prefer **благодарю** (*blagodaryú*, “I give a blessing,” a calque of Greek *eucharistō*). But in everyday modern Russian, **спасибо** is simply **the** word for thanks, its prayer long dissolved.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “spa-SEE-ba” — reduce that first **о** to an *a*
- which letter is b and which is v (**б** = b, **в** = v)
- “спасибо” — and recall the hidden **спаси Бог**

Before you move on

Read **спасибо**. What two words is it worn down from, and what do they mean? (**спаси Бог** — “God save [you].”) Which other courtesy words are fossilised blessings? (*adiós* = to God; *goodbye* = God be with ye.) Does **б** say b or v? (b.)

1.6 пожалуйста (pozhalusta) — “please,” and also “you’re welcome”

Say **спасибо**. The word that answers it, and asks for things, is the longest you have met — and shorter than it looks when spoken.

What to know first

- **спасибо** — this is its natural partner: **спасибо** → **пожалуйста** is Russia’s “thank you” → “you’re welcome.”

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) Everything here is familiar except one new letter: **пожалуйста**.

- **ж** = “**zh**” — the sound in *measure*. It looks like a little beetle with wings; no Latin letter carries this sound.
- The rest you know: **п**(p) **о**(o) **а**(a) **л**(l) **у**(oo) **й**(y) **с**(s) **т**(t).

A big pronunciation mercy: nobody says all four middle syllables. The written **пожалуйста** is spoken “**pa-ZHAL-sta**,” swallowing the **-уй**- entirely, and the first **о** reduces to *a*.

пожалуйста = **pozhálusta**, said “*pa-ZHAL-sta*”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

пожалуйста is **пожалуй** + a softening tag **-ста**. **пожалуй** is the command form of the old verb **жаловать** (*zhálovat'*), “to grant, to bestow a favour” — from the root **жал-**, the same root as **жаль** (*zhal'*, “a pity”) and **жалеть** (“to feel for someone”). So under the politeness sits “**grant [me this], do me the kindness.**” English **please** is the same idea worn down — short for *if it please you*. It also does a job English splits off: the **reply to thanks**. Where English needs a separate “you’re welcome,” Russian answers **спасибо** with **пожалуйста** — “[it was] a favour freely given.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

- Russian **пожалуйста** — “grant [me] a favour.”
- French **s’il vous plaît** — “if it pleases you.”
- Spanish **por favor** — “for a favour.”
- English **please** — “[if it] please [you].”
- German **bitte** — “I request,” and also “you’re welcome.”

German *bitte* pulls the same double shift — one word for both “please” and “you’re welcome.”

Why it's said this way

Because it is really a request for a kindness, **пожалуйста** also softens commands: add it to an instruction and a bark becomes a request. And as the answer to **спасибо**, it closes the ritual of thanks the way “*you’re welcome*” does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pa-ZHAL-sta” — drop the middle -уй-
- the new sound **ж** (the *zh* in *measure*)
- the exchange — “спасибо!” ... “пожалуйста!”

Before you move on

Read **пожалуйста**. What favour-root hides inside it? (**жаловать**, “to grant a favour” — cousin of **жаль**, “pity.”) What two English phrases does this one word cover? (“please” **and** “you’re welcome.”) What sound does **ж** make? (*zh*, as in *measure*.)

1.7 Chapter 1 — putting it together

Six words, and — more importantly — you can now **read Cyrillic** well enough to sound them all out. Let’s prove it.

Script — the four false friends, one more time

These are the letters that look Latin and lie. Say each sound aloud:

- **в** wears the shape of a Latin B and says **v** — as in **привет**.
- **р** wears the shape of a Latin P and says **r** — as in **привет**.
- **с** wears the shape of a Latin C and says **s** — as in **спасибо**.
- **н** wears the shape of a Latin H and says **n** — as in **нет**.

And the two easy vowel traps: **y** = “oo” (not y), **е** = “ye.”

Script — read them cold

Sound out each — no romanization:

- привет → *privét* (hi)
- здравствуйте → *zdrávtvuyte* (hello, formal)
- спасибо → *spasíbo* (thank you)
- да → *da* (yes)
- нет → *nyet* (no)
- пожалуйста → *pozhálusta* (please / you're welcome)

The exchange

Run the whole ritual, formal then informal:

- Meet a stranger: «Здравствуйте!»
- They thank you: «Спасибо!» → you answer «Пожалуйста!»
- A friend waves: «Привет!»
- Answer a question: «Да!» ... or «Нет!»

What you've built — the thread through the chapter

Every word carried a hidden story:

- привет shares its -вет “speak” root with **Soviet** (совет, a council).
- здравствуйте wishes you **health**; спасибо blesses you (*God save you*).
- нет is the ancient ***ne** you already own in *no, not, never*.
- пожалуйста asks for a **favour** — and doubles as “you’re welcome.”

Before you move on

Without looking: which greeting is formal and which is informal? (здравствуйте / привет.) Which word answers спасибо? (пожалуйста.) Name the four false-friend letters and their real sounds. (В=v, Р=r, С=s, Н=n.)

1.8 В and Р — writing the two great false friends

You *read* these two in привет. Now you'll **write** them. В and Р are the letters that fool every beginner — they wear Latin faces (*B* and *P*) but say *v* and *r*. Forming them by hand is the fastest way to stop your eye from lying to you.

Why it's said this way

Both came from **Greek**, not Latin, so the shape and the sound drifted apart:

- **В** is Greek **beta** — beta made the “v” sound in later Greek, and Cyrillic kept it. It looks like Latin *B*; it says **v**.
- **Р** is Greek **rho** — always an “r.” It looks like Latin *P*; it says a rolled **r**.

Writing — break it apart, then write it

В (“v”) — *a vertical, then two stacked bowls*:

1. **the vertical** — a straight downstroke, top to bottom.
2. **the upper bowl** — from the top of the vertical, bulge out right and back in.
3. **the lower bowl** — from the middle, a second belly out to the base.

Two bellies stacked on a spine — that's what tells **В** apart from Latin *B* (one belly) and from Russian **б** (which you'll meet next).

Р (“r”) — *a vertical that drops below the line, then a top loop*:

1. **the vertical** — a downstroke that sinks **below** the baseline (like the tail of Latin *p*).

2. **the loop** — a single closed bump at the **top**, on the right.

So **p** is drawn like a Latin lowercase *p*, tail and all — but it is an **r**.

Your turn

- *Say it:* trace **в** — “vertical, upper bowl, lower bowl” — and say its sound, “v”
- *Say it:* trace **р** — “vertical below the line, top loop” — and say its sound, “r”
- *Write it:* **привет** slowly, pausing on the **в** and the **р**

Before you move on

Draw **в** from its three strokes — what sound? (“v”; a vertical + two stacked bowls.) Draw **р** — what sound, and which Greek letter? (“r”; Greek **rho**.) Which Latin letters do they *look* like, and why is that a trap? (*B* and *P* — they’re Greek by descent, so the shapes stayed but the sounds didn’t.) Next: the other two false friends, **с** and **н**.

1.9 с and н — the last two false friends

Two more letters that wear a Latin mask. **с** looks like Latin *C* but says **s**; **н** looks like Latin *H* but says **n**. You’ve already read them — **с** opens **спасибо**, **н** opens **нет** — now write them and the four-letter false-friend set (**в р с н**) is complete.

Writing — break it apart, then write it

с (“s”) — *a single open curve:*

1. **the curve** — one stroke: start top-right, sweep left and down like a *C*, open on the right.

That’s the whole letter — a lone crescent. It **is** the shape of Latin *C*, but it comes from **Greek sigma** (the “s” sound). Think of it as the “s” hiding inside the English word *centre* said the soft way — *c* that sounds like *s*.

н (“n”) — *two verticals joined by a middle bar* (a Latin *H* shape):

1. **the left vertical** — a downstroke.
2. **the cross bar** — a short horizontal joining the two uprights **in the middle** (not slanted like a Latin *N*).
3. **the right vertical** — a second downstroke, parallel to the first.

So **н** is drawn exactly like a capital *H* — two posts and a rung — but it is an **n**. (Russian’s letter for the *H*-sound doesn’t exist; the “h” of foreign words is usually spelled with **г** or **х**.)

Script — the four false friends, together

letter	looks like	actually says	from
в	Latin B	в	Greek beta
р	Latin P	р	Greek rho
с	Latin C	с	Greek sigma
н	Latin H	н	—

Learn these four and the rest of Cyrillic stops ambushing you — most other letters either look foreign (so you can’t be fooled) or behave.

Your turn

- *Say it:* trace **с** — “one open curve” — sound “s”
- *Say it:* trace **н** — “left post, middle rung, right post” — sound “n”
- *Write it:* **спасибо** (find the **с**) and **нет** (find the **н**)

Before you move on

Draw **с** — one stroke, what sound and which Latin look-alike? (“s”; looks like *C*.) Draw **н** — three strokes, what sound and look-alike? (“n”; looks like *H*.) Name all four false friends and their sounds. (**в**=v, **р**=r, **с**=s, **н**=n.) Next: two letters with **no** Latin disguise — **б** and **д**.

1.10 б and д — letters that hide nothing

A relief after the false friends: **б** (“b”) and **д** (“d”) look like **nothing in Latin**, so they can’t trick you — you just have

to learn to draw them. You’ve read both already: **б** sits in **спасибо**, **д** opens **да**.

Script — **б** (“b”) — and how it differs from **в**

б and **в** are cousins (both from Greek **beta**, which split into a “b” letter and a “v” letter). They share a **vertical spine**, so keep them apart by their tops:

- **в** (v) = spine + **two stacked bowls** (both bellies face right).
- **б** (b) = spine + **one lower belly** + a **flag/hat** curving off the **top**.

Break **б** apart — *a vertical, a lower belly, a top flag*:

1. **the vertical** — a downstroke.
2. **the belly** — one bowl bulging right from the **lower** half.
3. **the top flag** — a short stroke off the top, curving **right** (the “hat” that **в** doesn’t have).

That top flag is the whole difference: **б** has a hat and one belly; **в** has no hat and two bellies.

Script — **д** (“d”) — the delta on little feet

д comes from Greek **delta** (Δ), the triangle — and you can still feel the triangle in it. Break it apart — *a body, then two little feet*:

1. **the body** — a rounded/looped shape sitting on the baseline (think a small *delta* or a curled *g*-like body).
2. **the feet** — two little legs dropping **below** the baseline, one at each corner of the base.

Those two descending feet are **д**’s signature — no Latin letter has them. Say “delta” as you draw it and the shape sticks.

Your turn

- *Say it:* trace б — “spine, lower belly, top flag” — sound “b” — then в for contrast (“two bellies, no hat”)
- *Say it:* trace д — “body, two feet below the line” — sound “d”, from delta
- *Write it:* спасибо (find the б) and да (the д)

Before you move on

What one stroke separates б from в? (The **top flag/hat** — б has it, and one belly; в has two bellies, no hat.) Draw д — what sound, from which Greek letter, and what’s its signature? (“d”; from **delta**; the two little feet below the line.) You can now hand-write every letter in привет, спасибо, да, and нет.

1.11 п and и — filling in привет

You can already hand-write the в and the р of привет. Now take two more of its letters: п (“p”) and и (“ee”). One is an honest Greek shape; the other is a **quiet false friend** — it looks like a Latin *N*.

Script — п (“p”) — the Greek gate

п is Greek **pi** (Π), the letter mathematicians write for 3.14.... It’s an honest letter: it looks like a little gateway and says “**p**.”

Break it apart — *two verticals joined by a top bar*:

1. **the left vertical** — a downstroke.
2. **the top bar** — a short horizontal across the top.
3. **the right vertical** — a second downstroke, parallel to the first.

A doorway shape: two posts and a lintel. (Don’t confuse it with н — that one’s bar sits in the **middle**, this one’s sits on **top**.)

Script — и (“ee”) — the backwards N

и says “ee” (as in *meet*) — a vowel. But watch out: it looks almost exactly like a **Latin N with the diagonal reversed**. That’s the quiet trap — your eye reads “N,” but it’s a vowel.

Break it apart — *two verticals joined by a rising diagonal*:

1. **the left vertical** — a downstroke.
2. **the diagonal** — from the **bottom** of the left vertical **up** to the top of the right (rising left-to-right — the mirror of Latin *N*, whose diagonal **falls**).
3. **the right vertical** — a downstroke.

So the tell between и and Latin *N* is which way the diagonal leans: и rises, *N* falls. (Later you’ll meet й — an и with a little breve on top, “ee-y.”)

Your turn

- *Say it*: trace п — “left post, top bar, right post” — sound “p”
- *Say it*: trace и — “left post, rising diagonal, right post” — sound “ee”
- *Write it*: the start of привет — п · р · и · ... — three letters down

Before you move on

Draw п — what sound and which Greek letter? (“p”; Greek **pi** Π.)
 Draw и — what sound, and how do you tell it from Latin *N*? (“ee”; its diagonal **rises** left-to-right, where *N*’s falls.) Which letter has its bar on top, п or н? (п — top bar; н — middle bar.) Next: е and т, and you’ll have all of привет.

1.12 е and т — the last two letters of привет

The finish line. е and т are two of Cyrillic’s most **honest** letters — they look like their Latin twins *and* sound close to them. Learn these and you can hand-write the whole of привет from memory.

Script — е (“ye”) — the honest vowel

е looks like a Latin **e** and sounds close to one — with a small twist: at the start of a syllable it carries a **y**-glide, “**ye**” (as in *yes*). So **привет** ends ...*v-ye-t*. (Letters that add a *y*-onset like this are called *iotated* — **е, ё, ю, я** are the family; you’ll meet the others in Chapter 2.)

Break it apart — *a curve, then a middle bar* (exactly like writing a Latin *e*):

1. **the curve** — start top-right, sweep left, curl down and round.
2. **the middle bar** — the short horizontal that closes the *e*.

No trap here: what you see is what you get.

Script — т (“t”) — Greek tau, honest too

т is Greek **tau**, and it looks and sounds like Latin **T**: a crossbar on a stem. (In *handwriting* Russians often make lowercase т look like an *m* with a bar over it, but the printed citation form is the clean T-shape you see here.)

Break it apart — *a central downstroke, then a top bar*:

1. **the downstroke** — a vertical stem.
2. **the top bar** — a horizontal across the top, centred on the stem.

Writing — now write the whole word

You now own every letter of **привет**:

п (p) · р (r) · и (ee) · в (v) · е (ye) · т (t) = *privét*

Two of them are false friends (**р**=r, **в**=v), one is a quiet one (**и**=ee), and three are honest (**п, е, т**). Write it slowly, naming each letter’s sound.

Your turn

- *Say it*: trace **е** — “curve, middle bar” — sound “ye”
- *Say it*: trace **т** — “downstroke, top bar” — sound “t”, Greek tau
- *Write it*: the full word — **привет** — start to finish, from memory

Before you move on

Draw **е** — what sound, and what does *iotated* mean? (“Ye”; it carries a *y*-onset.) Draw **т** — what sound and which Greek letter? (“t”; Greek **tau**.) Spell out the letters of **привет** with their sounds. (**п-р-и-в-е-т** = p-r-i-v-ye-t.) You can now hand-write your first Russian word end to end.

1.13 **привет** — watch one word move

Look at **привет**. Point from left to right and say the six sounds slowly: *p, r, ee, v, ye, t*. Every shape is already known.

Writing — observe and trace

Keep **привет** visible. Trace it once with a finger or a capped pen. Pause on **п** and say *r*; pause on **в** and say *v*. Stop after one careful trace.

Before you move on

Read **привет** once. Today was observation, not a memory test.

1.14 **привет** — one supported copy

Keep **привет** visible. Point to its two traps: **п** says *r* and **в** says *v*. You may look back after every letter.

Writing — guided copy

Copy **привет** once. Use three small chunks: **при** • **ве** • **т**. After each chunk, look back and compare only those letters. Then read the finished word.

Before you move on

Stop after one supported copy. Hiding the model belongs to the next lesson.

1.15 привет — look, hide, write, compare

Look at **привет** for five seconds. Touch the three chunks **при**
 • **ве** • **т**. Do not copy while the model is visible.

Writing — delayed copy

- cover **привет**
- wait five seconds
- write it once from memory
- uncover the model and compare one chunk at a time

Circle and repair one differing letter if needed. Repair is part of retrieval.

Before you move on

Read the repaired word once. Stop after one memory attempt.

1.16 One heard greeting — write what you know

Cover the answer lower on this page. You will hear one familiar informal greeting. No new Russian and no new Cyrillic shape is hiding here.

Writing — short dictation

Hear: privét — informal “hi”

Write the Russian word from sound alone. Do not use a visible model or romanization. Now uncover and compare: **привет**. Check **р** and **в** first, then the other four letters. Repair one place if needed.

Before you move on

This completes a tiny writing runway, not an exam simulation. Later work must grow from one word to messages, connected composition, and timed production.

Chapter 2

Introducing yourself

Modes: 🗣️ voice (9) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 8 of 10 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can give my name in Russian, ask for someone else's, and pick **ТЫ** or **ВЫ** to match how well I know them.

Run the whole introduction with a stranger — greet, ask Как вас зовут?, answer Меня зовут..., close with Очень приятно — then switch it for one friend by changing only the greeting and вас → тебя.

2.1 я — “I”

The shortest word in the chapter: one letter, one sound, and a pedigree of about six thousand years.

You'll want to know first — я

я — *ya* — I

That is the whole word. A single letter, pronounced *ya*.

It is a **new letter** — the writing track has taught **в, р, с, н, б, д, п, и, е** and **т**, and hasn't reached **я**. Read it here; you'll draw it when the track gets there.

And be careful with its shape. **я looks like a mirrored Latin R and has nothing to do with R.** (It descends from **Ѧ**, the “little yus” — not from R at all.)

It is also the **last** letter of the alphabet, 33rd of 33, and Russian has a rebuke built on that: «**Я — последняя буква в алфавите**», “я is the last

letter of the alphabet.” You say it to someone who talks about themselves too much. The letter’s position is the joke — don’t put yourself first.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Pronouns are the **least borrowable** part of a language. Nouns come and go by the thousand — *sputnik*, *pizza*, *computer* — but nobody borrows a word for *I*. So Я has simply been inherited, without interruption, for as long as there has been an Indo-European family: Russian Я, Latin *ego*, German *ich*, English **I**, Greek *egō*.

All from PIE **eǵh₂(om)*. Russian’s route ran through Proto-Slavic **azъ*, which East Slavic reshaped — a *j*- was added at the front (**azъ* → ЯЗъ) and the ending fell away — leaving the **one letter** you now say. It is the most extreme change in the family, and the reason Я sounds nothing like *ego* while being the same word.

Latin *ego* is the one English borrowed back, whole and untranslated, for the part of the mind that says *I*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Я” — *ya*
- the family — “Я ... *ego* ... *ich* ... **I**”
- the erosion — “**azъ* ... Я”

Before you move on

Say “I”. (Я — one letter, said *ya*.) What must you not mistake it for? (A **Latin R** — the shape is a coincidence.) Why has it changed so little in meaning? (**Pronouns are the least borrowable words** a language has.) Name three relatives. (*Ego*, *ich*, *I* — and Greek *egō*.) What did Russian’s come from? (Proto-Slavic **azъ*, with a *j*- added at the front and the ending lost.) Next: the two words for “you.”

2.2 ТЫ, ВЫ — the two words for “you”

Chapter 1 gave you two ways to say hello, split by formality. That split runs through the whole language — and here is the

place it matters most: Russian has **two words** for “you.”

The two words

Ты — *ty* — you, one person you’re familiar with. **Вы** — *vy* — you, formal, **or** more than one person.

Both turn on **ы**, which is the hardest vowel in Russian for an English speaker: not the *ee* of **Ты**’s look-alike, but a tighter, further-back sound made with the tongue pulled towards the throat. Say English *ill*, then try to say it with your tongue drawn back. The writing track hasn’t reached **ы** either.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Pronouns are the **least borrowable** part of a language. Nouns come and go; *I* and *you* stay. So the first two line up almost too neatly:

- **я** (last lesson) — Latin *ego*, English **I**, German *ich*.
- **ты** — Latin *tū*, English **thou**, German *du*.
- **вы** — Latin *vōs*, with no English or German survivor to set beside it.

The first two lines are the same word four times over. **The third is only half a set:** **вы** and *vōs* both continue PIE **wos*, but English *you* and German *ihr* come from the **other** stem in that paradigm, **yūs*. Cousins, not twins — worth marking rather than smoothing over. **ты** and *tū* and *thou* are the same word, barely touched in four thousand years. *Thou* fell out of standard English through the 1600s (it survives in Quaker usage, northern dialect and liturgy), leaving *you* for everyone — which is why the **ты/вы** choice feels foreign to English speakers. English **had** it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**я**” — *ya*
- “**ты**” and “**вы**” — hear the difference

- the family — “**Ты** ... *tū* ... **thou**”

Before you move on

Say “I”. (Я.) What are the two words for “you”, and what splits them? (**Ты** informal, **Вы** formal — or plural.) Why is **Ты** familiar to an English speaker’s ear? (It’s the **same word as *thou***, which left standard English through the 1600s.) Next: why plural **Вы** became polite.

2.3 Why plural **Вы** became polite

Give the pair: **Ты** for one familiar person; **Вы** for more than one person — or for one person addressed respectfully.

Grammar Lens: one social job, several grammatical routes

Russian **Вы** is a plural used for **one person** as a mark of respect. French does the same job with second-person plural **vous**. Chapter 1’s **здравствуй~~те~~** already carried the matching polite-plural ending **-те**. Other languages reached respect differently:

- Russian **Вы** — the second-person plural.
- French **vous** — the second-person plural, the very same route.
- German **Sie** — the *third*-person plural, not the ordinary *ihr*.
- Spanish **usted** — a worn-down title, *vuestra merced*, “your grace.”

Russian’s polite **Вы** is generally treated as an eighteenth-century import from French and German social usage, not a pattern Russian invented alone.

Why it’s said this way

Use **Вы** with a stranger, an older person, or in a formal relationship. Use **Ты** with a friend, child, or family member. When unsure with an adult, begin with **Вы**; too much respect is safer than unwanted familiarity.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- one close friend — **Ты**
- a new professor — **Вы**
- Russian and French use which route — second-person plural
- Spanish *usted* came from what — “your grace”

Before you move on

Why can **Вы** address one person? (A plural became respectful.) Which language shares that exact route? (French *vous*.) Which two take different routes? (German *Sie* uses third-person plural; Spanish *usted* came from a title.) Which Russian form is safest when you are unsure? (**Вы**.)

2.4 МЕНЯ ЗОВУТ... — “my name is...”

Many languages say “my name is” with a word for *my* and a word for *name*. Russian says something quite different, and it is worth taking apart slowly.

The exchange

Меня зовут Анна. — *Menyá zovút Anna.* — “My name is Anna.”

Now the literal reading:

меня — *menya* — **me**, the object form. **зовут** — *zovut* — **they call**.

So: “[**they**] call me Anna.”

There is **no word for “my”** and **no word for “name”** in the sentence. Russian reports what people call you, not what you possess.

Grammar Lens: the invisible “they”

Зовут is the **they** form of **звать**, “to call.” But there is no **они** (“they”) anywhere — and there isn’t meant to be. Russian uses a bare plural verb to mean “people in general,” the way English says “*they*”

say it'll rain" without anyone in mind.
English has the same trick and doesn't notice it:

They call me Anna. — Who are *they*? Nobody. Everybody.

Grammar Lens: **меня** is not **я**

This is the important part, and this book's first taste of **case**. You learned **я** for "I" last lesson. But here it is **меня** — because *I* is now the **object** of the calling, not the one doing it. Russian changes the **shape of the word** to mark that job:

я is *I*, the one acting; **меня** is *me*, the one acted on.

English does this with about six **pairs** — *I/me*, *he/him*, *she/her*, *we/us*, *they/them*, *who/whom*, plus the archaic *thou/thee*. Russian does it with **every noun and pronoun in the language**. That system is called **case**, and it is the main thing standing between you and Russian.

You do not need to learn it yet. You need to notice that **меня** is a **different shape of я**, and that the shape carries the meaning.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- "Меня зовут..." and your own name
- the literal — "they call me ..."
- the pair — "я ... меня"
- the English echo — "*they say it'll rain*"

Before you move on

Say "my name is Anna." (**Меня зовут Анна.**) What does it literally mean? ("**They call me** Anna.") Which two words is it missing? (Any word for **my**, and any word for **name**.) Who are "they"? (**Nobody** — a bare plural verb meaning "people in general," like English *they say*.) Why **меня** and not **я**? (Because it's the **object** — Russian changes a word's **shape** for its job. That's **case**.) Next: asking someone else's name.

2.5 как вас зовут? — “what’s your name?”

You can say your own name. Now ask for someone else’s — and notice that Russian asks a different question from English.

The exchange

Как вас зовут? — *Kak vas zovút?* — formal, or to more than one person. **Как тебя зовут?** — *Kak tebyá zovút?* — informal, to one person you know.

Taken apart:

как — *kak* — **how**. **вас** or **тебя** — *vas / tebya* — **you**, in the object form. **зовут** — *zovut* — they call.

So: “**How do they call you?**”

Grammar Lens: the object forms again

Last lesson’s **меня** has partners, and they follow the same logic — the person being called is the **object**, so the word changes shape:

- **я** becomes **меня** — me.
- **ты** becomes **тебя** — you, informal.
- **вы** becomes **вас** — you, formal or plural.

You now have a matched pair: **Как вас зовут?** — **Меня зовут...**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**Как вас зовут?**” — formal
- “**Как тебя зовут?**” — informal
- the whole exchange — “**Как вас зовут?**” · “**Меня зовут...**”

Before you move on

Ask a stranger’s name. (**Как вас зовут?**) And a friend’s? (**Как тебя зовут?**) What does **как** mean, and why does it matter?

(**How** — Russian asks *how they call you*, about an **action**, where English asks *what*, about a **possession**.) Give the three object forms. (Меня, тебя, вас.) Next: compare how several languages frame the same question.

2.6 Why Russian asks *how*, not *what*

In Как вас зовут?, which word means “how”? (Как.)

Grammar Lens: one question, two ways to organize it

English asks **what** your name is, treating the name as a thing you have. Russian asks **how** people call you, treating naming as something people do.

English is the odd one out in this small comparison:

- Russian asks Как вас зовут? — **how**.
- French asks *Comment vous appelez-vous ?* — **how**.
- Spanish asks *¿Cómo se llama?* — **how**.
- English asks **What** is your name? — **what**.

Three languages organize the question around an **action**; English organizes it around a **possession**. The answer is the same social fact, but the route to it differs.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three action words — **как**, *comment*, *cómo*
- Russian literally asks — “how do they call you?”
- English asks about — a thing you have

Before you move on

Which three languages ask “how”? (Russian, French, Spanish.)
 Which asks “what”? (English.) What is the underlying contrast?
 (Naming as an action versus a name as a possession.)

2.7 очень приятно — “pleased to meet you”

The reply that closes an introduction — and the best etymology in the chapter.

The two words

Очень приятно. — *Óchen priyátno*. — “Pleased to meet you.”

Literally: “**very pleasant.**”

очень — *ochen* — very. приятно — *priyatno* — pleasant, agreeable.

There is no “to meet you” and no “I am.” Russian states the **quality of the moment** and leaves the rest understood — the same economy as **меня зовут**, which left out “my” and “name.”

Both ч (*ch*) and я are letters the writing track hasn’t reached. Read them; you’ll draw them later.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Приятно comes from Slavic *prijati*, “to favour, to be well-disposed toward” — which gives Russian приятель (*priyátel*), a friend. That root goes back to PIE **preyH-*, “to love, to please.” And it went into Germanic too:

- Russian приятно, pleasant, and приятель, a friend.
- English **friend** — literally “one who is loving,” an old participle of a verb meaning *to love*.
- German *Freund*.

So приятно and *friend* are the same root, arriving from opposite ends of Europe.

Free almost certainly belongs to the family too. The usual account: the word first meant “belonging to the beloved household” — the

members of a family as opposed to the slaves in it — and only later meant “not in bondage.” *Free* and *friend* start in the same place. Saying **очень приятно** is, at the root, calling the meeting **friendly**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “Очень приятно”
- the whole exchange — “Как вас зовут?” · “Меня зовут...” · “Очень приятно”
- the family — “приятно ... приятель ... **friend**”

Before you move on

Say “pleased to meet you.” (**Очень приятно**.) What does it literally mean? (“**Very pleasant**” — no “I am,” no “to meet you.”) What is **приятно** related to? (Slavic *prijati* “to favour” → **приятель** “friend” — and, from the same PIE root **preyH-*, English **friend** and German *Freund*.) And *free*? (Most likely the **same family** — originally “belonging to the beloved household,” i.e. not a slave.) Next: putting the chapter together.

2.8 Chapter 2 practice — run the exchange

Give the three words the chapter opened with: *I*, familiar *you*, formal *you*. (**Я, ты, вы**.) Everything below is built from those.

The exchange

Two strangers meet. Say both voices aloud, one after the other:

— **Здравствуйте!** — *Zdrávstvuyte!* — **Как вас зовут?** —
Kak vas zovút? — **Меня зовут Анна. А вас?** — *Menyá zovút*
Anna. A vas? — **Меня зовут Иван. Очень приятно.** —
Menyá zovút Iván. Óchen priyátno.

Everything in it is formal, because **вы** is the safe opening with an adult you do not know.

Grammar Lens: what moves when the exchange goes informal

With one friend, exactly two pieces change:

- the greeting — **Здравствуйте** becomes **Привет**;
- the object pronoun — **вас** becomes **тебя**.

So **Как вас зовут?** becomes **Как тебя зовут?** The verb **зовут** does not move, and **меня** in the answer does not move either — you are still the one being called, whoever is asking.

Grammar Lens: why the shapes change at all

Я becomes **меня** because the calling lands **on** you rather than coming **from** you; **ты** and **вы** become **тебя** and **вас** for the same reason. And **зовут** is a plural verb with nobody behind it — “**they** call me,” where *they* is no one in particular. That is why the Russian question asks **how** people call you, not **what** your name is: naming is something people do, not something you own.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the full formal exchange, both voices
- the same exchange to one friend
- your own answer — “**Меня зовут...**” and your name

Before you move on

Run the formal exchange from memory, then switch it for one friend. Which two pieces changed? (The greeting, and **вас** → **тебя**.) Which word never moved? (**Зовут**.) Which form do you choose for an adult you have just met, and why? (**Вы** — a plural used as respect, and the safer default.) Who is doing the calling in **меня зовут**? (Nobody in particular — a bare plural verb.) And why is the question **как** rather than **что**? (Russian asks **how** people call you.)

2.9 Chapter 2 practice — the two person shapes

Russian changes a pronoun's shape when the action lands on that person. English still shows the same idea in $I \rightarrow me$.

Grammar lens — cover and retrieve

Cover the right column, then give the acted-on form:

doing the action	action lands here	meaning
я	меня	I / me
ты	тебя	you / you, informal
вы	вас	you / you, formal or plural

Russian has six cases, but none of that system is due yet. Learn these three pairs because the naming exchange needs them.

How to answer — each shape in the frame

- Меня зовут... — people call **me**...
- Как тебя зовут? — how do people call **you**, one friend?
- Как вас зовут? — how do people call **you**, formally?

The verb stays **зовут**; the person changes shape.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- я → меня
- ты → тебя
- вы → вас
- one verb, three object forms

Before you move on

Give the three pairs. Which shape answers “who receives the calling”? (The object form.) Do you need the six-case table yet?

(No — only these earned pairs.)

2.10 Chapter 2 practice — what Russian leaves out

Russian often says less than the English translation. Name only the words that are genuinely absent; do not erase a verb that is really there.

Grammar lens — three phrases, three English expansions

- **Меня зовут Анна** reads literally “they call me Anna”; English adds *my* and *name*.
- **Очень приятно** reads literally “very pleasant”; English adds *it is* and *to meet you*.
- **Как вас зовут?** reads literally “how do they call you?”; English adds *what* and *your*.

Only the middle sentence has **no verb at all**. In present-tense descriptions, Russian normally drops the linking verb: **Очень приятно** needs no spoken “is.”

The other two sentences do contain **зовут**, “they call.” They lack “is” because they are not “X is Y” sentences in Russian; English simply translates them that way.

Russian also has a present-tense **есть**. Chapter 1 already hid it inside **нет = не + есть**, “not-is.” The next chapter will reuse it. So the careful rule is not “Russian has no *is*”; it is “Russian usually omits the linking verb in a present-tense description.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the one verb-free phrase — **Очень приятно**
- the verb inside the naming pair — **зовут**
- the verb hidden inside **нет** — **есть**

Before you move on

Which sentence demonstrates the zero copula? (**Очень приятно.**)
Why do the naming sentences not count? (They contain **зовут.**)
Does Russian lack a present form of “be” entirely? (No: **есть** exists;
the linking use is normally omitted here.)

Chapter 3

Six Verbs, and the One You Never Say

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I do in Russian with six everyday verbs — **быть, жить, знать, говорить, видеть, идти** — put each of them in the **я** form, negate one with **не**, and say a sentence like «**Я — Анна**» the way Russian does, by leaving the verb out entirely.

Say **иду** — «*I am going*», one trip, right now — and hear why Russian splits going-there-once from going-there-often, a distinction English carries in tone and Russian carries in the verb itself. Then place **идти** against the two verb families the chapter has been sorting, and meet the **го-** that English also inherited in *go / went*.

3.1 **быть** — “to be”

Chapter 2 ended on a Russian sentence with no verb in it at all. This lesson is the verb that wasn’t there.

You’ll want to know first — **быть**

быть — *byt’* — to be

Four letters, and you have met all four already: **б** from **спасибо**, **ы** from **ты**, **т** from **привет**, and the soft sign **ь** from **очень**. Nothing new to decode — which is rare, and worth enjoying.

The **ь** is not a sound; it softens the **т** in front of it. That ending **-ть** is how almost every Russian verb names itself, the way English puts *to* in front.

Grammar Lens: the tense Russian will not say

English: *I am a student.* Russian:

Я студент. — *ya studént* — literally “**I student.**”

There is no word between them. Not a short one, not a quiet one — **none**. Russian does not use **быть** in the present tense; you link two things by setting them side by side.

The verb was not lost. Push the sentence into the past and it walks back in: **Я был студентом** — *ya byl studéntom* — “I was a student.” The present is the one place it goes silent.

Chapter 1 already showed you the survivor: **нет** is **не** + **есть**, “not-is.” **Есть** means **there is**, never *am*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

быть comes from Proto-Slavic **byti*, from PIE **b^huH-*, “to grow, to become.” Say *byt’* and then say **be** — that is the same root, barely worn.

Its cousins: English **be** and **been**, German *bin*, Latin *fuī* “I was” (which gave English **future**), Sanskrit *bhávati*.

Now the part worth keeping. English *be* is stitched from **three** different ancient roots — *be* from **b^huH-*, *is* and *am* from **h₁es-*, *was* and *were* from **wes-*. Russian holds two of those apart and lets you watch: **быть** is the **b^huH-* one, **есть** is the **h₁es-* one — the same root as English **is**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**быть**” — *byt’*, with a soft final t
- “**Я студент**” — and feel the gap where English puts *am*
- the two roots Russian keeps apart — “**быть ... есть**”
- the English pair — “**be ... is**”

Before you move on

Say “to be.” (**Быть**.) Now say “I am a student.” (**Я студент** — two words, and no verb.) Is the verb gone from the language? (No — **был** returns in the past; only the present drops it.) Which English word is **быть**? (**Be** — same root, **b^huH-*.) And which English word is **есть**? (**Is**.) Next: **жить**, “to live.”

3.2 **жить** — “to live”

Last lesson gave you a verb Russian refuses to say. This one you say constantly — and it is the first time you will put an ending on one.

You’ll want to know first — **жить**

жить — *zhít’* — **to live**

Same **-ть** ending as **быть**, and no new letters. The first one, **ж**, you met buried in **пожалуйста**: it is the *zh* of English *measure* or *pleasure* — a *sh* with the voice switched on. English never gives that sound a letter of its own; Russian gives it one.

So: *zhít’*, one syllable, soft *t* at the end.

Grammar Lens: the ending that means “I”

Я живу. — *ya zhivú* — **I live.**

Two things happened. A **-y** arrived on the end, and that **-y** is the whole signal for **I** — it is what *am*, *do* and *-s* are in English, packed into one letter. And a **в** surfaced in the middle that the infinitive never showed you: **жи-ть** becomes **жив-у**.

That is normal. A Russian verb’s dictionary form and its working stem are allowed to differ, so you learn the pair, not the one.

Switch to *you*, and the ending switches: **ты живёшь** — *ty zhivyósh* — “you live.” The person lives in the ending; Russian can therefore drop the pronoun entirely and still be perfectly clear.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ЖИТЬ goes back to PIE **g^weih₃-*, “to live,” and the family is enormous: Latin *vīvere* gave English **vivid**, **survive**, **revive**, **vital**; Greek *bíos* gave **biology**, and Greek *zōē* gave **zoo** and **zodiac**.

But the cousin worth carrying is the plain English one: **quick**. It meant **alive**, not fast — the speed came later, from how the living move. It is still frozen in the phrase *the **quick** and the dead*, in *cut to the **quick*** (cut to the living flesh), and in **quicksilver**, the metal that behaves as if alive.

So ЖИТЬ is **quick** in its older sense: to be among the living.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ЖИТЬ” — *zhit’*, with the *measure* sound in front
- “Я живу” — and land on the -y
- the pair — “живу ... живёшь”
- the old English meaning — “**quick** ... alive”

Before you move on

Say “to live.” (ЖИТЬ.) Say “I live.” (Я живу — and the -y is doing the work.) What did English *quick* once mean? (**Alive** — as in *the quick and the dead*.) Name two Latin cousins. (*Vivid*, *survive* — from *vīvere*.) Next: ЗНАТЬ, “to know.”

3.3 ЗНАТЬ — “to know”

The most useful sentence a beginner owns is not *hello*. It is *I don’t know* — and after this lesson you will have it.

You’ll want to know first — ЗНАТЬ

ЗНАТЬ — *znat’* — to know

No new letters, and the same **-ТЬ** that ended **БЫТЬ** and **ЖИТЬ**. Say the **З** and **Н** together with no vowel between them — *zn-*, exactly as English does in the middle of *magnet* but never at the start of a word.

In the present it takes the ending you already own:

Я знаю. — *ya znáyu* — **I know.**

That **-ю** is not a new ending. It is the same **-у** you put on **живу**, spelled so it carries a *y*-glide in front — the same glide **е** carries in **привет**. Russian writes the glide into the vowel instead of adding a letter for it.

Grammar Lens: не, the whole of “don’t”

Я не знаю. — *ya ne znáyu* — **I don’t know.**

You met **не** in Chapter 1, hidden inside **нет** — **не** + **есть**, “not-is.” Here it stands on its own, and it is the entire machinery of English *don’t*, *doesn’t* and *didn’t*: one small word, parked directly in front of the verb, never changing shape.

English needs a helper verb to negate — *I know* becomes *I do not know*, with a *do* that appears from nowhere. Russian adds nothing and borrows nothing. Put **не** in front, and you are done.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ЗНАТЬ is PIE **ǵneh₃-*, “to know,” and so is English **know** — the silent *k* in *know* is the fossil of a sound Russian still pronounces in **ЗН-**.

Down the Latin branch: *nōscere* gave **notice**, **notion**, **note**, **ignore** (*not*-knowing), **recognize**, **incognito**, and — through *nōbilis*, “knowable, well-known” — **noble**. Down the Greek branch: *gignōskein* gave **diagnosis**, **prognosis**, **agnostic**. English **ken** and **cunning** come straight down the Germanic branch beside *know*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**ЗНАТЬ**” — *znat’*, both consonants together
- “**Я знаю**” — the **-ю** is your **-у** wearing a glide
- “**Я не знаю**” — and notice you added nothing else
- the family — “**know** ... *notice* ... *ignore* ... *diagnosis*”

Before you move on

Say “to know.” (**Знать.**) Say “I don’t know.” (**Я не знаю.**) What does Russian add to negate a verb, besides **не**? (**Nothing** — no helper verb at all.) Which English word is **знать**? (**Know** — and its silent *k* is the sound Russian kept.) Next: **говорить**, “to speak.”

3.4 говорить — “to speak”

Your first new letter in three lessons, and an English word that looks like a relative and is not one.

You’ll want to know first — говорить

говорить — *govorít’* — to speak, to talk

One letter here is **new**: **г**. It is Greek **gamma** (**Г**) with the corner rounded off, and it says a hard **g**, as in *go* — never the *j* of *gem*.

Everything else you have met. And the two **os** behave the way **спасибо** taught you: an **o** away from the stress slides towards *a*. The stress falls on the last syllable, so this is **ga-va-RIT’**. Russian spells the *o*; your mouth says *a*.

Grammar Lens: verbs come in two families

Я говорю. — *ya gavar’yú* — **I speak.**

The **I** ending is the same **-ю** you put on **знаю**. Every Russian verb in the present ends the same way for *I*. Then switch to *you*, and the two families separate:

- **ты знаешь** — *ty znáyesh* — you know
- **ты говоришь** — *ty gavarísh* — you speak

An **-e-** against an **-и-**. That one vowel is the whole difference, and it is why you learn the *you* form alongside the dictionary form: it names the family, and the remaining endings follow from it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

говорить is built on the old Slavic noun **govorъ*, “a murmur, a din, the noise of many voices.” Russian still keeps **говор** for the buzz of a crowd or a regional way of talking. Most etymologists read the root as **imitative** — the word sounds like what it names — which is honest but means there is no tidy English cousin to hand you. Where a root is uncertain, this book says so.

What there *is* to hand you is a trap. **Govern** is **not** related. That is Latin *gubernāre*, “to steer a ship,” from Greek *kybernân* — the same word that gave English **cybernetics** and every **cyber-** since. A governor steers; a **говор** is a noise. Two roots that never met.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the new letter — “г is gamma, and says *g* as in *go*”
- “говорить” — *ga-va-RIT*’, both *os* leaning towards *a*
- “Я говорю” — same -ю as **знаю**
- the two families — “**знаешь ... говоришь**”

Before you move on

What sound is г? (A hard **g**, from Greek gamma.) Say “I speak.” (Я **гов**орю.) Which vowel separates the two verb families in the *you* form? (-**e**- in **зна**ешь against -**и**- in **гов**оришь.) Is **говорить** related to English *govern*? (**No** — *govern* is Greek *kybernân*, “to steer.”) Next: **видеть**, “to see.”

3.5 **видеть** — “to see”

One root, two meanings, and half of them ended up in English as words about **knowing** rather than about eyes.

You’ll want to know first — **видеть**

видеть — *videt*’ — to see

No new letters. Two you should keep honest, though: **В** says *v*, not *b*, and **И** says *ee* — the pair that fooled you in **привет**.

Stress lands on the **first** syllable here — *VEE-dyet'* — the opposite of **говорить**. Russian never prints its stress, so it travels with the word.

The *you* form tells you the family, exactly as promised last lesson:

ты видишь — *ty vídish* — **you see**

An **-ишь**, so **видеть** belongs with **говорить**, not with **знать**.

Grammar Lens: the letter that swaps for “I”

Now the surprise:

Я вижу. — *ya vízhu* — **I see.**

The **д** has become **ж** — the *measure* sound from **жить**. The ending is the ordinary **-у**; it is the consonant in front of it that shifted.

This happens in the **I** form and nowhere else in the present. **Ты видишь**, and everyone else, keep their **д**. So the pattern to carry is small and exact: **вижу**, then **видишь** — and after that the verb behaves.

English does the same trick and has stopped noticing: *spea*k against *spee*ch, *bre*ak against *bre*ach, *b*ake against *ba*tch. A consonant softening beside a front vowel, in both languages, for the same ancient reason.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

видеть is PIE **weid-*, and that root carried **two** senses at once: *to see*, and — because what you have seen is what you know — *to know*. The seeing branch, through Latin *vidēre*: **video**, **vision**, **visit**, **evident**, **provide**, **review**, **advise**. Through Greek *eîdos*: **idea** and **idol**.

The knowing branch came into English directly: **wit**, **wise**, **wisdom**, **witness** — someone who knows because they saw. Sanskrit took the same turn: the **Veda** is “what has been seen,” meaning knowledge. Russian kept both halves as two verbs: **видеть** for the eyes, and the older **ведать** for knowing — the *ved-* of *Veda*, still alive in Russian.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “видеть” — *VEE-dyet*’, stress at the front
- the odd pair — “вижу ... видишь”
- which family it joins — “видишь, like говоришь”
- the two branches — “*video* ... **wit**”

Before you move on

Say “to see.” (Видеть.) Say “I see.” (Я вижу — the **д** swapped to **ж**.) Does that swap happen anywhere else in the present? (**No** — the *I* form only.) What second meaning did **weid*- carry? (**To know** — hence *wit*, *wise*, *Veda*.) Next: **идти**, “to go.”

3.6 идти — “to go”

English has one verb for going. Russian has two, and picks between them on a distinction English hides inside its tenses.

You’ll want to know first — **идти**

идти — *idtí* — **to go** (on foot, and under way right now)

No new letters, and only four of them. The **дт** in the middle is not really pronounced as two sounds — Russians say *it-TEE*, with the stress at the end.

The endings are ones you already have:

Я иду. — *ya idú* — **I’m going.**

Ты идёшь. — *ty idyósh* — **you’re going.**

An **-у** for *I*, and an **-ешь** ending for *you*, so **идти** sits with **знать**, not with **говорить**.

Grammar Lens: going now against going often

Russian keeps a **second** verb for the same activity:

Я иду — I am on my way, **now**, in one direction.

Я хожу — *ya khazhú* — I go, **as a habit**, back and forth.

That is not a tense difference. They are two separate verbs, and Russian makes you choose one before you can open your mouth. English draws the same line with grammar instead: *I'm going* against *I go*. You know the distinction perfectly — you have just never had to choose a **verb** for it. Every Russian verb of motion comes in such a pair, so this one teaches the pattern.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

идти is PIE **h₁ei-*, “to go” — the same root as Latin *īre*, which gave English **exit** (“he goes out”), **transit**, **initial**, **itinerary**, **ambition** (*ambīre*, “to go around” canvassing votes) and **perish** (*perīre*, “to go through, to be lost”).

Now the good part. The past of идти is шёл — *shol* — which shares **no root** with it at all. A verb this common wears out and patches the hole with a second verb; that is called **suppletion**.

English does exactly this. *Go* has no past of its own either: **went** was taken from *wend* and kept. So идти → шёл is *go* → *went*, in two languages, for one reason — the words we use most wear out fastest.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “идти” — *it-TEE*
- “Я иду” — on my way this minute
- the contrast — “иду ... хожу”
- the two broken verbs — “идти ... шёл”, “go ... went”

Before you move on

Say “I’m on my way.” (Я иду.) And “I go there regularly”? (Я хожу — a different verb, not a different tense.) What is the past of идти? (Шёл — another root altogether, like English *went*.) Name two English cousins of **h₁ei-*. (*Exit*, *transit* — or *itinerary*.) That is six Russian verbs, and one of them you will spend your life not saying.

Chapter 4

Verbs of the Mind and the Page

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) 👁 eyes (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I think, understand, read and write in Russian, name the finished partner each of those verbs travels with, and read the letter **ш** that has been hiding in words I already say.

Say all four verbs of the chapter in the I form — я думаю, я понимаю, я читаю, я пишу — then name each one's finished partner, put the stress on the end of писать where it belongs, and read the ш you have been decoding since живёшь.

4.1 думать — “to think”

Six verbs behind you. This one opens the largest fact about Russian verbs.

You'll want to know first — думать

думать — *dúmat'* — to think

No new letters, and the -ть of **знать**. Stress on the first syllable, and it never moves: **DOO-mat'**.

Я **думаю**. — *ya dúmayu* — I think.

That -ю is the one you put on **знаю**. And ты **думаешь** — an -ешь, so **думать** files with **знать**, not **говорить**.

Three verbs of the head now: я **знаю** is a fact I hold, я **вижу** is what reaches my eyes, я **думаю** is what goes on behind them.

Grammar Lens: every Russian verb travels with a partner

Russian verbs come in **pairs**. One member is the **doing** — under way, repeated, unfinished. The other is the **deed done**, seen whole.

Думать is the first kind; its partner **подумать** is not “to think” but “to have a thought, and be done with it.”

You have met the instinct once. **Идти** was going *now, one way*, with a separate partner for going *as a habit* — one small family of motion verbs. This is a **different** distinction, applied to nearly **every verb in the language**.

So one job per verb: learn its partner’s **name**. What a pair does to a sentence is a later lesson.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

дума is the Russian noun for **a thought** — and for a body that thinks: the State **Дума** is the lower house of the Russian parliament, this same word.

Its own origin carries a hedge. The standard account makes **дума** an early borrowing from **Gothic** *dōms*, “a judgement” — behind English **doom** (a judgement before it was a fate) and **deem**. If so, **думать** and *doom* are relatives **by contact**, not by descent; a minority prefer an inherited root.

Latin’s *cogito, ergo sum* is built on the same idea, and its other pieces are yours: the **-o** of *cogito* is Latin **ego**, the pronoun Russian keeps as **я**; and *fuī*, “I was,” is **быть**’s root, English **be**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**думать**” — *DOO-mat*’, stress on the front
- the three heads — “**я знаю ... я вижу ... я думаю**”
- the pair — “**думать ... подумать**”, the doing and the done

Before you move on

Say “I think.” (**Я думаю.**) Which family does **думать** join, **знаешь** or **говоришь**? (**Знаешь.**) What is **подумать** beside **думать**, and how many verbs have such a partner? (The **finished**

member; nearly **all**.) Which English word does the standard account attach **дума** to? (**Doom**, by borrowing.)

4.2 ПОНИМАТЬ — “to understand”

The most useful sentence a traveller owns is short, and after this lesson it is yours: *I don't understand*.

You'll want to know first — ПОНИМАТЬ

ПОНИМАТЬ — *ponimát'* — **to understand**

No new letters. Stress on the last syllable, and both **os** lean towards *a* away from it: **па-ни-МАТ'**.

Я **понимаю**. — *ya panimáyu* — **I understand**.

The same **-ю** as **думаю**. And now the sentence worth more than the rest:

Я **не понимаю**. — *ya ne panimáyu* — **I don't understand**.

He does the whole job, exactly as in **я не знаю**: one word in front of the verb, no helper borrowed from anywhere. Say those syllables to a Russian speaker and the conversation slows down for you.

Grammar Lens: the partner, and a warning about its shape

Думать took **подумать**: a prefix on the front, nothing else disturbed. Do not expect that every time.

Понимать's partner is **понять** — same root, but the middle of the word has been squeezed out, **-ним-** against **-ня-**. Russian builds a pair by prefix, by a reshaped stem, or by both, and the shape is learned with the verb.

The job is unchanged: **ПОНИМАТЬ**, **ПОНЯТЬ**, said together, one entry.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ПОНИМАТЬ is **по-** plus a root meaning simply **to take**: Indo-European **h₁em-*, which came down the Latin branch as *emere*, “to take, and so to buy.” English took the family whole — **exempt** (taken out),

redeem (bought back), **example** (taken as a specimen), **premium**, **prompt**, **assume**, **consume**.

So **понимать** literally says **take hold of**. English says the same and has stopped noticing: **comprehend** is Latin *com-prehendere*, “to seize together”; **grasp** is what a hand does; German **begreifen** is *greifen*, “to grip.”

Set that beside the two pictures Russian already gave you. **Знать** was **ǵnehz-*, English **know** — knowledge you simply *have*. **Видеть** was **weid-*, which meant *see* and *know* at once and gave English **wit** and **wise** — knowledge you *saw*. Now understanding as something you *caught*. And unlike **думать**, which arrived by Gothic borrowing, this one is inherited straight down.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**понимать**” — *pa-ni-MAT*’, both *os* leaning to *a*
- “**Я понимаю**” then “**Я не понимаю**” — one word added, nothing else
- the pair — “**понимать ... понять**”, the squeezed middle
- the picture — “take hold” ... *comprehend*, *grasp*

Before you move on

Say “I don’t understand.” (**Я не понимаю**.) Name **понимать**’s partner and say how its shape differs from **подумать**’s. (**Понять** — the stem is reshaped, not just prefixed.) What does the root of **понимать** mean? (**To take** — as *comprehend* and *grasp* also do.) And which of your knowing-verbs is a borrowing rather than an inheritance? (**Думать**, from Gothic.)

4.3 ЧИТАТЬ — “to read”

English says *I read* and *I am reading* and means two things. Russian cannot — and the reason is a verb it refuses to say.

You'll want to know first — читать

читать — *chítát'* — to read

No new letters: **ч** you have been reading since **очень**, and it says the *ch* of *cheese*. Stress on the last syllable, **chi-ТАТ'**.

Я читаю. — *ya chítáyu* — I read.

The same -ю, and ты читаешь puts it with **знать** and **думать**. Two verbs, one ordinary sentence:

Я читаю и понимаю. — *ya chítáyu i panimáyu* — I read and I understand.

Grammar Lens: one present tense, two English sentences

Я читаю is *I read* and *I am reading*. Russian has one present tense and it covers both.

There is a reason, and you hold it. English builds *I am reading* out of **be** plus *-ing*; Russian's **быть** has no present tense to build with — the missing verb of Chapter 3, the one **Я студент** does without. With no auxiliary, Russian never grew the machinery.

The work English does with *am reading* against *read* is carried instead by the pair. **Читать** is the ongoing member; **прочитать** is the finished one — to read a thing **through**, to the end.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

читать rests on an old Slavic root meaning **to count, to reckon, to heed**, and Russian keeps the family in plain sight: **число** is a *number*, **честь** is *honour*, **почитать** is *to hold in esteem*. Counting, respecting and reading are one act — careful attention, item by item. Outside Slavic the root surfaces in Sanskrit *cétati*, “he perceives.”

And then the trail stops. There is **no secure English descendant**, and the two words that look promising are not it: **cheat** is a clipped *escheat*, from Latin *cadere*, “to fall,” and **chit**, the little note, came into English from India. This book would rather hand you nothing than a cousin that is only a resemblance — the care it took with **говорить**, which is not *govern*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “читать” — *chi-TAT*’, the *ch* of *cheese*
- “Я читаю и понимаю” — and hear it as both *read* and *am reading*
- the pair — “читать ... прочитать”, the doing and the read-through

Before you move on

Say “I read and I understand.” (Я читаю и понимаю.) Give the two English sentences я читаю covers, and say why. (*I read* and *I am reading*; быть has no present tense to build the second.) Name the finished partner. (Прочитать.) Which two Russian nouns share this root, and is читать related to English *cheat*? (Число and честь; and no — as говорить was not related to *govern*.)

4.4 писать — “to write”

A new letter, an English family you know on sight, and a stress mistake worth naming before you make it.

You’ll want to know first — писать

писать — *pisát’* — to write

Stress on the **last** syllable, **pi-SAT**’ — not a detail you may skip.

Я пишу. — *ya pishú* — **I write**, and **I am writing**.

Two things moved: the **с** becomes **ш** in the present, and the stress that sat on the ending for *I* jumps back to the stem elsewhere — пишу (*pishú*), but ты пишешь (*píshesh*). The pair runs as читать’s did: писать ongoing, написать finished.

Careful. Писать stressed at the end — *pisát’* — is **to write**. Писать stressed at the front — *pisat’* — is a child’s word for **to urinate**, whose *I* form is *písayu* beside *pishú*. The two differ only in where your voice lifts, and beginners land on the wrong one. Stress the **end** and say *pishú*.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) All of **писать** is familiar; the new letter arrives in **пишу**.

- **ш** = “**sh**”, the sound of *shoe*. Three uprights on a bar, like a comb with the teeth up.

You have been reading it without being told: **живёшь, знаешь, говоришь** and the past **шёл** all carry it. And note the kind of letter it is: **я** lies to a Latin reader, looking like a mirrored *R* while being a vowel; **ш** resembles nothing Latin at all.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

писать is Indo-European **peyk-*, “**to cut, to scratch, to mark**” — before ink there was a point and a surface. The root became, in Latin, *pingere*, “to paint”, and English took the results: **paint, picture, pigment**. Russian’s **письмо** (a letter) and **писатель** (a writer) sit on the verb.

That closes the chapter’s thread: **думать** came in from Gothic, **понимать** is a root meaning *take*, **читать** a root meaning *count* with no English descendant, and **писать** a root meaning *scratch* that handed English a wall of paint.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**писать**” then “**я пишу**” — stress on the end, and the **ш** arriving
- the four — “**я думаю, я понимаю, я читаю, я пишу**”

Before you move on

Say “I write.” (**Я пишу.**) Where does the stress go, and what if it goes on the front? (On the **end**; *písat’* is a child’s word for urinating.) What sound is **ш**? (**Sh** — **живёшь, знаешь, говоришь, шёл.**) Say the chapter’s four verbs in the *I* form, then their finished partners. (**Я думаю, я понимаю, я читаю, я пишу; подумать, понять, прочитать, написать.**) And what did **писать**’s root mean? (**To scratch** — hence *paint*.)

Chapter 5

Taking, Asking, Helping, Loving

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I take, ask, help and love in Russian, put any verb I own after **люблю** as a bare infinitive, and tell a suppletive aspect pair like **брать · взять** from an ordinary one like **спрашивать · спросить**.

Say **я люблю** with its inserted **л**, then run every verb you own through it — **я люблю читать, писать, помогать, жить** — and close by naming the chapter’s four partners and picking out **взять** as the one built from a different root.

5.1 брать — “to take”

A short verb, an English cousin you carry every day, and a partner that shares not one letter with it.

You’ll want to know first — **брать**

брать — *brat’* — **to take**

Five letters, all of them yours, and the familiar **-ТЬ**.

Я беру. — *ya berú* — **I take.**

The stem grows a vowel: **бр-** in the infinitive, **бер-** once an ending arrives. Then **ты берёшь**, so this verb sits in the **знать** family, and that **-у** is the plain form of the **-ю** you have been saying.

Three sentences, all ordinary Russian:

Я читаю. Я пишу. Я беру. — *ya chítáyu, ya pishú, ya berú.*

Grammar Lens: a pair with nothing in common

The partners so far were recognisable: **читать** · **прочитать** added a prefix, **понимать** · **понять** reshaped a middle. Now the hard case. **Брать**'s finished partner is **взять** — *vzyat'*, **я возьму**, *ya vaz'mú*. Not a prefixed **брать**, not a squeezed one: a **different word entirely**, drafted in as half of the pair.

Grammarians call this **suppletion**, and you have met it once: **идти** takes **шёл** for its past, from another root, exactly as English *go* takes **went**. Here the same trick builds an aspect pair instead of a past tense. There is a quiet reward in it. **Взять** is **вз-** on the very root that built **понимать**, the ancient root meaning *take*. So **брать**'s finished partner is family with the verb for *understand*, and **брать** is the outsider.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

брать is Indo-European **b^her-*, “**to carry, to bear**”, one of the richest roots English owns: **bear, birth, burden, bier**; Latin *ferre* behind **transfer, refer, fertile**; Greek *phérein* behind **metaphor**, a carrying-across. Russian keeps the load too — **бремя** is a burden, and **беременная**, *pregnant*, is literally *carrying*.

Now the trap, because this track flags both kinds. **Брат** means **brother**, sits one soft sign from **брать**, and is **not related**: **брат** is **b^hréh₂ter*, English *brother*. And **быть** is **b^huH-*, English *be*. Three roots that all begin **b^h** — a family accent, not a shared word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**брать**” then “**я беру**” — hear the stem grow its vowel
- “**Я читаю. Я пишу. Я беру.**” — *ya chitáyu, ya pishú, ya berú*
- the odd pair — “**брать ... взять**”, two words sharing nothing
- the other suppletion — “**идти ... шёл**”, “**go ... went**”
- “**брать**” then English “**bear, birth, burden, transfer, metaphor**”

Before you move on

Say “I take.” (Я беру.) Name **братъ**’s finished partner and say what is strange about it, then give the English pair that behaves the same way. (**Взять**, a different root; *go* and **went**, as **идти** takes **шёл**.) Which verb of yours is **взять** related to? (**Понимать** — both on the old root for *take*.) And is **братъ** related to **брат**? (No — different roots, and **быть** is a third.)

5.2 спрашивать — “to ask”

You have asked a question in Russian since Chapter 2 without owning the verb for asking. Here it is.

You’ll want to know first — спрашивать

спрашивать — *spráshivat’* — to ask (a question)

Long on the page, easy in the mouth: the stress lands on **спра-** and stays, **SPRA-shi-vat’**. The **ш** in the middle is the letter **пишу** introduced.

Я спрашиваю. — *ya spráshivayu* — I ask.

The same **-ю**, and **ты спрашиваешь** puts it in the **знать** family. Set it beside your other verb for opening your mouth: **говорить** is to speak, **спрашивать** is to speak with a question mark on the end. And one distinction English hides: Russian asks a **question** with **спрашивать**, but **for a thing** with **просить**.

Grammar Lens: an ordinary pair, after a very strange one

Братъ took **взять**, a partner from a different root. That was the worst case, not the norm. **Спрашивать**’s partner is **спросить** — *ya sproshú, ty sprosish* — one root worn into two shapes, the ongoing member long, the finished short.

Why it’s said this way

The moment you ask, Russian makes you choose. **Как вас зовут?** takes **вас** for a stranger and **тебя** for a friend — a choice that sits inside **ты** and **вы**, the split English lost when **thou**, **ты**’s cousin, left

ordinary use. Other languages make the same move by other grammar: French **vous** and Russian **вы** are the plural doing polite duty, German **Sie** borrows the third person, Spanish **usted** grew out of a title. And recall what that question literally asks: **how** they call you, not what your name is — an action where English reaches for a possession, as French and Spanish also do.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Strip the prefix and **спрашивать** rests on the root of **просить**, “to request”: Indo-European **prek-*, “to ask.” In Latin it became *precārī*, “to pray”, and English took the lot: **pray**, **prayer**, **precarious**, **deprecate**. German **fragen** is the Germanic outcome, so **спрашивать** and *fragen* are one inherited word. English **ask** is not in this family; the cousin kept here is *pray*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “спрашивать” then “я спрашиваю” — and hear the ш of пишу
- the two mouths — “я говорю ... я спрашиваю”
- “Как вас зовут” then “Как тебя зовут” — and choose which fits

Before you move on

Say “I ask.” (Я спрашиваю.) Name the partner and say how this pair differs from **брат** · **взять**. (Спросить — one root in two shapes.) In **Как вас зовут?**, what decides between **вас** and **тебя**? (Whether the person is **вы** or **ты** — and **ты** is English *thou*.) And give an English cousin of **prek-*. (*Pray, prayer, precarious.*)

5.3 помогать — “to help”

This verb is built out of the word for *being able*, and that word is English **may**. Helping, in Russian, is lending someone your can.

You'll want to know first — помогать

помогать — *potogát'* — **to help**

The *г* is the letter **говорить** introduced: Greek gamma, a hard **g** as in *go*. Both **os** lean towards *a* away from the stress, as **говорить**'s do — **ра-ма-GAT'**.

Я помогаю. — *ya potagáyu* — **I help.**

Same **-ю**, and **ты помогаешь** files it with **знать**.

One honest limit: the person you help takes a case this book has not reached, so keep the sentence bare. **Я помогаю** alone is ordinary Russian.

Grammar Lens: a partner that does not end in -ть

Every infinitive so far ended in **-ть**. The partner of **помогать** does not: it is **помочь**, ending in **-чь**, and *ya potagú, ty potózhesť*. A small handful of Russian verbs end that way, and they are built on old roots about power. The shape is a signpost, not an exception to memorise blind.

Three pairs cover the chapter so far: **брать · взять, спрашивать · спросить, помогать · помочь**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

помогать is **по-** plus **-мочь**, and under it sits **мочь**, “to be able” — **я могу**, *ya magú*, “I can.”

That root is Indo-European **magʰ-*, “to be able, to have power”, and English holds several pieces of it:

- **may** and **might** — the ordinary modal, and the noun for strength in *with might and main*.
- **dismay** — to strip someone of their power to act.
- German **mögen** and **Macht**; and Greek *mēkhanē*, “a contrivance”, which is English **machine** and **mechanic**.

Note what did **not** happen here. **Mory** and *may* still mean the same thing after five thousand years. That is not the usual outcome: **жить**'s root handed English **quick**, which once meant **alive** and now means *fast*. Some roots keep their sense, some drift out of recognition, and

спрашивать's went from *ask* all the way to *pray*. Each one has to be checked rather than guessed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “помогать” — *pa-ma-GAT'*, both *os* leaning to *a*
- “Я помогаю”
- the three pairs — “брать · взять, спрашивать · спросить, помогать · помочь”
- “могу” then English “may, might” — one meaning, two languages

Before you move on

Say “I help.” (Я помогаю.) Which verb is hiding inside it, and what does it mean? (Мочь — to be able; я могу.) Name the partner and say what is odd about its ending. (Помочь, in -чь rather than -ть.) Give two English cousins of **mag^h*-. (*May, might, dismay, machine*.) And which English word from your verbs no longer means what its root meant? (**Quick**, from жить's root — it meant *alive*.)

5.4 любить — “to love, and to like”

The last verb of the chapter is English **love**, and it lets you say every verb you own in a real sentence.

You'll want to know first — любить

любить — *lyubít'* — to love, and to like

One verb for both: with a person, *love*; with an activity, closer to *like*.

Я люблю. — *ya lyublyú* — I love.

And ты любишь — an -ишь, so любить joins говорить and видеть, not знать. The stress moves too: *lyublyú* on the ending, *lyúbish* on the stem.

Grammar Lens: the letter that appears out of nowhere

Любить has no л after the б. Люблю does.

You have met this shape. Видеть swapped д for ж in вижу and nowhere else. Here it happens by insertion: stems ending in б, п, в, м, ф push an л in — but **only in the I form**.

So люблю, then любишь, любят, with no л at all. Learn the I form and the rest behaves.

Grammar Lens: now say everything at once

Любить takes a bare infinitive, as English *like* does — the dictionary form goes straight in:

Я люблю читать. — I like reading. Я люблю писать.
— I like writing. Я люблю думать. — I like thinking. Я
люблю помогать. — I like helping. Я люблю жить. —
I love living.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

любить is Indo-European **leubh-*, and English **love** is the same word — no borrowing, no detour. The family is wider than it looks: **lief**; **believe** (*be-* plus the root — to hold a thing dear enough to trust); **leave** in *by your leave*; and Latin *libet*, “it pleases”, behind **libido**. Its partner **полюбить** deserves an honest line: not *to finish loving* but **to come to love**, the moment the feeling starts. A pair does not always mean *doing* against *done* — which is why they get a later chapter of their own.

And the root thread: **бр-** carries (*bear*), **-прос-** asks (*pray*), **мог-** is able (*might*), **люб-** holds dear (*love*) — with **пис-** from last chapter still scratching its mark (*picture*).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “любить” then “я люблю”, then “ты любишь” without the л
- “Я люблю читать. Я люблю писать. Я люблю помогать. Я люблю жить.”

- the four pairs — “брать · взять, спрашивать · спросить, помогать · помочь, любить · полюбить”

Before you move on

Say “I love”, then “I like reading.” (Я люблю; Я люблю читать.) Where is the л in ты любишь, and which earlier verb behaved this way? (Gone — the insert hits only the *I* form, as д → ж in вижу.) Name the chapter’s four partners, and which is a different root from its verb. (Взять, спросить, помочь, полюбить; взять.) And give the English cousins of любить, брать, спрашивать, помогать and писать. (Love, bear, pray, might, picture.)

Chapter 6

Water, Coffee, Tea, and Bread

Modes:  voice (2)  eyes (2)  Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name water, coffee, tea and bread with their genders in Russian, ask for any of them politely, and say which are native and which are loans.

The chapter closes on хлеб, the word that looks native but is a prehistoric Germanic loan: the reader produces all four words with their genders, extends пожалуйста into a real request pattern on кофе and чай, and sorts the set into native (вода), loan disguised by age (хлеб), and two visibly foreign words that arrived by opposite routes (кофе by sea, чай overland). It reaches back to Chapter 5's любить, closing the chapter's own final atoms which nothing had yet revisited.

6.1 вода — “water,” and how every Russian noun announces itself

Five chapters of verbs, and not one noun. Here is the first — and it comes with a rule that will save you for the rest of the book.

You'll want to know first — вода

вода — *vodá* — water

Stress on the last syllable, *vo-DÁ*; the unstressed first *o* drifts toward *a*, the same reduction you have been hearing since спасибо.

Grammar Lens: no “the,” no “a” — and the ending tells you the gender

Two facts belong together, because each explains the other.

First: Russian has no articles at all. No word for *the*, no word for *a*. **Вода** by itself can mean “water,” “the water,” or “a water” — context carries the difference. Every Romance or Germanic language taught in this program has spent a whole lesson on articles. Russian never will, because it has none to teach.

Second: every Russian noun is one of three genders — masculine, feminine, or neuter — and, unlike Hindi’s arbitrary assignment, Russian’s *ending* usually tells you which:

ending	gender	this chapter’s example
a consonant	masculine	(<i>next lesson</i>)
-a / -я	feminine	вод-а
-o / -e	neuter	(<i>ahead</i>)

Вода ends in **-a**, so it is **feminine** — regular, no exception, the easiest kind of noun this language has. Hold that confidence for exactly one lesson; the next word breaks the rule on purpose.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

вода is Indo-European **wódr*, one of the best-preserved roots in the whole family. English **water** is the same word, barely disguised; so is the combining form **hydro-** in *hydrogen* and *hydrate*, which English borrowed separately from the Greek branch of the same root.

Russian kept building on it at home, too: **vódka** is **вод-а** plus the affectionate diminutive **-ка** — literally “**little water.**”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**вода**” — *vo-DÁ*, stress on the end
- the three endings — “consonant, masculine; **-a** or **-я**, feminine; **-o** or **-e**, neuter”
- “water, hydro-, **vódka**” — one root, three words you already own

Before you move on

Say “water.” (Вода.) What two words does Russian have for “the” and “a”? (**Neither exists.**) What ending makes **вода** feminine, and what are the other two endings for? (**-а**; a consonant for masculine, **-о** or **-е** for neuter.) Name two English words from the same root as **вода**. (**Water, hydro-** — and Russian’s own **vódka**, “little water.”)

6.2 кофе — “coffee,” the noun that breaks the rule you just learned

Last lesson’s rule said **-о** and **-е** endings are neuter. This word ends in **-е** and is not neuter at all — meet Russian’s most argued-about noun.

You’ll want to know first — кофе

кофе — *kófe* — coffee. Masculine.

Say that twice: **masculine**, ending in **-е**. By last lesson’s rule it should be neuter, like every other **-е** noun ahead in this book. It never declines at all — **кофе** is **indeclinable**, the identical shape in every sentence, so there is no ending left to fix.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) One new letter: **ф**.

- **ф** = “**f**” — Greek **phi** (**Φ**), a circle with a line through it. You have already met two other Greek-shaped letters, **г** (gamma) and **л** (lambda); **ф** joins them.

Everything else in **кофе** — **к, о, е** — you have read since Chapter 1.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

кофе is a loanword, and a recent one beside **вода**’s prehistoric root. It travelled **Arabic qahwa** → **Ottoman Turkish kahve** → **Dutch koffie**, and reached Russian during Peter the Great’s westernizing reforms in the early 1700s — the same push that filled Russian with

borrowed Dutch and German trade and technical vocabulary. Its first Russian form was **кофий**, ending like an ordinary masculine noun (compare **чай**, next lesson). Across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the final syllable wore down to today's **кофе** — but the **gender stuck**, long after the ending that explained it was gone. Dictionaries still mark it masculine; everyday speech increasingly treats it as neuter, exactly the way last lesson's rule would predict, and the argument between the two is still alive in Russian classrooms today. You already own the verb for how you feel about it:

Я люблю кофе. — *ya lyublyú kófe* — **I love coffee.**

(Кофе is inanimate and masculine, so it takes exactly the same shape here as it does standing alone — nothing to adjust.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “кофе” — masculine, indeclinable, never changes shape
- the new letter — “ф is phi, and says f”
- the route — “qahwa, kahve, koffie, кофе”
- “Я люблю кофе.”

Before you move on

Say “coffee,” with its gender. (Кофе — **masculine**.) Why is that surprising, given last lesson's rule? (**It ends in -e**, which the rule predicts as neuter.) Name the three languages the word crossed before Russian, and the century it arrived. (**Arabic, Turkish, Dutch; the early 1700s.**) Say “I love coffee.” (Я люблю кофе.)

6.3 чай — “tea,” which went overland while кофе went by sea

Same drink family, a completely different journey — and, finally, the sentence that actually orders one.

You'll want to know first — чай

чай — *chai* — tea. Masculine.

A consonant ending, so last lesson's rule holds without a fight this time: consonant-final nouns are masculine, and чай is the plain case. Every letter — ч, а, й — you have read since Chapter 2.

*(Careful on paper: romanized, this word looks like the English drink brand name **chai** and nothing else — pure coincidence of spelling, not a shared history. Its real cousins are below.)*

Grammar Lens: asking politely, at last

You have owned **пожалуйста** since Chapter 1 and had nothing new to attach it to. Now you do: name the thing, add the word.

Чай, пожалуйста. — *chai, pzhálusta* — Tea, please.

Кофе, пожалуйста. — *kófe, pzhálusta* — Coffee, please.

Both words sit here exactly as they do alone — чай is already the shape a request needs, and кофе never changes shape at all. That is not an accident of this chapter: it is the simplest version of a pattern you will meet in its fuller, case-shifting form once this book reaches nouns that *do* change for a request. For now, name the thing, add пожалуйста, and you are understood.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

чай is Mandarin Chinese **chá**, and it reached Russia by the opposite road from кофе. Persian traders on the Silk Road bought it from northern China as *cha-ye khatai*, “tea of Cathay,” and their Turkic-speaking customers misheard the trailing syllable as part of the word itself — giving **Turkish çay**, **Persian chāy**, and, at the end of the same overland chain, **Russian чай**.

Compare last lesson's кофе: **Arabic** → **Turkish** → **Dutch**, by ship, arriving in Peter the Great's Russia from the west. Чай came **overland, from the east**, along a caravan route that also carried it into Hindi (*chai*) and Arabic (*shai*). One plant; two words for it in English (**tea** took the same Chinese root by sea, through Dutch traders on the coast) — and Russian happens to have picked the

eastern branch, while English picked the **southern coastal** one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “чай” — one syllable, masculine
- “Чай, пожалуйста. Кофе, пожалуйста.”
- the fork — “chá overland to chai; chá by sea to tea”

Before you move on

Say “tea,” with its gender. (Чай — **masculine**.) Ask for it politely. (Чай, пожалуйста.) Which route did чай travel, and which did кофе travel? (Чай: overland, Chinese → Persian → Turkic → Russian. Кофе: by sea, Arabic → Turkish → Dutch → Russian.) Which English word took the same Chinese root as чай, but by the other route? (Tea — by sea, through Dutch.)

6.4 хлеб — “bread,” the chapter’s fourth word and its only immigrant besides кофе

One more request word, one more letter, and then the whole table — four things to ask for, and what each one’s history actually is.

You’ll want to know first — хлеб

хлеб — *khleb* — **bread**. Masculine.

Consonant-final, so the ending rule holds again. And the pattern from last lesson still works:

Хлеб, пожалуйста. — *khleb, pazhálusta* — **Bread, please**.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) One new letter: **х**.

- **х** = a raspy “**kh**,” made where you’d clear your throat — not the hard *k* of **кофе**’s **к**. It **looks like Latin *x*** and says nothing like it: a fourth false friend, alongside **в, р, с, н** from Chapter 1.

л, е, б you already have. Keep **х** apart from last lesson’s **ф**: one is a throat rasp, the other a clean *f*.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Here is the twist this chapter has been building to. **хлеб** looks and sounds completely native — nothing about it announces itself as foreign the way **кофе** or **чай** do. But it is a **borrowing**, and an ancient one: Proto-Slavic took it from **Proto-Germanic *hlaibaz**, the same root that gave English **loaf** and German **Laib**. It happened so far back in prehistory — long before **кофе**’s eighteenth century or **чай**’s Silk Road centuries — that the word has had well over a thousand years to stop feeling borrowed at all.

So the chapter’s four words sort into a pattern worth naming outright:

word	route	age
вода	inherited straight from PIE	prehistoric, native
кофе	Arabic → Turkish → Dutch, by sea	18th century
чай	Chinese → Persian → Turkic, overland	centuries old
хлеб	Germanic *hlaibaz	prehistoric, but borrowed

Вода and **хлеб** both feel completely native — but only one of them actually is. Age can disguise a loanword as thoroughly as it can preserve an inheritance.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**хлеб**” — the raspy **х**, masculine

- “Хлеб, пожалуйста.”
- all four requests — “Вода, кофе, чай, хлеб, пожалуйста” — one request word covering the whole table
- “Я люблю хлеб.” — the same pattern that closed кофе’s lesson

Before you move on

Say “bread,” with its gender, and ask for it politely. (Хлеб — **masculine**; Хлеб, пожалуйста.) What does **х** sound like, and which Latin letter does it impersonate? (A raspy **kh**; looks like **x**.) Which of this chapter’s four words is native, which is borrowed but looks native, and which two are visibly foreign? (Вода native; хлеб borrowed from Germanic but disguised by age; кофе and чай, both visibly loans, by opposite routes.) Say “I love bread,” recalling the verb Chapter 5 ended on. (Я люблю хлеб — люблю, with its inserted л.)

Chapter 7

Friend and Siblings

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a friend, brother and sister in Russian, build a feminine person-noun with по-...-а, and say which pronoun, ты or вы, goes with each.

The chapter closes on сестра, брат's securely cognate pair: the reader produces друг, подруга, брат and сестра with their genders, builds the по-...-а feminine pattern on подруга, and names all four as exactly who Chapter 2's ты was for. It reaches back to Chapter 5's братъ/брат minimal pair and rescues three Chapter 2 atoms — the ты/вы comparison, the vy-politeness pragmatics, and the ty/thou etymology — that nothing had revisited since.

7.1 друг — “friend,” the word that explains why ты exists

A new chapter, and the first word in it names exactly who Chapter 2's informal ты was built for.

You'll want to know first — друг

друг — *drug* — friend (a man, or a friend generally)

Consonant-final, so masculine — the ending rule holding steady for the third time. Every letter is one you already read — none of them the throat-rasp х that хлеб just taught you; that one waits for a later word.

(Romanized, this word is spelled exactly like the English **drug** — pure accident of transliteration, no shared root at all. Say it drook-ish, not like the English word it happens to resemble on the page.)

This is the noun Chapter 2’s whole **ТЫ/ВЫ** choice was about. **ТЫ** is for a **друг** — someone close enough that formality would feel wrong. **ВЫ** is for the stranger, the elder, the shopkeeper: everyone **друг** does not cover.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

друг is Indo-European **d^hrewǵʰ-*, “to accompany, to be loyal” — a companion-on-the-road sense, not far from **друг**’s meaning today. Its clearest descendants sit outside everyday modern English: Gothic **gadrauhts**, “warrior” (literally one who accompanies), and Old English **dryhten**, “lord” — originally the leader a troop of *drauhts* followed, a word that survives only in old poetry now, not in ordinary speech.

Unlike **хлеб**’s tidy modern cousin *loaf*, this is a root that mostly vanished from English rather than one that thrived in it — worth saying plainly rather than stretching for a connection that isn’t really there.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**друг**” — masculine, consonant ending
- the pair — “**ТЫ** for a **друг**, **ВЫ** for everyone else”
- the false friend on paper — “drug, spelled like the English word, unrelated to it”
- last chapter’s letter — “**х**, the throat-rasp from **хлеб**”

Before you move on

Say “friend.” (**Друг**.) Which pronoun goes with a **друг**, and which is for everyone else? (**ТЫ** for a friend; **ВЫ** otherwise.) What did **друг**’s root originally mean? (**To accompany, to be loyal** — Gothic *gadrauhts*, “warrior”; English *dryhten*, now archaic.) Is **друг** related to the English word it looks like on the page? (**No** — pure spelling coincidence.) And what English word is **хлеб**’s modern

cousin? (**Loaf.**)

7.2 подруга — “friend” (female), built on the word you just learned

Russian doesn’t reach for a new word to make друг feminine — it builds one, in front of your eyes, out of pieces you already have.

You’ll want to know first — подруга

подруга — *podrúga* — **friend** (a woman)

Ends in **-a**, so feminine — the rule holding for the second time in this chapter, this time on a longer word.

Grammar Lens: watch the word get built

Take друг apart and put it back together:

по- (a prefix here worn down to little independent meaning) + друг (friend) + **-a** (the feminine ending) → подруга

This is Russian’s ordinary machinery for turning a masculine person-word feminine: keep the root, change the ending, sometimes add a light prefix along the way. It is the same instinct English uses in *host* → *host-ess* or *actor* → *actr-ess* — a suffix doing the work — except Russian reaches for this pattern constantly, on ordinary words, not just a formal handful.

Say the pair together and the family resemblance is obvious:

друг · подруга — *drug* · *podrúga*

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “подруга” — feminine, stress on the second syllable

- the build — “по- plus друг plus -а”
- the pair — “друг, подруга”

Before you move on

Say “friend” for a woman. (Подруга.) What three pieces build it, and what does each contribute? (По- + друг + -а, the feminine ending.) What English pattern does the same job, on different words? (-ess, as in *host/hostess*.) And what does друг itself trace back to? (PIE *d^hrewg^h-*, “to accompany, be loyal.”)

7.3 брат — “brother,” the noun Chapter 5 already warned you about

Chapter 5 told you брат meant “brother” and was **not** related to the verb брать, “to take” — a warning, in passing, about a word not yet properly taught. Here it is, properly taught.

You’ll want to know first — брат

брат — *brat* — **brother**. Masculine.

Consonant-final, so the ending rule holds a fourth time. And here is the minimal pair Chapter 5 flagged: брат (brother) against брать (to take, romanized *brat’*) — one soft sign, and nothing else, separates them. Say *brat* with a hard final *t* for “brother”; *brat’* with a soft one for “to take.”

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

брат is Indo-European **b^hréh₂tēr* — and this time the resemblance to English is not a trap but the real thing: **brother** is the same word, inherited, not borrowed. So is Latin **frāter** (→ **fraternal**, **fraternity**), and Sanskrit **bhrātar**. Few words in any language family are reconstructed with as much confidence as this one.

Recall Chapter 5’s other two **b^h-* words, because the three sit right next to each other and mean three different things: брать (**b^her-*, “to carry” → **bear**, **birth**), быть (**b^huH-*, “to be” → English **be**), and now брат (**b^hréh₂tēr*, “brother”). Three roots, one shared opening sound, no shared meaning — a family accent, not a family.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “брат” — hard final t, brother
- the minimal pair — “брат, брать” — one soft sign apart
- “brother, frāter, bhrātar” — the same word, three languages
- the chapter so far — “друг, подруга, брат” (*drug, podrúga, brat*)

Before you move on

Say “brother.” (Брат.) What one sound separates it from брать, “to take”? (**A soft sign** — none in брат, one in брать.) Is брат’s resemblance to English **brother** real or a trap? (**Real** — inherited, like Latin *frāter* and Sanskrit *bhrātar*.) Name Chapter 5’s two other *b^h- words, and what each one means. (Быть, “to be”; брать, “to take” — three different roots, one shared sound.)

7.4 сестра — “sister,” and the chapter closes on four people

Брат (*brat*)’s partner, one more secure cognate, and the four people this chapter has introduced you to, gathered in one place.

You’ll want to know first — сестра

сестра — *sestrá* — **sister. Feminine.**

Ends in **-a**, stress on the end: *ses-TRÁ*. Say брат and сестра together and you have both siblings, both genders’ endings, in one breath.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

сестра is Indo-European **swésōr* — and, like брат, this is a straight inheritance, not a loan and not a false lead. English **sister** is the same word (by way of Old Norse, reinforcing an Old English form that had drifted further); Latin’s version, **soror**, took a bumpier sound-change road to the same root. Brother and sister arrive as a matched pair in Russian exactly as they do in the deep history of the whole family.

Grammar Lens: who gets **ты**

Chapter 2 gave you **ты** for someone close and **вы** for everyone else — the same choice English used to make with **thou** and **you**, before *thou* died out and *you* took over both jobs. This chapter has now named exactly who sits on the **ты** side of that line: a **друг**, a **подруга**, a **брат**, a **сестра** — the people close enough that formality would be strange. Everyone else still gets **вы**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**сестра**” — feminine, stress on the end
- the pair — “**брат, сестра**” — brother, sister
- the four people — “**друг, подруга, брат, сестра**” (*drug, podrúga, brát, sestrá*)
- “sister, soror” — same root, one smooth, one bumpy

Before you move on

Say “sister,” with its gender. (**Сестра** — **feminine**.) Is its resemblance to English **sister** real? (**Yes** — both from PIE **swésōr*.) Name all four people this chapter taught, and which pronoun goes with every one of them. (**Друг, подруга, брат, сестра** — all **ты**.) What pair of English words used to make the same close/distant choice Russian’s **ты/вы** still makes? (**Thou** and **you**.)

Chapter 8

Family

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a family in Russian, and say what its own root shares with the English word home.

A one-lesson chapter that gathers Chapter 7's four people under семья, and reaches all the way back to Chapter 3's ЖИТЬ to rescue that lesson's stranded etymon — the two words share an idea, if not a root, and the chapter says so honestly.

8.1 семья — “family,” the word that gathers the chapter before it

One word to hold everyone Chapter 7 introduced — and a root that turns out to be hiding an English word you use every day.

You'll want to know first — семья

семья — *sem'yá* — family

The soft sign softens the м; stress lands on the final -я, so it rhymes with друг · подруга · брат · сестра — this is the word that gathers all four of them.

(Note the ending: -ья is a soft-consonant variant of -я, and still counts as the regular feminine ending from Chapter 6's rule.)

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

семья is Indo-European **key-*, “to lie down, to settle” — the same root that, through the Baltic branch, gave Lithuanian **šeimà**, “family,” and Ancient Greek **kōmē**, “village.” That is already a wide family. But it goes one branch further: through **Proto-Germanic *haimaz**, “home, village,” the very same root became English **home** — and, in its diminutive form, **hamlet** — and it survives fossilized in every English place name ending in **-ham**: *Birmingham, Nottingham, Durham*. Settle somewhere, and Slavic calls the people you settled with your **семья**; the deep Germanic cousin of that same root calls the place itself your *home*.

Chapter 3 taught you **жить**, “to live” — a different root (PIE **g^weyh₃-*, the one behind English *quick* in its old sense of “alive”), but the same idea from a different angle: **семья** is who you settle with; **жить** is what you do once you’re there.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**семья**” — soft **м**, stress on **-я**
- the four it gathers — “**друг, подруга, брат, сестра — моя семья**” in idea, if not yet in Russian grammar
- the cousin — “*key-* settle → **семья**, and → home, hamlet, -ham”
- “**семья, жить**” — who you settle with, and what you do there

Before you move on

Say “family.” (**Семья**.) What English word is its distant Germanic cousin, and what three English place-name endings preserve the same root? (**Home** — and every **-ham** place name: *Birmingham, Nottingham, Durham*.) Which earlier verb shares the same idea, if not the same root, and what did that verb’s own root originally mean? (**Жить**, “to live” — PIE for “quick, alive.”) Name the four people **семья** gathers. (**Друг, подруга, брат, сестра**.)

Chapter 9

Eyes, Ears, Mouth, and Nose

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the ear, nose, mouth and eye in Russian with their genders, and say which trace to a secure ancient root and which do not.

The chapter closes on глаз, the word that quietly evicted Russian's true inherited eye-word: the reader produces all four face words with their genders, names ухо and нос as secure PIE cognates, names рот as an honest dead end, and traces глаз back to slang for 'ball' while placing the real cousin of English eye, око, inside очки. It is the first realization of SPINE-CHECK-WELLBEING in this track, and it reaches back to Chapter 3's видеть and говорить, rescuing three atoms nothing had revisited.

9.1 yxo — “ear,” and Russian’s third gender finally arrives

A new chapter, a new part of the body, and the last of Chapter 6’s three genders — held back until now, on purpose.

You’ll want to know first — yxo

yxo — *úkho* — ear. Neuter.

Stress on the first syllable: *Úkho*. Ends in -o, so — finally — Chapter 6’s third row: **-o and -e mark the neuter**, and here is the first word in this book to actually wear it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

yxo is Indo-European **h₂ous-*, and the cousin web is about as tight as this book gets: English **ear** is the same word; so is Latin **auris** (→ **auricle**, **aural**), and Greek **ous** (→ **otitis**, an ear infection). Four languages, one unbroken thread from a single ancient root — no borrowing, no replacement, nothing lost along the way.

That makes **yxo** the plainest kind of cousin in this book: not a loanword like **κοφε**, not a word that replaced an older one, just the same PIE root worn down four different ways in four different mouths.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**yxo**” — stress on the front, neuter
- the third row — “-o and -e, neuter”
- “ear, auris, ous” — one root, three languages

Before you move on

Say “ear.” (**Yxo.**) What gender is it, and which ending finally shows this? (**Neuter** — -o.) Name two other languages that share the same root word for “ear.” (**English ear, Latin auris** — also Greek *ous*.) Is this word borrowed or inherited? (**Inherited**, straight from PIE, no detour.)

9.2 HOC — “nose,” a second straight cousin in a row

One syllable, one gender back to consonant-final masculine, and another word that never left the family.

You’ll want to know first — HOC

HOC — *nos* — **nose**. **Masculine**.

Consonant-final, back to the first row of Chapter 6’s table. Every letter is one you have read since Chapter 1.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

HOC is Indo-European **nas-*, and it barely needs translating: English **nose** is the same word, and so is Latin **nasus** (→ **nasal**, **nasturtium**, the “nose-twisting” flower). Say *nos* next to *nose* and *nasus* and the family resemblance needs no explaining at all.

Two body-part words in a row, **YXO** and **HOC**, and both are the same kind of cousin: no loan, no replacement, just the same ancient root, worn down along three different paths to the same meaning.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**HOC**” — one syllable, masculine
- “nose, nasus” — barely disguised
- the pair so far — “**YXO**, **HOC**”

Before you move on

Say “nose,” with its gender. (**HOC** — **masculine**.) Name its two closest cousins. (**English nose**, **Latin nasus**.) What English flower name comes from the Latin cousin? (**Nasturtium**.) Which earlier word in this chapter is the same kind of straight inheritance? (**Yxo**, “ear.”)

9.3 poT — “mouth,” where the cousin trail actually runs out

Two straight cousins in a row was good luck, not the rule. This one has no secure English relative at all — and it belongs to a verb you already own.

You’ll want to know first — poT

poT — *rot* — **mouth**. Masculine.

Consonant-final, masculine again. (*On paper this romanizes exactly like the English word **rot** — another spelling coincidence, like друг/drug, with no shared history at all.*)

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Ухо and нос both handed you a clean English cousin. рот does not. Its Proto-Slavic ancestor ***рътъ** originally meant “beak, snout” and is **probably** related to **рыть**, “to dig, to burrow” — the picture of an animal’s snout rooting through the ground, later widened to any mouth, including yours. There is **no secure link to English *mouth*** at all: English’s word comes from an entirely separate Germanic root, ***munþaz**, with no shared ancestor here. Where Chapter 4’s **читать** had no English descendant, this word has no English *ancestor* in common — a different kind of dead end, and worth naming exactly that plainly rather than forcing a connection that isn’t there. What **рот** does have is a job you have been practising since Chapter 3: it is what makes **говорить** possible. You met **г** as Greek gamma on **говорить**’s very first line; here is the mouth that has been saying it ever since.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “рот” — one syllable, masculine
- the honest dead end — “no English cousin, only **рыть**, ‘to dig’”
- “рот, говорить” — the mouth, and what it has been doing since Chapter 3

Before you move on

Say “mouth,” with its gender. (**Рот** — **masculine**.) Is it related to English *mouth*? (**No** — separate Germanic root, no shared ancestor.) What is its own best guess of an origin? (**Рыть**, “to dig” — a snout rooting the ground.) Which Chapter 3 verb does the mouth make possible, and what letter did that verb first teach you? (**Говорить**; the letter **г**, Greek gamma.)

9.4 глаз — “eye,” the word for the eye that isn’t the word for the eye

The last of four face words, and the strangest story in the chapter: Russian’s everyday word for “eye” is not the word Indo-European gave it for “eye” at all.

You’ll want to know first — глаз

глаз — *glaz* — eye. Masculine.

Consonant-final, masculine, closing the chapter’s four with the same pattern that opened it in Chapter 6.

*(Tempting, on the page, to link this to English **glass** — the spellings even rhyme. Resist it: they trace to two different PIE roots and are not cousins. Its real story is stranger than that coincidence.)*

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Every other body word in this chapter kept its ancient Indo-European name. Глаз did not. Глаз began in Old Russian as ***glazъ**, “a ball, a glass bead, a smooth round stone” — PIE **g^(h)el-*, “round.” Starting around the sixteenth century it spread as slang for “eyeball,” then simply “eye,” and it **completely displaced** the true inherited word. That older word was око (plural очи) — PIE **h₃ókʷs*, the actual, secure cousin of English **eye** itself, the same root behind Latin **oculus** (→ **ocular**, **monocle**) and Greek **ophthalmós**. Око still exists, but only in poetry and set phrases now. Its one everyday survivor is hiding in plain sight: очки, “eyeglasses,” is built directly on очи — literally “**little eyes**.” So the word that means *eye* in Russian today is a Slavic upstart; the word that is actually your cousin only shows up when you put spectacles on.

This is Chapter 3’s **видеть** completed at last: the organ that does the seeing turns out to have replaced its own name, while the verb for *seeing* stayed put the whole time.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “глаз” — masculine, and not related to English *glass*

- the evicted word — “око, очи — the real cousin of *eye*”
- where it hides — “очки, ‘little eyes’”
- the whole face — “ухо, нос, рот, глаз”

Before you move on

Say “eye,” with its gender. (Глаз — **masculine**.) What did глаз originally mean, and what word did it push out? (“**Round object, ball**”; it displaced око.) Where does the true inherited eye-word survive today? (Очки, “glasses” — literally “little eyes.”) Name all four face words this chapter taught, in order. (Ухо, нос, рот, глаз.) Which Chapter 3 verb does the eye make possible, and what sound-swap did that verb teach in its *I* form? (Видеть; д → ж, as in вижу.)

Chapter 10

Heart

Modes: 👁 eyes (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the heart in Russian, pronounce its silent letter correctly, and name its cousins across three other languages.

A one-lesson chapter closing the tranche on сердце, the surest cognate in the book: the reader produces the word with its silent д, reads the new letter ц, names heart, cor and kardía as its cousins, and closes by naming любить as the verb the heart does — the last of Chapter 5's atoms to be rescued.

10.1 сердце — “heart,” the surest cousin in this book

One more letter, one silent consonant, and then the tightest Indo-European cognate set this book will show you.

You'll want to know first — сердце

сердце — *sérdtse* — heart. Neuter.

Ends in -це, a spelling variant of -о/-е forced by the letter before it — still Chapter 6's neuter row. Stress on the front: *SYÉRT-se*. And listen closely: the д is not pronounced at all. Four consonants in a row would be unsayable, so Russian drops the middle one in speech — write **сердце**, say *sérts-e*.

The letters in this word

(*Skim if you read Cyrillic.*) One new letter: **ц**.

- **ц** = “**ts**,” the sound at the end of English *cats*. No Latin look-alike to trip over — it simply hasn’t been in your way until now.

с, е, р, д, е you already have.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

сердце is Indo-European **kerd-*, and few roots in this book have travelled so far with so little disguise. English **heart** is the same word. Latin **cor**, genitive **cordis**, gave English **cordial** (“heartfelt”), **courage** (from the heart), and — by a long and surprising road through “to learn by heart” — **record**. Greek **kardía** gave **cardiac** and **cardiology**. Say *sérdtse*, *heart*, *cor*, *kardía* in a row and the family resemblance needs no proof.

It is fitting that the book’s most secure cousin is also the organ Chapter 5 gave a verb to: **любить**, with its inserted **л**, is what the **сердце** does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**сердце**” — silent **д**, *SYÉRT-se*
- the new letter — “**ц** says ts, as in cats”
- “heart, cor, kardía” — one root, three more languages
- all five body words — “**ухо, нос, рот, глаз, сердце**”
- “**Я люблю**” — the verb the heart does

Before you move on

Say “heart,” with its gender, and pronounce it correctly. (**Сердце** — **neuter** — *sérts-e*, the **д** silent.) What sound does **ц** make? (**Тs**, as in *cats*.) Name three English words that share its root, beyond *heart* itself. (**Cordial**, **courage**, **record** — from Latin *cor/cordis*; or **cardiac**, from Greek *kardía*.) Which Chapter 5 verb is what the

heart does? (Любить, “to love.”)

Chapter 11

Parting Words

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: none of the 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can close a Russian conversation with the parting word that fits how long until I see the person again, and say good night.

The chapter closes on СПОКОЙНОЙ НОЧИ, the last word of the day and the surest cognate in the chapter: the reader produces all six parting words in order, names НОЧЬ and ПОКОЙ's English cousins, and hears the ДО + genitive pattern that links five of the six. It is the first realization of SPINE-TAKE-LEAVE in this track, closing all six of the node's concepts, and it reaches back to Chapter 6 to rescue ф, х, чай, хлеб and the request pattern, nothing had revisited since.

11.1 ДО СВИДАНИЯ — “goodbye,” built on a verb you already own

Plenty of meeting, greeting and naming so far, and not one word yet for closing the door behind you. That changes now — with a phrase built from a verb you already own.

You'll want to know first — ДО СВИДАНИЯ

ДО СВИДАНИЯ — *da svidániya* — **goodbye** (the ordinary, all-purpose parting word)

Two words, said fast as one: *da-svi-DA-ni-ya*. Every letter is one you already read.

Grammar Lens: до asks for the genitive

до means “until,” and it always reshapes the word after it — the **genitive** case, Russian’s way of marking “of” or “belonging to this event.” **Свидания** is **свидание** wearing the shape **до** requires. You do not need the rule behind that shape yet — only that **до** always asks for one, and every parting word this chapter teaches will show it again.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

свидание means “a meeting, a seeing of one another” — a noun built on **видеться**, “to see each other,” which is your own verb **видеть**, “to see,” wearing the reflexive ending and the prefix **с-**, “together.” Taken apart, the whole phrase reads: “until [we] see each other again.” That is not a Russian oddity. **French** *au revoir* and **German** *auf Wiedersehen* are built the same way, on their own “see” verbs — every one of them says goodbye by promising to look at you again, rather than by naming an ending. Russian’s **видеть** is the same root you met wearing English clothes as **wit**, **wise** and **video**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**до свидания**” — *da-svi-DA-ni-ya*, all-purpose goodbye
- the verb inside it — “**видеть, видется, свидание** — see, see each other, a seeing”
- the pattern — “**до** + genitive, every time”
- the three languages — “**до свидания, au revoir, auf Wiedersehen** — all ‘until the re-seeing’”

Before you move on

Say “goodbye,” the all-purpose way. (**До свидания.**) Which familiar verb is hiding inside it, and what does the whole phrase literally mean? (**Видеть**, “to see” — literally “until [we] see each other again.”) What case does **до** always ask for? (**The genitive.**) Name one other language that says goodbye the same way. (**French** *au revoir* or **German** *auf Wiedersehen*.) One last look back:

what word closed the previous lesson, and what English words share its root? (Сердце, “heart” — cousin of *heart*, Latin *cor/cordis*, Greek *kardía*.)

11.2 пока — “bye,” the casual half of yesterday’s word

Every formal word in this book has an informal twin somewhere. Here is **до свидания**’s — and it turns out to share a root with a word you already own, from the other end of the book entirely.

You’ll want to know first — пока

пока — *paká* — **bye** (casual — friends, family, anyone you’d use **ты** with)

Two syllables, stress on the second: *pa-KÁ*. Reach for **до свидания** with a stranger or someone older; reach for **пока** with exactly the people **друг** was about.

(Note: no genitive here at all — this word does not follow yesterday’s **до**-pattern. It is not built the same way, which is your first clue that it has a different history.)

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

пока is built from **по-** plus an old Slavic pronoun, **кьи**, “which, what kind” — the ancestor of the modern word **какой**, “which one.” That pronoun descends from the same ancient Indo-European question-root, PIE ***k^wos**, “who,” that gives Russian **как** (“how,” the question word from **как вас зовут?**) and, on the Germanic branch, the **entire English wh- family**: *who, what, when, where, why, which*. **Пока** is, at its root, a fossil of “however long” or “for the while that” — the same idea as English *while*, which shortens *for a while* into *bye for now*. But the word you are learning to say “bye” with is much younger than its root. Dictionaries record **пока** as a parting word only from the early 20th century — colloquial slang at first, likely modeled on English “**so long**” — centuries after **кьи** had already worn down into **как** and **какой**. The root is ancient; the goodbye is recent.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “пока” — *pa-KÁ*, casual bye
- the pair — “до свидания for a stranger, пока for a друг”
- the root — “как, какой, пока — one ancient question-stem”
- the timeline — “the root is ancient; the goodbye is 20th century”

Before you move on

Say “bye,” casually. (Пока.) Which two earlier words share its root, and what English word-family is their cousin? (Как and какой; English *who, what, when, where, why, which*.) Does пока follow yesterday’s до + genitive pattern? (No — it is built differently.) How old is пока’s use as a farewell? (Only since the early 20th century.) One more look back: what word closes on the letter ц, and what does that letter say? (Сердце; ц says “ts.”)

11.3 до скорого — “see you soon,” and a root that goes nowhere in English

Back to yesterday’s до + genitive pattern — and to a word whose trail, unlike свидания’s, simply stops before it reaches English.

You’ll want to know first — до скорого

до скорого — *da skóra-va* — see you soon

Same shape as до свидания: до plus a genitive. The word underneath is скорый, “quick” or “soon” — so this is literally “until the soon [thing/meeting].” Say it *da-SKÓ-ra-va*; that final -ого is spelled with a *г* but said like a *в*, a small spelling-versus-sound gap that shows up on this exact ending across the whole language, not just here.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

скорый is native Slavic, from a Proto-Indo-European root reconstructed as ***sker-**, “to jump, to hurry” — the same root, on the Baltic branch, as Lithuanian *skėrỹs*, “locust” (a jumping insect, and a vivid enough image for “quick” that it needs no further gloss). Slavic languages keep a whole family on this root: Russian **скоро** (“soon”), Ukrainian **скорий**, Polish **skory**, Bulgarian **скоро**.

Unlike yesterday’s **до свидания**, this root **does not reach English at all** — no confident cousin, on any branch. That is a different kind of honesty than **пока**’s: **пока** had an ancient root but a young use as a farewell; **скорый** has an ancient root and an ancient use, and simply never left a descendant in the language you already speak. **Читать** and **рот** taught you this shape of sentence already — some roots travel to England, and some do not, and a good etymology says so either way.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “до скорого” — *da-SKÓ-ra-va*, see you soon
- the shape — “до + genitive, like до свидания”
- the honest gap — “*sker-*, ‘to hurry’ — no English cousin at all”
- the г-as-в spelling — “-ого, said -ova”

Before you move on

Say “see you soon.” (**До скорого.**) What word for “quick, soon” is it built from, in the genitive? (**Скорый.**) Does it have a secure English cousin? (**No** — PIE **sker-*, “to hurry,” with no confident descendant in English.) What grammatical pattern does it share with **до свидания**? (**До + genitive.**) One more look back: what does the letter **ц** say, and which word taught it to you? (“**Ts**,” as in *cats*; from **сердце**.)

11.4 до завтра — “see you tomorrow,” with the dawn hiding inside it

A precise version of “see you soon” — more definite than **до скорого**, warmer than **пока** — and, taken apart, a word for “tomorrow” that turns out to be built directly on the word for “morning.”

You’ll want to know first — до завтра

до завтра — *da záftra* — see you tomorrow

Unlike the last two lessons, **завтра** does not change shape after **до** — it is an adverb, not a noun, so it has no genitive to show. Say it *da-ZÁF-tra*, with the **в** devoicing to an *f* sound in front of the voiceless **т** that follows it — the same kind of small sound-shift you already handle in **здравствуй**те.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

завтра splits cleanly into **за-**, “beyond, after,” and **утро**, “morning” — so “tomorrow” is literally “**after-the-morning**.” And **утро** is not a dead end the way last lesson’s **скорый** was: it continues Proto-Indo-European ***h₂ews-**, “to shine, to dawn” — the very root behind English **east** (the direction dawn comes from), Latin **aurora** (“dawn,” and the name of the Roman dawn-goddess), and Greek **ēōs** (“dawn,” also a goddess’s name). Say **утро**, *east*, *aurora*, *ēōs* in a row and you are tracing one ancient sunrise across four languages. So **до скорого** and **до завтра** make a matched pair: one word this book could not connect to English at all, and the very next one buried inside a word you use to talk about breakfast — the kind of contrast that only shows up when you keep asking the question honestly, lesson after lesson.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “до завтра” — *da-ZÁF-tra*, see you tomorrow
- the split — “за- ‘after’ + утро ‘morning’”
- the cousins — “утро, east, aurora, ēōs — one root, four languages”

- the contrast — “**скорого** had no cousin; **завтра** has three”

Before you move on

Say “see you tomorrow.” (**До завтра.**) Split it into its two parts and give their meanings. (**За-**, “after” + **утро**, “morning.”) Name three English/Latin/Greek cousins of **утро**. (**East, aurora, ēōs.**) Does **завтра** take a genitive after **до**, the way **скорого** did? (**No** — it is an adverb, unchanged.) One quick look back: what is the word for “eye,” and what did it originally mean as slang? (**Глаз** — “round stone.”)

11.5 до встречи — “see you later,” a meeting built from two prefixes

Vaguer than **до завтра**, warmer than **до скорого** — the fifth parting word, and the last one built on the **до** + genitive pattern.

You’ll want to know first — до встречи

до встречи — *da fstréchi* — **see you later** (no specific time promised, unlike **завтра**)

До plus the genitive of **встреча**, “a meeting” — the fourth phrase in a row to follow that shape. Say it *da-FSTRÉ-chi*: four consonants in a row at the front (**в-с-т-р-**), which is genuinely a mouthful even for a native speaker, so slow down on the approach and let each one land.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

встреча takes apart by its pieces rather than by a single ancient root: **в-**, “into,” plus **с-**, “with, together,” on an old Slavic base meaning roughly “to come upon.” Put together, it is close to what English *meet* does when it means “to come together” — but that closeness is a match of **idea**, not of **ancestry**: there is no secure shared root behind the two words, the same honest gap this chapter already met in **скорого**. That makes two of this chapter’s five words so far with **no** confirmed English cousin (**скорого, встречи**), against three that connect cleanly (**свидания, пока’s** root, **завтра**). A chapter of goodbyes turns out to be as good a place as any to see that ratio plainly: a good deal of what

a language says every day traces back to something you already know, and a good deal simply does not, and neither half is the “real” Russian.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “до встречи” — *da-FSTRÉ-chi*, see you later
- the pieces — “В- ‘into’ + с- ‘with’ + an old ‘come upon’ root”
- idea vs. ancestry — “close to *meet* in meaning, not in history”
- the running count — “два из пяти без английского кузена so far”

Before you move on

Say “see you later.” (До встречи.) Which two prefixes is **встреча** built from? (В-, “into,” and с-, “with.”) Is it a true cousin of English *meet*, or only a resemblance in meaning? (**Only in meaning** — no secure shared root.) How many of this chapter’s words so far have no confirmed English cousin so far? (**Two**: скорого and встречи.)

11.6 СПОКОЙНОЙ НОЧИ — “good night,” the chapter’s most secure cousin

The last of six ways to close a conversation — and, fittingly for the final word before sleep, the phrase with the deepest and most secure roots in the whole chapter.

You’ll want to know first — СПОКОЙНОЙ НОЧИ

СПОКОЙНОЙ НОЧИ — *spakóynay nóchi* — **good night**

Unlike this chapter’s five ДО-phrases, there is no ДО here at all: this is the genitive standing alone, after an unspoken wish — “[I wish you] **a calm night.**” Say it *spa-KOY-nay NO-chi*. It closes the day the way **здоровствуйте** opens one, back at the very start of this book: a whole sentence’s worth of meaning compressed into two words.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

НОЧЬ, “night,” is Proto-Indo-European ***nókʷts** — one of the most secure cognate sets that survives anywhere in the family, changed almost nothing on its way here: English **night**, Latin **nox / noctis** (→ *nocturnal*, *equinox*), Greek **νύχ** (→ *nyctophobia*). Say **НОЧЬ**, *night*, *nox*, *nyx* together and there is no gap left to explain.

СПОКОЙНОЙ carries an equally solid, if less obvious, root. It is built on **ПОКОЙ**, “calm, rest, peace,” from PIE ***kʷeih₁-**, “to rest, be quiet” — the same root, through Latin **quiēs**, as English **quiet**, **quiescent**, and **tranquil**; and, through a separate Germanic path (Gothic *hveila*, “a space of time”), the same root as English **while**. Rest, quiet, and “a while” all sit on one ancient idea of stillness — and Russian says good night by wishing you both the darkness and the calm in the same two words.

That makes the chapter’s tally, word by word: **свидания** (cousin: *see*), **пока**’s root (cousin: *who/what/why*), **скорого** (no cousin), **завтра** (cousin: *east*), **встречи** (no cousin), and **ночи / спокойной** (**several cousins each**). The book’s last word before sleep turns out to be its best evidence yet that English and Russian are the same language, worn down two very different ways for four thousand years.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**спокойной ночи**” — *spa-KOY-nay NO-chi*, good night
- “**ночь**, night, *nox*, *nyx*” — one root, barely worn down
- “**покой**, quiet, tranquil, while” — one more
- all six parting words, in order — “**до свидания, пока, до скорого, до завтра, до встречи, спокойной ночи**”

Before you move on

Say “good night.” (**Спокойной ночи.**) Name three English cousins of **НОЧЬ**. (**Night, nox, nux.**) Name two English cousins of **ПОКОЙ**. (**Quiet and tranquil** — or **while.**) Now reach all the way back to the water-coffee-tea-bread words: what sound does **ф** make, and

what does **x** sound like? (**F**, from кофе; a raspy **kh**, from хлеб.)
Ask for tea or bread politely, the pattern чай, пожалуйста already
taught. (Чай, пожалуйста. Хлеб, пожалуйста.)

Chapter 12

Mother and Father

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name my mother and father in Russian, in both the affectionate and the formal register, and say which one is a real cousin of the English word and which is not.

The chapter closes on отец, the surprise of the pair: the reader produces мама, папа, мать and отец, states the natural-gender exception папа tests, and names мать as a secure PIE cousin of mother while отец is not a cousin of father at all. It reaches back to Chapter 8's семья to complete the family it gathers, and rescues four atoms nothing had revisited since Chapters 2, 7 and 8.

12.1 мама — “mom,” a resemblance that isn’t really a cousin

Say good night, say see-you-later, and now a new chapter — back to семья (*sem’yá*) to fill it in, one person at a time, starting with a word that looks like a cousin of English and, on close inspection, is not really one at all.

You’ll want to know first — мама

мама — *máma* — mom, mum (the everyday, affectionate word)

Stress on the first syllable, *MÁ-ma*. Ends in -a, so the noun-gender ending rule holds: feminine, matching the person it names.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Every etymology so far in this book has asked the same question: does this word share an **ancestor** with an English one? **Mama** is the first word where the honest answer requires a different question entirely.

Mama is not descended from Proto-Indo-European, and it is not borrowed from anywhere. Babies across the world, whatever language surrounds them, babble the same easy sounds first — an open **a**, made with a wide-open mouth, paired with the simplest consonants a mouth can make by pressing the lips together: **m**, **b**, **p**. Parents everywhere hear that babble and adopt it, so *nearly every language on earth* ends up with something that sounds like *mama* for “mother” — Mandarin **māma**, French **maman**, Swahili **mama**, English **mama** — without any of them having borrowed the word or inherited it from a common source. It is not a family resemblance; it is a resemblance built from the shape of a human mouth, reinvented from scratch in every generation.

That is a genuinely different kind of “no” from **пот**’s or **до скорого**’s — those had no cousin **because** no one has found one. **Mama** has no cousin **because the question does not apply**: it was never inherited in the first place.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**mama**” — feminine, first-syllable stress
- the babble sounds — “open a, plus m, b, or p”
- the world tour — “māma, maman, mama, mama”
- the distinction — “not a family resemblance; the same invention, everywhere”

Before you move on

Say “mom.” (**Mama**.) What gender, and why? (**Feminine** — ends in **-a**.) Why does **mama** resemble the word for “mother” in so many unrelated languages? (**Universal infant babbling** — the easiest sounds a baby’s mouth makes, not shared ancestry.) Is this the same kind of “no cousin” as **пот** or **до скорого**? (**No** — those simply

have not been traced to one; **мама** was never inherited at all.)

12.2 папа — “dad,” the word that breaks the ending rule on purpose

Мама’s twin, built the same babbling way — but this one does something **кофе** only hinted at: it breaks the noun-gender ending rule outright, and tells you exactly when that is allowed to happen.

You’ll want to know first — папа

папа — *pápa* — **dad**, **papa** (the everyday, affectionate word)

Stress on the first syllable, *PÁ-pa* — the same rhythm as **мама**, the **м** simply swapped for **п**. Same babbling story, same easy vowel, one consonant apart.

Grammar Lens: when biology beats the ending

Here is the rule you already know: **-а/-я** endings are feminine. **Папа** ends in **-а** — and **папа** is **masculine**.

This is not another **кофе**, a fossil accident that happens to break the pattern. It is a real, live rule of its own, and a small closed set of words follows it: any noun naming a **male person** is masculine, whatever letter it ends in, because Russian lets biology outrank spelling for people. You will meet the rule’s other members later — **дядя** (“uncle”) and **дедушка** (“grandpa”) both end in **-я/-а** and are both masculine for exactly this reason. **Папа** is your first sighting of it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**папа**” — masculine, despite the **-а**
- the rule — “a male person is always masculine, whatever the ending”
- the pair — “**мама**, feminine; **папа**, masculine — same ending, opposite gender”

Before you move on

Say “dad.” (Папа.) What gender is it, and does that match its **-a** ending? (**Masculine** — it does **not** match; a male person overrides the ending.) Name the shared origin of **мама** and **папа**. (**Universal infant babbling** — the easiest mouth sounds, reinvented everywhere.) Name one other Russian word that will follow the same male-person rule later. (Дядя or дедушка.) And one last look further back: how do you say “good night”? (Спокойной ночи.)

12.3 мать — “mother,” the word мама only pretends to resemble

The formal word behind yesterday’s affectionate one — and, unlike **мама**, a word with a real, unbroken, six-thousand-year paper trail straight to the English word you already own.

You’ll want to know first — мать

мать — *mat’* — **mother** (formal register: forms, introductions, “my mother is a doctor”)

One syllable, softened by the **ь** at the end — the same soft sign you already read in **очень** and **семья**. Feminine, matching **мама**, but reach for **мать** where English would reach for *mother* rather than *mom*: on a form, in an introduction, talking *about* her rather than *to* her.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Where **мама** only **resembles** English *mama* by babbling coincidence, **мать** is the genuine article: Proto-Indo-European ***méh₂tēr**, one of the oldest reconstructed words in the entire family, and one whose meaning has not shifted at all in perhaps six thousand years. English **mother**, Latin **māter** (→ *maternal*, *matrix*), Greek **mētēr** (→ *metropolis*, literally “mother city”), and Sanskrit **mātar** all continue the same word. Say **мать**, *mother*, *māter*, *mētēr*, *mātar* together and you are pronouncing one sentence’s worth of unbroken history. Linguists suspect ***méh₂tēr** itself grew out of the same infant babble as **мама** — the *m*-sound a baby makes first — but so long ago, and so

thoroughly grammaticalized into “mother” across every daughter language, that it counts as real inheritance now, not live coincidence. **Мама** is that babble happening again, fresh, in front of you; **мать** is the fossil the same babble left five thousand years ago.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**мать**” — one syllable, soft **ть**
- “**мать**, mother, *māter*, *mētēr*, *mātar*” — one word, five languages
- the register split — “**мама** to her; **мать** about her”
- the two kinds of “m” — “**мама**, live babble; **мать**, ancient fossil”

Before you move on

Say “mother,” formally. (**Мать**.) Name three language cousins beyond English *mother*. (**Latin *māter*, Greek *mētēr*, Sanskrit *mātar***.) Is **мать**’s connection to *mother* the same kind of thing as **мама**’s? (**No** — **мать** is true inheritance; **мама** is fresh babble that merely resembles it.) When would you say **мама** instead of **мать**? (**To her, informally** — not on a form or in a formal introduction.)

12.4 отец — “father,” an old word that is a stranger to its English namesake

Мать just gave you the cleanest cousin in this book. Its partner is the opposite kind of surprise: an equally ancient word — and one with **no** relation at all to the English word it translates.

You’ll want to know first — **отец**

отец — *atéts* — **father** (formal register, matching **мать**)

Stress on the last syllable, *a-TÉTS*. Consonant-final, so — regular rule, no exception needed this time — masculine.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Here is the twist **мать** did not prepare you for. **Отец** is genuinely old — it continues Proto-Indo-European ***átta**, itself a nursery address-word for “father,” parallel to **мама**’s babble but grammaticalized into the formal word millennia ago. Its cousins are real: **Gothic *atta***, **Latin *atta*** (an affectionate, informal “papa,” distinct from the formal *pater*), **Hittite *attaš***, **Ancient Greek *átta***. But *none of those is English father*. English *father* continues a **completely different** PIE root, ***ph₂tēr**, the formal word matched to ***méh₂tēr** “mother” — the very cousin set **мать** just gave you. Slavic simply **lost** that word somewhere in its history and replaced it with the *atta*-family word instead. So the two halves of this book’s family pair are not symmetric at all: **мать** kept the ancient formal word and still matches *mother*; **отец** kept an ancient word too, just a *different* one, and the formal match with *father* never survived into Slavic at all. Introduce your own family the way you already learned to introduce yourself: **Меня зовут...** for you; **Его зовут...** (“his name is...” — that same unnamed “they,” and the same object-shaped pronoun **его** that **вас/тебя** already showed you a piece of) for your father, brother, or anyone else.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “отец” — *a-TÉTS*, masculine
- the real cousins — “atta, atta, attaš — Gothic, Latin, Hittite”
- the honest gap — “NOT father — that word is *ph₂tēr*, lost from Slavic entirely”
- the naming pattern — “Меня зовут... / Его зовут...”

Before you move on

Say “father,” formally. (**Отец**.) Is it related to English *father*? (**No** — *father* is **ph₂tēr*, a different root Slavic lost; **отец** continues **átta* instead.) Name three real cousins of **отец**. (**Gothic *atta***, **Latin *atta***, **Hittite *attaš***.) Now reach back to Chapters 2, 7 and 8: how

would you say “his name is...”, and what word gathers everyone this chapter just named? (Его зовут...; семья, the word for друг, подруга, брат, сестра — and now мама, папа, мать, отец too.)

Chapter 13

Milk, Cheese, Juice, and Soup

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name milk, cheese, juice and soup in Russian with their genders, ask for any of them politely, and say which are inherited and which are borrowed.

The chapter closes on суп, a French loan that mirrors кофе's story from the opposite direction: the reader produces МОЛОКО, СЫР, СОК and суп with their genders, extends Chapter 6's request pattern to all four, and sorts the set into a hand-motion cousin, a taste cousin, an honest dead end, and a shared loanword. It reaches all the way back to Chapter 2 to rescue the naming-question comparison and я's script warning, the last two atoms in the track that nothing had revisited.

13.1 МОЛОКО — “milk,” a cousin down to the hand motion

Мать and отец just closed the family — remember папа's odd masculine ending on the way past — and now a new chapter, back to the water-coffee-tea-bread drink shelf to add three more words, starting with one whose English cousin shares not just a sound, but the very gesture the word describes.

You'll want to know first — МОЛОКО

МОЛОКО — *malakó* — **milk**. Neuter.

Stress on the last syllable, and the two unstressed **o**s both reduce toward *a* — the *akanye* rule from your very first lessons, doing real work here: *ma-la-KÓ*, not *mo-lo-KO*. The **-o** ending gives the third gender, same row as **ухо** and **сердце**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

молоко continues Proto-Indo-European ***h₂melǵ-**, “to rub, to stroke, to milk” — a root that names the *motion of the hand*, not the liquid itself, exactly the way English **milk** does too: English **milk**, German **Milch**, Latin **mulgeō** (“I milk,” → the rare English *emulsion* relative), and Greek **amélgō** all continue the same word. Say **молоко**, *milk*, *Milch*, *mulgeō* together and every one of them still carries the memory of a hand closing around an udder.

One honest complication: some etymologists treat the Slavic word as a **borrowing** from early Germanic rather than an independent inheritance from the same PIE root — the same kind of hedge this book already gave **думать** and its link to **doom**. Either way, **молоко** and *milk* share the same ultimate ancestor; the only open question is how directly.

Ask for it the way you already know:

Молоко, пожалуйста. — *malakó, pazhálusta* — **Milk, please.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**молоко**” — *ma-la-KÓ*, neuter, both **o**’s reduced
- “**молоко**, milk, Milch, mulgeō” — the hand’s motion, four languages
- “**Молоко, пожалуйста.**” — the request pattern, holding steady

Before you move on

Say “milk,” with its gender. (**Молоко** — **neuter**.) What did its PIE root originally describe — the liquid, or something else? (**The hand motion of milking**.) Name two Germanic cousins. (**Milk**, **Milch**.) Ask for milk politely. (**Молоко, пожалуйста.**)

13.2 сыр — “cheese,” which is really just an old word for “sour”

Bread’s natural partner, finally on the table — and a word whose Russian double life gives away exactly how it got its name.

You’ll want to know first — сыр

сыр — *syr* — cheese. Masculine.

One syllable, consonant-final — the regular rule again, no exception. Say it with the vowel **ты** already made you practise: drawn back in the throat, not the *ee* of **и**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

сыр is, historically, the same word as сырой, “raw, damp, uncooked” — cheese named not for what it becomes, but for the state its milk was in on the way there. Both continue a Proto-Indo-European root for “sour, damp,” and the family shows up right on English’s own doorstep: **English** *sour* (Old English *sūr*, from the same Germanic branch), **Old Norse** *súrr*, **Old High German** *sûr*. Say сырой, *sour*, *súrr*, *sûr* and you are hearing one old idea of “gone tart” spread across the whole Germanic half of the family, with Russian’s сыр sitting one short step away from all of it.

That gives you the chapter’s drink-and-bread shelf a genuine internal logic: **молоко** was named for the *hand* that made it; сыр is named for the *taste* milk takes on before it becomes food at all.

Сыр, пожалуйста. — *syr, pazhálusta* — Cheese, please.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “сыр” — masculine, the pulled-back **ы**
- the double life — “сыр and сырой, one root”
- “сырой, sour, súrr, sûr” — Slavic and Germanic, side by side
- “Сыр, пожалуйста. Хлеб, пожалуйста.” (*syr, pazhálusta; khleb, pazhálusta*) — cheese and bread, the request pattern’s pair

Before you move on

Say “cheese,” with its gender. (**Сыр** — **masculine**.) What Russian adjective does **сыр** secretly share its root with, and what does it mean? (**Сырой**, “raw, damp.”) Name its English cousin. (**Sour**.) Ask for it politely. (**Сыр, пожалуйста.**)

13.3 сок — “juice,” ancient and untranslatable into English cousins

The third drink on this chapter’s shelf — and, like **скорого** and **встречи** before it, a root old enough to reconstruct and still without a single confirmed English relative.

You’ll want to know first — сок

сок — *sok* — **juice**. Masculine.

One syllable, consonant-final, the regular rule holding for the third lesson running. Every letter you have owned for a long time now.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

сок reconstructs cleanly to Proto-Indo-European ***sokʷós**, by way of Proto-Balto-Slavic ***sakás** — this is not a shaky guess the way **пот**’s root was, but a solid reconstruction with real evidence behind it. What it does **not** have is a surviving cousin anywhere in English or the rest of Germanic: the trail is well documented all the way back, and then simply stops before it reaches the language you already speak. That is worth holding next to **молоко** and **сыр**, the two words either side of it on this shelf: three drinks, three different outcomes. **Молоко** connects to English down to the hand motion. **Сыр** connects through a Germanic side door, by way of *sour*. **Сок** connects to nothing at all — and all three are equally real, equally ancient Russian.

Сок, пожалуйста. — *sok, pazhálusta* — **Juice, please.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “сок” — masculine, one syllable
- the honest gap — “*sok^wós, well attested, no English cousin”
- the three-way contrast — “молоко, сыр, сок — hand motion, sourness, and nothing at all”
- “Сок, пожалуйста.” — juice, please

Before you move on

Say “juice,” with its gender. (Сок — **masculine**.) Does it have a confirmed English cousin? (**No** — a solid PIE root, but no surviving Germanic descendant.) Which of this chapter’s three drink words connects to English through a hand motion, and which through a taste? (Молоко through milking; сыр through *sour*.) Ask for juice politely. (Сок, пожалуйста.)

13.4 суп — “soup,” the same French word English also borrowed

The last word on this chapter’s table — and, like кофе before it, a loanword rather than an inheritance, which makes it the perfect word to close on.

You’ll want to know first — суп

суп — *sup* — **soup**. Masculine.

One syllable, consonant-final, the regular rule holding one last time. Every letter is one you have owned for a long time now.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

суп is a straight loan from **French soupe**, part of the flood of French vocabulary that entered Russian aristocratic life in the 1700s — the same century, and nearly the same social world, that gave кофе its own sea route into the language. Chase *soupe* back further and it comes from Late Latin **suppa**, “bread soaked in broth.” Here is what makes суп different from everything else on this shelf: **English soup took the identical French word**, by a separate

crossing, centuries apart from Russian's own borrowing. So **суп** and *soup* **are** related — but by two languages independently reaching for the same French word, not by shared Russian-English ancestry. It mirrors **кофе** and *coffee*, which took one Arabic word by two different European doors; here, two languages took the *same* French door, just at different times.

Ask for the whole shelf the way you already know:

Молоко, сыр, сок и суп, пожалуйста. — Milk, cheese, juice and soup, please.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**суп**” — masculine, one syllable
- the loan — “French soupe, 1700s, same century as **кофе**”
- the mirror — “**суп**/soup: one French word, two borrowings; **кофе**/coffee: one Arabic word, two doors”
- the whole shelf — “**молоко, сыр, сок, суп, пожалуйста**” (*malakó, syr, sok, sup, pazhálusta*)

Before you move on

Say “soup,” with its gender. (**Суп** — **masculine**.) When did it enter Russian, and from where? (**The 1700s**, from **French soupe**.) Is **суп** related to English *soup* by inheritance or by borrowing? (**Borrowing** — two separate crossings of the same French word.) Now reach all the way back to the naming-question comparison: which languages ask “how do they call you” instead of “what is your name,” and what must you never mistake this book's very first letter, **я**, for? (**Russian and French**, against English's *what*; **never a mirrored Latin R**.)

Chapter 14

Eleven Letters, Sorted Into Three Kinds

Modes: ✍ pen (11) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 11 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write eleven more Cyrillic letters from memory, sort any Cyrillic letter into true friend, false friend or new shape, and explain what the soft sign does even though it makes no sound of its own.

A letter that is a whole syllable and looks like a backwards R that it has nothing to do with — closing a chapter whose organising idea is that every Cyrillic letter sorts into one of three kinds.

14.1 y — the letter that looks like Latin y and says 'oo'

You have met the false friends and the first new shapes. This chapter takes the eleven letters that block the most words you cannot yet read.

Script

y

It looks like a Latin **y**. It is not one. It says **oo**, the vowel of English *boot*.

This is the single most expensive letter to get wrong, because it is common: it blocks more words in this book than any other letter you have left. Every time an English eye reads it as *y*, a word comes apart.

The shape is close to Latin *y* — a small bowl on top, a tail below the line — but the tail is usually straighter and the bowl smaller.

Say it round and short, with the lips pushed forward. Not the *y* of *yes*. Not the *u* of *cup*. The *oo* of *boot*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* *y*
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What does **y** sound like? (**oo**, as in *boot*.) What does an English eye want it to be? (A **y** — and that is the trap.)
Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.2 3 — a letter shaped like the digit 3

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

3

z, the *z* of English *zoo*. And the shape is exactly what it looks like: **the digit 3**.

That is not a coincidence to memorise around — it is simply a convenient hook, and a rare piece of luck in this alphabet. Nothing in Latin looks like this, so nothing can mislead you.

Write it as you would write a 3, and read it as *z*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **3**
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What does **з** sound like? (**z**.) And what does it look like? (The **digit 3**.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.3 К — a true friend

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

К

к, the *k* of English *skip*. It looks like a Latin **k** and it **is** one.

Cyrillic letters come in three kinds for an English reader, and it is worth having the three named:

- **true friends** — look Latin, sound Latin. This one, and the letters romanised *a*, *o*, *m*, *t*.
- **false friends** — look Latin, sound different. **у** you just met, and the ones you met earlier as *u*, *r*, *s* and *n*.
- **new shapes** — look like nothing Latin at all. **з** from a moment ago, and the two you learned as *b* and *d*.

There is no fourth kind. Sorting every new letter into one of those three is most of what learning this alphabet is.

Your turn

- *Write it:* К
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What are the three kinds of Cyrillic letter for an English reader? (**True friends**, **false friends**, **new shapes**.) Which is К? (A **true**

friend.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.4 л — a new shape

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

л

l, the *l* of English *love*. A **new shape**: nothing in Latin looks like it.

Two strokes meeting at a peak, with the left leg kicking out. Written quickly it leans, and in some fonts it is nearly a triangle with an open base.

Careful with one thing. In handwriting л and м are close relatives, and you are about to meet м. The difference is the top: л comes to a **point**, м has a **dip** in the middle.

Your turn

- *Write it*: л
- *Sort*: true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

Is л a true friend, a false friend, or a new shape? (A **new shape**.)
How do you tell it from the letter coming next? (л peaks; the other **dips**.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.5 м — a true friend, and its capital

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

м М

м, the *m* of English *met* — a **true friend** in both cases.

And here is a fact about this alphabet worth having early: **most Cyrillic capitals are simply the lowercase letter drawn large**. Latin makes you learn two shapes for *a*, *b*, *d*, *e*, *g*; Cyrillic mostly does not.

This letter is one of them, and so are the ones romanised *k*, *o*, *s* and *t*: same shape, two sizes.

Not all of them — the letters for *b*, *d* and *a* do have distinct capitals — but the default is that a capital costs you nothing new, which is a genuine saving over the Latin alphabet and the opposite of what a beginner expects.

Your turn

- *Write it:* м
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What sound is **м**? (**м**.) And what is true of most Cyrillic capitals? (They are the **lowercase drawn large** — no new shape to learn.)
Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.6 Ъ — the vowel English has no name for

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

Ъ

Now a letter with no English equivalent at all — not a shape problem, a **sound** problem.

Ъ is a vowel made with the tongue pulled **back and high**, roughly where you hold it for *oo*, but with the lips **unrounded** and spread as for *ee*. English has no such vowel and no letter for it. Books usually transliterate it *y*, which helps nobody.

The reliable way in: say *ee*. Hold it. Now, without moving your lips, pull your tongue back towards your throat. What comes out is close.

The shape is two pieces — a hard sign body and a vertical — and it is **never capitalised at the start of a word**, because no Russian word begins with it.

Your turn

- *Write it:* Ъ
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

Is Ъ a shape problem or a sound problem? (A **sound** problem.)
How do you find it? (Say *ee*, then **pull the tongue back** without moving the lips.) And can a word begin with it? (**No.**)
Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.7 Ж — the beetle

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

Ж

zh, the sound in the middle of English *measure* or *vision*. A **new shape**, and the most recognisable one in Cyrillic: three strokes radiating from a central spine, symmetrical, often called **the beetle**.

The sound is worth isolating. English has it — *measure*, *treasure*, *azure*, *genre* — but spells it with no letter of its own, and no ordinary English word opens with it. Russian gives it a letter and opens words with it freely.

Symmetrical, so there is no wrong way round. Draw the spine, then the four legs.

Your turn

- *Write it:* Ж
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What sound is ж? (The middle of *measure*.) Does English have that sound? (**Yes** — but no letter for it.) And what is the shape called? (**The beetle**.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.8 ч — one letter for a sound English spells with two

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

ч

ch, the *ch* of English *cheese*. A **new shape** — roughly a Latin *h* rotated, or a wine glass.

Notice what the alphabet is doing. English needs **two** letters, *c* and *h*, to write this sound, and that pair is ambiguous — compare *church*, *chorus*, *machine*. Cyrillic spends **one letter** on it and the letter means one thing.

This is a genuine advantage of the script and it is worth naming: Russian spelling is far more regular than English spelling. A letter usually says one thing.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ч
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

How many letters does English use for this sound? (**Two** — and ambiguously.) How many does Russian? (**One**.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.9 Ш — the comb

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

Ш

sh, the *sh* of English *shoe*. A **new shape**: three vertical teeth on a base, like a **comb**.

Same point as the last letter, and it is a pattern rather than a coincidence: English writes this with two letters, Russian with one.

Keep it apart from the beetle by counting: Ж radiates from a centre, Ш stands on a flat base with three uprights.

Your turn

- *Write it:* Ш
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What sound is Ш? (**sh**.) How do you tell it from the beetle? (Ш has three uprights on a **flat base**; the beetle **radiates** from a centre.)
Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.10 Ъ — a letter that makes no sound of its own

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

Now the idea this alphabet has and Latin does not.

Ъ

This is the **soft sign**, and **it is not a sound**. You cannot pronounce it. It has no name you say aloud in a word. What it does is change the letter **before** it: it **softens** that consonant, which means the tongue moves towards the roof of the mouth, as if a faint *y* were sliding in after it.

English does this by accident. Compare the *n* in *canyon* with the *n* in *can* — the first is softer, because a *y* follows. Russian treats that difference as **meaningful** and gives it a letter.

A letter that is a modifier rather than a sound is the one genuinely alien thing in this script for an English reader. Everything else is a shape to learn or a sound to hear; this is a different kind of object entirely.

It is also common — it blocks a great many words in this book — and it never begins a word, so you will only ever meet it after a consonant.

Your turn

- *Write it:* Ъ
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

Can you pronounce Ъ? (**No** — it makes no sound of its own.) What does it do? (**Softens** the consonant before it.) And where in a word can it never appear? (At the **start**.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

14.11 Я — one letter that is a whole syllable

Write the letter from the previous lesson, and say which of the three kinds it is.

Script

Я я

Last, and it carries two lessons at once.

It looks like a backwards Latin R. It is not an R and has nothing to do with one. That resemblance is the reason this letter appears on every parody of Russian ever printed in English, and it means nothing.

And it is not one sound but two. Я says **ya** — a whole syllable, a *y* glide plus an *a*, in a single letter. Cyrillic has several of these, and they are why a Russian word can look shorter than its pronunciation.

On its own, Я is also the Russian word for **I**. A single letter, a whole word — like English *a* and *I*, and for the same reason: the commonest words wear down to the shortest forms.

That is your eleventh piece. Sort each one into the three kinds as you go, and the rest of the alphabet is more of the same.

Your turn

- *Write it:* Я
- *Sort:* true friend, false friend, or new shape?

Before you move on

What does Я sound like? (**ya** — two sounds, one letter.) Is it related to Latin R? (**No** — the resemblance is meaningless.) And what word is it on its own? (**I**.)

Source: Unicode Cyrillic chart.

Chapter 15

The Two Letters You Already Knew, and Six You Did Not

Modes: 👁 eyes (1) ✍ pen (8) 🔄 Hands-free start: none of the 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write eight more Cyrillic letters from memory, sort each of them into true friend, false friend or new shape, and read an unstressed **о** as an **a** – which is the commonest thing an English reader gets wrong when reading Russian aloud.

Eight letters sorted into two true friends, one false friend and five new shapes – with the false friend named as the dangerous kind, because it is the only one that can be read confidently and wrongly.

15.1 а — a true friend, and the sound Russian keeps landing on

Write **я**. A whole syllable in one letter, and nothing to do with the Latin R it resembles.

Three kinds of letter, you were told: **true friends**, **false friends**, and **new shapes**. This chapter opens with the two truest friends in the alphabet — and then shows you why they still catch people out.

Script

а

A **true friend**, and about as true as they come. Same shape as Latin *a*, and when it is stressed it says the *a* of English *father* — clean, open, and with none of the drift English *a* has in *cat*, *cake* or *call*.

Nothing to learn about the shape. What is worth learning is how **often** you will see it, and there is a reason for that beyond the alphabet, which the next letter explains.

Write it as you write a Latin *a*. That is the whole instruction.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **a** — exactly the Latin letter
- *Say it:* **a** as in *father*, held open, not the *a* of *cat*

Before you move on

Which English *a* is it — the one in *cat*, or the one in *father*?
(**Father.**)

15.2 o — the letter that is not always itself

Write **a**. Say it as in *father*.

Script

o

Another **true friend** on the page: same shape as Latin *o*, and when it is **stressed** it says the *o* of English *more*, shortened and rounded.

Write it as you write a Latin *o*.

Why it's said this way

Now the part that matters, and it is worth more to you than the shape.

When o is NOT stressed, it is not pronounced o. It is pronounced a.

Russian words carry exactly one stressed syllable, and every other vowel in the word relaxes towards the middle. For **o**, that relaxation lands on **a**. So a word written with two **o**'s, stressed on the second, comes out of a Russian mouth as *a-o* — not *o-o*.

This has a name — **akanye** — and you do not need the name. You

need the habit:

written o, stressed → say **o**

written o, unstressed → say **a**

One refinement, so the rule does not mislead you later: right **before** the stress the sound is a full *a*. Further from the stress it relaxes further still, towards the *uh* of English *sofa*. Either way it is **not an o**, which is the part that matters.

It is the single commonest thing an English reader gets wrong when reading Russian aloud, because the letter is sitting right there on the page looking like an *o* and behaving like an *a*.

This is also why **a** is the most-heard vowel in the language while not being the most-written one: it gets reinforcements from every unstressed **o**.

And this is why stress is marked in this book's romanizations rather than on the Cyrillic. Russian text does not print stress marks — a native reader knows where the stress falls and needs no help. You do not know yet, so the romanization carries it, and the Cyrillic stays exactly as you would meet it in the world.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **o** — the Latin letter
- *Say it:* a stressed **o**, then an unstressed one — and let the second become **a**

Before you move on

Does the spelling change when the sound does? (**No** — the page keeps **o**.)

15.3 **г** — a corner, and a hard **g**

Write **o**. Then say what it becomes when it is not stressed.

Script

Г

A **new shape** — no Latin relative to mislead you. Two strokes meeting at a square corner: a horizontal across the top, and a vertical dropping from its left end. Like a Latin **F** with the middle bar removed, or a rotated **L**.

It says **g**, hard, as in English *go* — **never** the soft *g* of *gem*. Russian spelling does not have that ambiguity, which is one fewer thing to carry than English asks of you.

It does have one twist, and you have already met it. In the ending **-oro** (and **-ero**) this letter is written Г and **said В** — which is why **до скорого** comes out *da-SKO-ra-va*. That ending is everywhere in Russian, so the exception is worth knowing on the day you learn the letter rather than being ambushed by it later. Everywhere else: hard g.

If it helps: this is the Greek **gamma**, squared off. Russian took its alphabet from Greek, and this is one of the letters where the descent is plain.

Your turn

- *Write it:* Г — top horizontal, then the vertical down from its left end
- *Say it:* **g** as in *go*, never as in *gem*

Before you move on

Which Latin letter does it resemble with a bar removed? (**F**.)

15.4 x — an x that is not an x

Write Г. A corner, and a hard g.

Script

x

A **false friend**, and a well-disguised one. Two crossing diagonals — an exact Latin **x** on the page — and it does not say *x*.

It says the sound at the end of Scottish *loch* and German *Bach*: a **breathy rasp** made at the back of the mouth, in the same place as *k*

but without ever closing it. Start to say *k*, then leave the gap open and push air through.

Romanized in this book as **kh**, which is a warning label rather than a spelling: there is no *k* and no *h* in it, only the one rasping sound.

English has no letter for it, which is why English borrows it as *ch* in *loch* and *Bach* and then most speakers say a *k* anyway. You have the letter now, so you can do better than the borrowing.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **x** — two crossing diagonals, like a Latin *x*
- *Say it:* **kh** — start a *k*, then leave it open and breathe through
- *Say it:* *loch*, the Scottish way, then just its ending

Before you move on

Is there a *k* sound in it? (**No** — the mouth never closes.)

15.5 ϕ — a circle on a stick

Write **x**. Then make its sound without letting your mouth close.

Script

ϕ

A **new shape**: a vertical stroke with a closed loop threaded onto it, the loop sitting on both sides of the line. Draw the vertical first, then the loop across it.

It says **f**, exactly as in English *foot*. No trap at all.

This is Greek **phi**, and that ancestry shows in where you find it. Native Slavic words almost never contain ϕ — nearly every Russian word with this letter came in from Greek or later from Western Europe. When you meet it, the word is very often one you can half-guess, because it was borrowed from a language you know.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ϕ — the vertical, then the loop threaded across it
- *Say it:* f as in *foot*

Before you move on

Which Greek letter is it? (**Phi**.)

15.6 Ϸ — one letter for two sounds

Write Ϸ — three uprights standing on a base.

Script

Ϸ

A **new shape**, and one you should compare to Ϸ immediately, because they are close:

Ϸ — three uprights on a base, **nothing below the line**

Ϸ — two uprights on a base, and a **small tail dropping below** at the right

Two uprights instead of three, and a descender. That tail is doing real work: it is the only thing separating this letter from one you already know.

It says **ts**, the ending of English *cats* — but as a **single** sound at the **start** of a word too, which English never asks of you. Say *cats*, then say just its last two letters, then put a vowel after them.

One letter, one sound, even though English needs two letters to write it.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ϕ, then Ϸ, then Ϸ — and check which one has the tail
- *Say it:* *cats*, then **ts** alone, then **tsa**

Before you move on

Does English write this sound with one letter or two? (**Two** — *ts*.)

15.7 й — и in a hat

Write **ц**. Two uprights, base, tail.

Script

й

No new shape at all. This is **и**, which you have written since your very first letters, with a small curved cap sitting on top of it. The cap is called a *breve*, and you draw the letter exactly as before and then add it last.

The cap changes the job. **и** is a vowel, the *ee* of *see*. **й** is a **consonant**: the *y* of English *boy* or *yes*. Its formal name is “short **и**”, which describes it well — the same sound, clipped so short it stops being a syllable of its own and leans on the vowel beside it.

That is why it turns up glued to other vowels at the ends of words, and why it never carries the stress: it cannot, because it is not a syllable.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **и**, then add the cap to make **й**
- *Say it:* **ее**, then clip it to the **y** of *boy*

Before you move on

Can this letter carry the stress of a word? (**No** — it is not a syllable.)

15.8 ю — a syllable in one letter, again

Write **я**, then **у**. One is a whole syllable; the other is the *oo* that looks like a Latin *y*.

Script

ю

A **new shape**, but a familiar idea. Two parts, joined: a **vertical stroke** on the left, and a **closed loop** to its right, tied to the vertical by a short horizontal at mid-height.

It says **yu** — the *you* of English, or the *u* of *use*. One letter, two sounds, exactly the deal you already accepted with **я** (*ya*).

That is the pattern worth taking away: Russian has a small set of letters that each write a **y-glide plus a vowel** in a single shape. You have met two of them now. They are the reason a Russian word can look shorter than its pronunciation, and the reason counting letters is a poor guide to counting syllables.

Do not confuse its sound with **y**, the *oo* letter that looks like a Latin *y*. **ю** is that sound with a *y* welded to its front.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **ю** — the vertical, the loop, and the bar that ties them
- *Say it:* **y** (*oo*), then **ю** (*yoo*) — the glide is the only difference
- *Say it:* **я**, then **ю** — the same trick, two vowels
- *Write it:* **й**, then **ю** — a capped letter, then a syllable-letter

Before you move on

Is **ю** the same sound as **y**? (**No** — it is **y** with a *y* in front.)

15.9 Practice — eight more letters, sorted

Write **а** and **о**. Then say what happens to the second one when it is not the stressed vowel.

Script — the three kinds, one more time

You already have a way to sort any Cyrillic letter. Here are this chapter's eight, sorted:

True friends — the shape and the sound both match Latin:

а а · о о

False friend — the Latin shape, a different sound:

х *kh*, the rasp in *loch*

New shapes — no Latin relative to help or mislead:

г *g* · ф *f* · ц *ts* · ю *yu*

And one that fits none of the three, because it is not a new letter at all:

й — и wearing a cap

Two, one, four and one. The single false friend is the one to drill, because a false friend is the only kind that can be read confidently and wrongly: a new shape stops you dead, but х lets you read straight past it.

What you've built

Twenty-one letters before this chapter, and twenty-nine now. Russian has thirty-three.

Three of the eight cost you almost nothing. а and о were already yours from the Latin alphabet — the work in them was not the shape but **what unstressed о does to your ear** — and й is a letter you already write, wearing a cap.

That leaves **four genuinely new shapes** (г, ф, ц, ю) and **one false friend** (х) to drill. Five letters of real work out of eight.

Your turn

- *Write it:* а о г х ф ц й ю — all eight, in order, without looking above
- *Say it:* **kh**, the one that is not an x
- *Write it:* ш, then ц — and check which one has the tail
- *Say it:* и, then й — vowel, then consonant

Before you move on

How many of the thirty-three are now yours? (**Twenty-nine.**)

Chapter 16

And, Or, and Neither

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can join two words or two whole sentences with *i*, offer a choice with *ili*, refuse both halves at once with *ni ... ni*, and agree with somebody using *tozhe*.

*The first two-clause sentence this book can make. Until this chapter the longest structure the track taught was a single clause, and *i* – the commonest word in Russian – had been printed twice as a conjunction without any lesson owning it. *ni ... ni* is the first joining pattern in the book that stands in FRONT of both halves rather than between them, and it needs the negative said three times in one short sentence.*

16.1 и — the word you have already read

Two verbs from the chapter of first verbs, before the smallest word in the book arrives.

- *Recall:* **знать**, its English cousin *know*, and how **не** goes in front
- *Recall:* **говорить**, which is **not** a relative of *govern*, and the two verb families it belongs to
- *Recall:* the eight letters you sorted into true friends, false friends and new shapes

You'll want to know first — и

- и — *i* — and

One letter. One vowel. Nothing else. It is the commonest word in Russian, and you have been reading it since the verbs of the mind:

- Я читаю и понимаю. — *ya chítayu i panímáyu* — I read **and** I understand.

That sentence was on the page long before anyone told you that the little и between the two verbs was a word at all. It is. It joins two things of the same kind: two nouns, two verbs, two whole thoughts.

The letter is one you can already write, and the word is the letter. Nothing new goes on the page here — only the fact that this shape has a meaning.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

и goes back to a Slavic particle built on the ancient **pointing stem** **i-*, the demonstrative that meant roughly *this one, that one*. A joining word that began as a pointing word is not strange: *and* is a way of saying *there is another one over here*.

That same old stem is the one hiding in **его** — which is why the smallest word in the language and one of its pronouns are relatives.

Your turn

- *Say it:* Я читаю и понимаю — and hear и as a word this time
- *Say it:* any two verbs you own, with и between them
- *Build:* two foods, joined — молоко и сок

Before you move on

Say “and.” (и.) Which letter is it, and had you written that letter before today? (и — yes, from the writing lessons.) What kind of old word is it built on? (**A pointing word.**) And one look back: say “I know,” and then say you do not. (я знаю / я не знаю.)

16.2 и between two sentences — the book's first long sentence

Yesterday's word, and two verbs it is about to join.

- *Recall:* **идти**, the one-way verb whose past comes from another root entirely
- *Recall:* **думать**, the verb hiding inside the name of the Russian parliament, and the partner verb that finishes what it starts

Grammar lens — one word, any size of piece

You have joined two verbs with **и**. Now join two whole sentences with it. The word does not change:

- **я иду и я думаю** — *ya idú i ya dúmayu* — I am walking **and** I am thinking.

Each half stands on its own. Take the **и** away and you have two sentences that are still Russian. Put it back and you have one sentence with two halves, which is a thing this book has not been able to make until now.

Russian does not need a comma here, and does not want one: when **и** joins two halves that share a subject, nothing goes in front of it.

- **я иду и думаю** — *ya idú i dúmayu* — I walk and think.

Say the second **я** or leave it out; both are Russian. Leaving it out is what a Russian usually does, because the ending on the verb has already said who.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **я иду и думаю**
- *Build:* any two things you do, joined with **и**, dropping the second **я**
- *Build:* the same pair with the second **я** put back

Before you move on

Does **и** change when the pieces it joins get bigger? (**No** — one letter, always, and it is still the same old pointing word underneath.) Does a comma go in front of it when both halves share a subject? (**No**.) And one look back: which verb of motion means going one way, this once? (The verb is **идти**.)

16.3 или — “or,” which is “and” with a doubt on the end

The two verbs that first stood on either side of **и**.

- *Recall:* **понимать**, which literally means to **take hold of** — the same picture English keeps in *comprehend*
- *Recall:* **читать**, and the fact that Russian has **no separate way** to say *I am reading*
- *Recall:* the whole first exchange — **да, нет**, and which greeting you give a stranger

You’ll want to know first — или

- **или** — *íli* — **or**

Stress the first syllable: *Í-li*. It sits between the two things exactly where **и** sat, and it does the opposite job — not both, but one of the two.

- **чай или кофе?** — *chai íli kófe* — tea **or** coffee?
- **я читаю или пишу** — *ya chitáyú íli pishú* — I read **or** I write.

Offering somebody a choice is one of the first useful things you can do with a joining word, and this is the whole of it: two nouns, **или**, a rising voice.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

или is **и** with a small word welded on the end: **ли**, an old particle that carries doubt — the thing Russian puts in a sentence when the answer is not yet known.

So *and* plus *maybe* gives *or*. Once you see **и** at the front of **или**, the pair is impossible to confuse: the short one joins, the long one doubts.

Your turn

- *Say it:* чай **или** кофе? with the voice going up
- *Build:* the same two drinks joined with **и** instead — and hear the meaning turn over
- *Build:* two of your own verbs with **или** between them

Before you move on

Say “or.” (It is **или**.) Which two pieces is it built from? (**и** plus **ли**.) Which of the two, **и** or **или**, offers a choice? (The long one, **или**.) And one look back: what does **понимать** literally do to a thing? (**Takes hold of it.**)

16.4 **ни ... ни ... — refusing both halves at once**

Two verbs, and the letter one of them brought with it.

- *Recall:* **писать**, whose root means to **scratch** — the same root behind *paint* and *picture* — and the letter **ш** it taught you
- *Recall:* **братъ**, English *bear*, and the partner verb from a completely different root
- *Recall:* **или**, and the two pieces **и** and **ли** it is welded from

Grammar lens — the word that goes in front, twice

и and **или** both stand **between** the two things. This one stands **in front** of each of them, and there are two of it:

- **ни чай, ни кофе** — *ni chai, ni kófe* — **neither** tea **nor** coffee.

That shape is new. Every joining word so far has been a hinge in the middle; **ни ... ни ...** is a pair of flags planted before each half.

ни is the negator **не** with its vowel changed. Russian keeps them apart by job: **не** denies one thing, **ни** is the form that turns up when the

denial has to be said twice.

And Russian says the denial a third time, on the verb. Where English is content with *I take neither*, Russian negates the verb as well:

- **я не беру ни чай, ни сок** — *ya ne berú ni chai, ni sok* — I take neither tea nor juice.

Three negatives in one short sentence, and every one of them is required. That is not sloppiness — it is the rule.

Your turn

- *Say it:* ни чай, ни кофе
- *Say it:* the whole refusal — **я не беру ни чай, ни сок**
- *Build:* two foods you own, refused together

Before you move on

Where does **ни** stand — between the halves or in front of them? (**In front of each half.**) How many times is the negative said in **я не беру ни чай, ни сок**? (**Three.**) And one look back: which verb means to write, and which letter arrived with it? (The verb is **писать**; the letter is **ш**.)

16.5 тоже — “me too,” and “me neither”

Two verbs whose roots went a long way from home.

- *Recall:* **спрашивать**, on the root that gave Latin its word for **pray**
- *Recall:* **помогать**, built on a verb meaning **to be able** — English *may, might* and *main*

You’ll want to know first — тоже

- **тоже** — *tózhe* — **also, too**

Stress the first syllable. It is not a joining word — it does not sit between two things — but it does the same social work as one: it puts a second person or a second fact alongside the first.

- **я тоже** — *ya tózhe* — **me too**.

Two syllables, and one of the most useful answers in the language. Somebody says what they do; you say **я тоже** and you have agreed, in full, without owning a single extra verb.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

тоже is two words fused: **то** (that) and **же** (a little word meaning *the very same*). *That same* — which is what *also* has always meant. And because Russian negates by putting **не** in front of the verb, *me neither* comes out by putting **не** after **тоже**:

- **я тоже не знаю** — *ya tózhe ne znáyu* — I do **not** know **either**.

English swaps the whole word — *too* becomes *either*. Russian leaves **тоже** where it is and lets **не** do the work, which is one fewer word to learn.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **я тоже**
- *Say it:* **я тоже не знаю**
- *Build:* agree with any sentence you can already make, using **тоже**

Before you move on

Say “me too.” (That is **я тоже**.) Which two words is **тоже** built from? (**то** and **же**.) How do you turn it into “me neither”? (**Put не in front of the verb** — the word **тоже** itself does not change.) And one look back: which verb means to help, and what is buried inside it? (The verb is **помогать**, and the piece inside it means **to be able**.)

Chapter 17

But, Twice Over

Modes:  voice (3)  eyes (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 3 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can contradict with *но*, set two facts side by side with *а*, count one, name the other one, divide a fact between two people with *одни ... другой*, and close a sentence with the three marks Russian writes only at the end.

English hides two different jobs under one word, but. Russian splits them: no denies the first half, а sets two facts beside each other, and an English speaker reaches for the wrong one until the whereas test is stated out loud. другой then pays back a root the book has been holding since the friends chapter – друг, the companion, is literally the other one. The chapter closes on the page itself: Russian, unlike Spanish, opens nothing and marks only the end.

17.1 *но* — “but,” said flatly

One word from the drinks chapter, one from the verbs, and the two newest words in the book.

- *Recall:* *любить*, English *love* itself, and the letter *л* that appears from nowhere in *я люблю*
- *Recall:* *кофе*, which sailed Arabic to Turkish to Dutch to Russia, and the letter *ф* it needed
- *Recall:* *и*, and its old pointing stem, and *тоже* with *не* after it

You'll want to know first — **но**

- **но** — *no* — **but**

Two letters, and it sits between the halves exactly where **и** sat. Where **и** adds, **но** takes back:

- **я люблю чай, но не кофе** — *ya lyublyú chái, no ne kófe* — I like tea, **but not** coffee.

Notice the comma. Russian puts one in front of **но** every time, and this is the first joining word in the book that has asked for one — **и** did not.

но contradicts. Whatever the first half led you to expect, the second half denies it, and nothing softer is meant.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Almost every word this book has taken apart has handed you an English relative. **но** does not. It goes back to a bare Slavic particle, written in the oldest manuscripts with a short vowel Russian has since dropped altogether, and the etymologists disagree about where even that came from.

That is worth saying out loud rather than papering over: a language's oldest, smallest, most-used words are often the ones whose history is least secure, because they are too short to leave much evidence behind.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **я люблю чай, но не кофе**
- *Build:* the same sentence with **и** instead of **но**, and hear it stop contradicting
- *Build:* two things you do, the second one denied, with **но не**

Before you move on

Say “but.” (That is **но**.) Does a comma go in front of it? (**Yes** — always.) Did **и** want one? (**No**.) Does **но** have a secure English cousin? (**No** — the histories disagree.) And one look back: how do you say “me neither”? (**я тоже не** plus the verb.)

17.2 а — the other “but,” and the one English does not have

Two words from the food chapter, and the two joiners you already own.

- *Recall:* чай, which came overland from Mandarin through Persian while English *tea* came by sea
- *Recall:* хлеб, borrowed from Germanic before Russian was Russian, and the letter х in it
- *Recall:* и joining two whole clauses, and но taking the second one back

You’ll want to know first — а

- а — *a* — and, but — the *whereas* one

One letter again. Russian’s two commonest joining words, и and а, are both single letters, and you learned to write both of them long before anyone said they were words.

- я люблю чай, а ты любишь кофе — *ya lyublyú chai, a ty lyúbish kófe* — I like tea, and you like coffee.

Nothing is denied there. Two facts are set side by side so that the difference between them can be seen. English has no separate word for this and reaches for *but*, or *and*, or *whereas*, depending on the sentence.

Like но, а takes a comma in front of it.

Grammar lens — which of the two to reach for

Ask one question: is the second half denying the first, or standing beside it?

- но — denying. *I like tea, but not coffee.*
- а — standing beside. *I like tea, and you like coffee.*

English hides both jobs under one word, so an English speaker will reach for но far too often. The test that works: if you could say *whereas*, use а.

Your turn

- *Say it:* я люблю чай, а ты любишь кофе
- *Say it:* я люблю чай, но не кофе — and hear the two sentences part company
- *Build:* one of each, about you and somebody else

Before you move on

Which word denies, and which sets two facts side by side? (**но** denies; **а** sets side by side.) Which English word can you swap in to test for **а**? (*Whereas.*) Which two joining words are single letters? (**и** and **а**.) And one look back: which drink came overland and which came by sea? (Tea came overland as **чай**; English *tea* came by sea.)

17.3 один — “one,” and five English words that are the same word

The pair of friends, and two joining words.

- *Recall:* друг, on a root meaning **to accompany**, whose English descendants have all died out
- *Recall:* подруга, the same word with a prefix and the feminine -а
- *Recall:* или, built from и plus ли, and а the *whereas* word

You’ll want to know first — один

- один — *adín* — **one**

Stress the second syllable, and the unstressed **о** at the front says *a*, which is the reduction rule the letters chapter left you with: *a-DÍN*, never *o-DIN*.

- один друг — *adín drug* — **one friend**.

It is the first number this book has given you, and it is here for a reason: it is half of a joining pattern that arrives in the next lesson.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

Strip the strengthening piece off the front of **ОДИН** and what is left goes back to PIE ***óynos**, “one.” That single root gave English **five** separate everyday words:

- **one** — the number itself
- **an** and **a** — which are *one*, worn down to nothing
- **alone** — *all-one*
- **only** — *one-ly*

Latin took the same root and made **unus**, behind *unit*, *union* and *universe*. Russian kept it in **ОДИН** and, unlike English, never wore any of it down into an article — which is why Russian has no word for *a* at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **ОДИН** — *a-DÍN*, with the first vowel reduced
- **ОДИН друг**
- the English family — *one*, *an*, *a*, *alone*, *only* — all one root

Before you move on

Say “one.” (That is **ОДИН**.) Which syllable is stressed, and what does the first vowel say? (**The second**; the first **o** says *a*.) Name three English words from the same root. (*One*, *an*, *alone* — or *a*, or *only*.) And one look back: what does **друг**’s root mean? (**To accompany**.)

17.4 **другой** — “the other one,” and it is your word for friend

The pair of siblings, and yesterday’s number.

- *Recall:* **брат**, one of the most secure cognate sets in the whole family — *brother, frater, bhrātar*
- *Recall:* **сестра**, which completes the pair as securely as **брат** did
- *Recall:* **один**, and **ни ... ни ...** standing in front of both halves

You'll want to know first — **другой**

- **другой** — *drugóy* — **other, another**

Look at the front of it. It is **друг**, your word for *friend*, with an ending stitched on — and the meaning that came out is *the other one*.

That is not a coincidence and it is not a pun. In the oldest Slavic, a **друг** was a companion: the one who is not you, the second of a pair. Ask who *the other one* is, and the answer is the person beside you.

- **другой брат** — *drugóy brat* — the **other** brother.

Grammar lens — **один ... другой ...**

Put the two words at the front of two halves and you have the last of the joining patterns: the one that hands out a fact to each of two people.

- **один брат любит чай, другой любит кофе** — *adín brat lyúbit chai, drugóy lyúbit kófe* — **one** brother likes tea, **the other** likes coffee.

Like **ни ... ни ...**, this pattern stands in **front** of its halves rather than between them. Unlike **ни ... ни ...**, it denies nothing: it divides.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **другой** — and hear **друг** at the front of it
- *Say it:* **один брат любит чай, другой любит кофе**
- *Build:* the same split with two sisters, and two drinks of your own

Before you move on

Which word for a person is hiding inside **другой**? (It is **друг**.) Why does *companion* end up meaning *the other one*? (**Because the companion is the one who is not you.**) Which two joining patterns stand in front of their halves rather than between them? (**ни ... ни ... and один ... другой**)

17.5 . ? ! — the three marks that close a Russian sentence

Two nouns from earlier, before the page itself is the lesson.

- *Recall:* **семья**, a cousin of English *home* through the root meaning **to settle**
- *Recall:* **ухо**, inherited straight from the root behind English *ear*
- *Recall:* **тоже**, and how **не** turns it into *me neither*
- *Recall:* four of the last eight letters — **ф, ц, й, ю** — and which of the eight was the false friend

Writing — the three closing marks

Russian uses the same three marks English does, in the same three shapes:

- **.** — **точка** — the full stop, and the Russian word for it means *a dot*
- **?** — the question mark
- **!** — the exclamation mark

A statement ends with the dot. Nothing else is needed and nothing goes at the front:

брат и сестра.

Draw the dot on the writing line, not floating above it. That is the whole of the stroke, and it is the mark you will make more often than any other.

Grammar lens — Russian closes, and never opens

Spanish opens a question with an upside-down mark and closes it with the ordinary one. Russian does **not**. One mark, at the end, and nothing at the beginning:

- чай или кофе? — one mark, at the end
- ухх! — the same rule for the exclamation

So a Russian question looks exactly like a Russian statement until you reach the last character. What tells a listener it is a question is the **voice**, not the page — which is why the reading and the saying have to be practised together.

Your turn

- *Write it:* брат и сестра and close it with a dot on the line
- *Write it:* чай или кофе and close it with one question mark, nothing at the front
- *Say it:* the same two words as a statement, then as a question, and hear the only difference

Before you move on

How many marks does a Russian question take, and where? (**One**, at the end.) What does точка mean as an ordinary word? (**A dot**.) What tells a listener a Russian sentence is a question? (**The voice**.) And one look back: which pattern hands one fact to each of two people? (один ... другой ...)

Chapter 18

One Word, and a Whole Sentence After It

Modes:  voice (4)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 4 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask what, say I think that something is so, say what it is I do not know, and write the dash that stands where the missing verb to be would have been.

что is the cheapest sentence-level word in the queue: one syllable that turns думат and знат – both taught chapters ago and both stuck without an object – into verbs that carry a whole clause. It is also the word Russian spells with a ch and says with a sh in one job and not the other, and the word English splits into that and what while Russian does not. The chapter ends on the dash, which is the only mark in the language whose job is to stand in for a word the sentence never says.

18.1 ЧТО — “what,” spelled with a ч and said with a sh

Two parts of the face, and the mark that closes a question.

- *Recall:* **НОС**, inherited straight from the root behind English *nose*
- *Recall:* **ПОТ**, probably from a verb meaning **to dig** — a snout rooting the ground
- *Recall:* the one question mark at the **end**, and **НО**, the *but* with no cousin

You'll want to know first — ЧТО

- ЧТО — *shto* — **what**

Read the spelling and then read the sound again, because they disagree. The word is written with Ч, and it is said with a Ш: *shto*, never *chto*.

That is not carelessness. It is one of a small handful of Russian words where the old spelling was kept after the pronunciation moved, and it is the commonest of them, so it is worth learning as a fact about this word rather than as a rule.

ЧТО? on its own is already a whole question, and it is the plainest way to ask somebody to say a word again. A single word, a rising voice, and one mark at the end.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ЧТО goes back to PIE ***k^wid**, “what” — the same word as Latin **quid** and English **what** itself.

You have met this family before. The farewell **пока** was built on the ancient question-stem ***k^wo-**, the one behind **как** and the entire English *wh-* set. ЧТО is that family's plainest member, and the book collects the rest of it over the chapters that follow.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- ЧТО — *shto*, with a Ш sound and a Ч on the page
- it as a one-word question, voice rising
- the three you own — **как**, **пока**, **что** — one ancient stem

Before you move on

Say “what.” (It is ЧТО, said *shto*.) Which letter is on the page and which sound comes out? (Ч on the page, Ш in the mouth.) Which two words you already own belong to the same ancient family? (They are **как** and **пока**.) And one look back: which part of the face is a straight inheritance from the root behind *nose*? (That is **нос**.)

18.2 ЧТО as a hinge — one word carrying a whole sentence

Two more of the body, and the newest word in the book.

- *Recall:* **глаз**, which began as slang for a **ball** and pushed the true eye-word out of the language
- *Recall:* **сердце**, English *heart* barely disguised, and the letter **ц** inside it
- *Recall:* **что** said *shto*, and **а**, the *whereas* word
- *Recall:* the first letters you wrote — **р с н б д е т** — and the one that looks like an English R and is not one

Grammar lens — the same word, doing the other job

Put **что** between two clauses instead of at the front of a question, and it stops asking and starts carrying:

- **я знаю, что ты понимаешь** — *ya znáyu, shto ty panimáyesh* — I know **that** you understand.

Three things to notice, and the third is the one to hold on to.

- The **comma is compulsory**. Russian puts one in front of **что** every single time, with no exceptions of the kind English allows.
- The English *that* can be dropped — *I know you understand* is perfectly good English. The Russian **что** cannot. Leave it out and the sentence breaks.
- As a joining word it is said the way it is **spelled**: *chto*, not *shto*. Same letters, two jobs, two pronunciations.

English plays the same trick, twice: *what* and *that* both began as question words and one of them settled into this job.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **я знаю, что ты понимаешь**
- *Say it:* **что** twice — as the question *shto*, then as the hinge *chto*

- *Build:* я знаю, что plus any sentence you can already make

Before you move on

May the Russian **что** be dropped the way English drops *that*? (**No** — never.) What must always stand in front of it? (**A comma.**) Which of the two jobs is said *shto*? (**The question.**) And one look back: which eye-word did **глаз** push out of everyday Russian? (The word **око**, which survives inside **очки**, “little eyes.”)

18.3 я думаю, что ... — saying that an opinion is yours

The two farewells, formal and casual, and the number from the last chapter.

- *Recall:* до свидания, literally **until the re-seeing**, with **до** taking the genitive after it
- *Recall:* пока, whose root is ancient and whose use as a goodbye is a hundred years old
- *Recall:* один, and the five English words its root became
- *Recall:* как вас зовут?, and the choice between **ты** and **вы** inside it

Grammar lens — the opinion frame

думать has been in this book since the verbs of the mind, and until this chapter it had nothing to think **about** — no object bigger than a single word could be attached to it. **что** fixes that in one move:

- я думаю, что ... — *ya dúmayu, shto ...* — **I think that ...**

Whatever you can already say in Russian, you can now say you **think** it. That is a genuine step up rather than one more phrase: it turns every sentence you own into an opinion you have marked as your own, which is the difference between reporting a fact and taking a position.

- я думаю, что ты понимаешь — *ya dúmayu, shto ty panimáyesh* — I think that you understand.

The comma before **что** is compulsory here as everywhere.

Your turn

- *Say it:* я думаю, что ты понимаешь
- *Build:* take any sentence you own and put я думаю, что in front of it
- *Build:* the same sentence without the frame, and hear it turn back into a flat claim

Before you move on

Say “I think that you understand.” (That is я думаю, что ты понимаешь.) What had думать been missing until now? (Anything to think about that was bigger than one word.) Does the comma stay? (Yes — always.) And one look back: what does до свидания literally say? (Until the re-seeing.)

18.4 я не знаю, что ... — admitting it, in a whole sentence

Two more farewells, and the divider from the last chapter.

- *Recall:* до скорого, built on a word meaning **quick** with no English cousin at all
- *Recall:* до завтра, and завтра built on the root behind English *east* and *aurora*
- *Recall:* другой, and the split один ... другой ...

Grammar lens — the other frame, and the negative one

знать takes что exactly as думать does, and the negative is where it earns its place:

- я знаю, что ты понимаешь — I know **that** you understand.
- я не знаю, что ты говоришь — *ya ne znáyu, shto ty gavarísh* — I do not know **what** you are saying.

Read those two English translations again. The Russian word is **the same word both times**, and English needs *that* in the first and *what*

in the second. Russian makes no such split, which is one distinction fewer for you to get wrong.

The second sentence is the useful one. Until now this book could say **я не знаю** and stop — a flat shrug. With **что** you can say what it is you do not know, which is what turns an admission into something the other person can act on.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **я не знаю, что ты говоришь**
- *Say it:* the same sentence without **не**, and hear it turn into a claim
- *Build:* **я не знаю, что** plus anything you own

Before you move on

Say “I do not know what you are saying.” (That is **я не знаю, что ты говоришь**.) How many Russian words cover English’s *that* and *what* here? (**One** — **что** does both.) Which two verbs now take a whole sentence after them? (**думать** and **знать**.) And one look back: which farewell is built on the word for *morning*? (That is **до завтра**.)

18.5 — the dash that stands where the verb would have been

The last two farewells, and the marks from the previous writing lesson.

- *Recall:* **до встречи**, built from **into** plus **with** on a root with no secure English cousin
- *Recall:* **спокойной ночи**, whose **ночь** is one of the most secure cognates in the family and whose **покой** is the root of English *quiet*
- *Recall:* the dot at the end, and the single question mark
- *Recall:* three letters from the middle of the alphabet — **ж**, **ч**, and the soft sign that makes no sound at all

Writing — one long stroke on the line

Russian's dash is **тире**, and it is a genuinely long mark — longer than an English hyphen, with a space on each side of it:

брат — друг

Draw it at the height of the small letters, not at the top and not on the baseline, and give it the length of about two letters.

The mark is a French loan, **tiret**, borrowed whole. What Russian does with it is not French at all.

Grammar lens — the mark for a verb that is not there

You learned early that Russian says *I am a student* with no verb in the middle: the present tense of **быть** is absent altogether. On the page, that absence gets a mark of its own.

Where the sentence would have needed **is**, and both halves are nouns, a Russian writer puts a dash:

сестра — подруга

A sister is a friend. There is no verb in that sentence and there never will be. The dash is doing its work — and it is the only punctuation mark in the language whose job is to stand in for a word.

Say it aloud and there is a small pause exactly where the dash sits. The mark is not decoration; it is written-down silence.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **сестра — подруга**, with a space on each side of the dash
- *Say it:* the same sentence, and put a small pause where the dash is
- *Write it:* one sentence of your own with two nouns and a dash between them

Before you move on

What word is the dash standing in for? (**The verb to be**, which Russian does not say in the present.) How is it drawn? (**Long, on the level of the small letters, with a space each side.**) And one look back: which farewell means *calm* plus *night*? (That is

спокойной ночи.)

Chapter 19

Why, Because, When

Modes:  voice (3)  eyes (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask why and when in one word each, give a reason with potomu chto, put two things at the same moment with kogda, and write the comma Russian requires at the seam of every subordinate clause.

The question family the book opened at poka closes here at five members – kak, kakoy, chto, pochemu, kogda – all one ancient stem, and two of them do double duty as joiners without changing a letter. potomu chto is pochemu with the question-stem swapped for the pointing-stem, so the answer is made out of the question. The chapter ends by stating the one Russian punctuation rule that has no exceptions, which is only sayable once the track owns the subordinators it applies to.

19.1 почему — “why,” which is really “after what”

The two nursery words, and the newest mark on the page.

- *Recall:* **мама**, which is not inherited from anywhere — every language builds it out of the first sounds a baby makes
- *Recall:* **папа**, and the rule that a word can wear a feminine ending and still be a man
- *Recall:* the dash standing where the missing verb would be

- *Recall:* **я** and **ты**, English *thou*, and why **вы** is the safer one

You'll want to know first — почему

- **почему** — *pachemú* — **why**

Three syllables, stress right at the end: *pa-che-MÚ*. It is the longest question word in this book and the easiest to take apart.

- **почему?** — on its own, it is a complete question.

One word, one rising voice, one mark at the end, and you have asked for a reason about anything the other person has said. That is worth having before you can give a reason yourself.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

почему is **по** (“after, along”) plus a case-form of **что**.

- **по + чему = почему** — literally, *after what*

So the question family you opened in the last chapter has produced its third member: **как**, **что**, and now **почему**. All three are the same ancient stem wearing different endings, and there are more still to come.

English does exactly the same trick and then forgets it did: *wherefore* is *for-what*, and *therefore* is *for-that*. Asking *why* by asking *after what* is not a Russian oddity — it is what most of Europe does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **почему** — *pa-che-MÚ*, stress at the end
- it as a one-word question after anything you say
- the three of the family — **как**, **что**, **почему**

Before you move on

Say “why.” (That is **почему**.) Which two pieces is it built from? (**по** plus a form of **что**.) What does it literally say? (**After what**.) And one look back: which word is built out of the first sounds a baby makes rather than inherited? (That is **мама**.)

19.2 ПОТОМУ ЧТО — the answer, made out of the question

The two formal parent-words, and yesterday’s question.

- *Recall:* **мать**, straight from the root behind English *mother*
- *Recall:* **отец**, which is **not** the father-root at all but a nursery word for *daddy* that won
- *Recall:* **почему**, and **тоже**

You’ll want to know first — ПОТОМУ ЧТО

- **ПОТОМУ ЧТО** — *patamú shto* — **because**

Set the two words side by side and the shape gives itself away:

- **почему** — *after what* — the question
- **ПОТОМУ** — *after that* — the answer

Russian answers *why* by taking the same word, swapping the question-stem for the pointing-stem, and adding **что** to hang the reason on. **почему** asks; **по тому** points at the reason; **что** carries the sentence that names it.

Grammar lens — where the halves go, and where the comma goes

The thing that happened comes first; the reason follows:

- **я не читаю, ПОТОМУ ЧТО я не понимаю** — *ya ne chitáyu, patamú shto ya ne panimáyu* — I am not reading, **because** I do not understand.

The comma stands before **потому**, not between **потому** and **что** — the two words are one joining word and nothing may come between them.

и went bare; **но** and **а** each took a comma; this one takes a comma too. A shape is starting to show through those four, and the writing lesson at the end of this chapter is where it gets stated.

Your turn

- *Say it:* я не читаю, потому что я не понимаю
- *Say it:* почему? and then answer yourself with потому что
- *Build:* any sentence you own, a comma, **потому что**, and a reason

Before you move on

Say “because.” (That is **потому что**.) What is the one-word difference between it and *why*? (**Question-stem** against **pointing-stem** — *after what* against *after that*.) Where does the comma go? (**Before** **потому**, never inside the pair.) And one look back: which formal parent-word is really a nursery word that won? (That is **отец**.)

19.3 когда — “when,” and the family’s fifth member

Two things from the fridge, and the newest joining word.

- *Recall:* **молоко**, on the root behind English *milk*
- *Recall:* **сыр**, built on a word meaning **sour** — cheese named after what happens to the milk
- *Recall:* **потому что**, and **один**
- *Recall:* **меня зовут** — the they-form with nobody in it, and the object shape of **я**

You'll want to know first — **когда**

- **когда** — *kagdá* — **when**

Two syllables, stress on the second. Read the spelling and say the sound carefully, because they disagree again: the unstressed **о** at the front says *a*, exactly as it does in **один**.

- **когда?** — a complete question all by itself.

You now have three one-word questions: **что?**, **почему?** and **когда?** — each of them a whole turn in a conversation, none of them needing a verb.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

когда is the same ancient question-stem as **как**, **что** and **почему**, this time with an old time-ending welded on.

That makes four. Look at the front of each one and the family resemblance is on the page:

- **как** and **когда** — both beginning with the same **к**
- **что** — the same stem, worn down further, which is why the letters no longer match
- **почему** — the stem again, wearing **по** in front

Learning one question word in Russian is nearly learning the set.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **когда** — *kag-DÁ*, with the first vowel reduced
- the three one-word questions in a row — **что? почему? когда?**
- the four of the family — **как, что, почему, когда**

Before you move on

Say “when.” (That is **когда**.) What does its first vowel say? (**A**, because it is unstressed.) How many members of the question family do you now own? (**Four**.) And one look back: what does the word behind **сыр** mean? (**Sour**.)

19.4 **когда** as a hinge — two things happening at once

The last two things on the food list.

- *Recall:* **сок**, a native word with no secure English cousin at all
- *Recall:* **суп**, borrowed from French, and recent enough that Russians still feel it as a loan
- *Recall:* **другой**, and the split **один ... другой ...**
- *Recall:* **очень приятно**, its root meaning **friend**, and the sentence with no verb in the middle

Grammar lens — the question word, joining

ЧТО asked a question and then hung a clause under a verb without changing a letter. **когда** does exactly the same:

- **когда я читаю, я думаю** — *kagdá ya chitáyuy, ya dúmayu* — **when** I read, I think.

This time the joining word may go **first**. Russian is happy to lead with the *when*-half and follow with the main one — and when it does, the comma sits between the two halves rather than before the joining word. Turn the halves round and the comma travels with the seam:

- **я думаю, когда я читаю** — I think **when** I read.

Either order is correct and both mean the same thing. What never changes is that there is a comma at the seam.

Your turn

- *Say it:* когда я читаю, я думаю
- *Say it:* the same sentence with the halves the other way round
- *Build:* two things you do at the same time, joined with **когда**

Before you move on

May **когда** stand at the front of the whole sentence? (**Yes** — and then the comma goes at the seam between the halves.) Which other word you own asks a question and joins clauses without changing? (That is **что** — and both of them come off the same ancient question-stem.) And one look back: which food word is a French loan? (That is **суп**.)

19.5 , — the comma, and the rule with no exceptions

The marks you already draw, and two things they were drawn around.

- *Recall:* the dot on the line, the single question mark at the end, and the long dash with a space each side
- *Recall:* я не знаю, что ... — and the pattern ни ... ни ...
- *Recall:* all eight of the last letters — а о г х ф ц й ю — and the one vowel among them that says something else when it is not stressed

Writing — the hooked-back stroke

The comma is **запятая**, and the name is a description of the stroke: it means roughly *the one hooked back*. Where **точка** is named for what it looks like — a dot — this one is named for what your hand does.

Start on the writing line, press, and pull the tail down and back to the left. It sits **below** the line, which is the whole difference from the dot.

,

Draw ten of them in a row and watch that every tail goes the same way.

Grammar lens — the rule that has no exceptions

English commas are a matter of taste and half of what people argue about is optional. Russian's central comma rule is not optional and has no exceptions:

A comma stands at the seam of every subordinate clause.

Everything that hangs one clause under another takes one — **что, потому что, когда** — every time, in every sentence, whether or not a reader would pause there.

The words that join two equal halves are the other case, and they split:

- **и** — no comma
- **но** and **а** — comma, always

So one mark, three rules, and only the first of them is absolute. It is worth learning as a single fact because it is the one piece of Russian punctuation an examiner can mark wrong without any argument about style.

Your turn

Write these out:

- ten commas in a row, every tail below the line
- **я читаю и понимаю** — and put no comma in it
- **я не читаю, потому что я не понимаю** — and put one in

Before you move on

Which of the joining words you own never takes a comma? (That is **и**.) Which take one always? (**но, а**, and everything that hangs a clause underneath — **что, потому что, когда**.) Where does the tail of the comma go? (**Below the line**.)

Chapter 20

The Verb That Takes Another Verb

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) 👁 eyes (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I want, put a bare infinitive after it with nothing in between, give the purpose of an action with chtoby, say what I can and cannot do, and state an obligation in a sentence with no subject at all.

Fourteen infinitives had been taught and not one of them had ever stood after another verb, because the track had no khochu, mogu or nado to put one after: the pattern was missing, not the words. moch had been worse off than missing – the pomogat lesson spelled out that the verb is po- plus moch and then never taught moch, so the reader had been reading it for fifteen chapters. nado closes the chapter on a sentence with no subject in it, which is the same freedom as the absent copula the track already teaches.

20.1 ХОТЕТЬ — “to want,” the verb the book has been missing

Reach back four chapters, and then further.

- *Recall:* и, the one-letter joiner, and its old pointing stem
- *Recall:* ЗНАТЬ, English *know*, and the -y / -ю that marks the *I* form of almost every Russian verb
- *Recall:* the comma at the seam of every clause hung under another

- *Recall:* почему, which is по plus a form of что, and я думаю, что ...

You'll want to know first — хотеть

- хотеть — *khatét* — **to want**
- я хочу — *ya khachú* — **I want**
- ты хочешь — *ty khóchesh* — **you want**

Look at the *I* form. The **т** of the infinitive has turned into a **ч** — the same consonant swap you met in the first verbs — and the ending is the familiar **-у**.

- я хочу чай — *ya khachú chai* — I want tea.

This book has taught you to say what you do, what you know, what you understand and what you love. Until this line it could not say what you **want**, which is the first thing a traveller needs and the last thing this book supplied.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

хотеть is native Slavic and stops there. There is no secure Latin cousin, no Germanic one, no English one — the etymologists trace it inside the Slavic family and no further.

That is the third time this book has had to say so, after **но** and **сок**, and the pattern behind it is worth noticing: the words a language never borrows are the ones it needs every day.

Your turn

- *Say it:* хотеть, then я хочу, and hear the **т** turn into **ч**
- *Say it:* я хочу чай
- *Build:* name a drink or a food you own and say you want it

Before you move on

Say “I want tea.” (That is я хочу чай.) Which letter changes between хотеть and хочу? (The **т** becomes **ч**.) Does this verb have

an English cousin? (**No** — it is native Slavic and traceable no further.) And one look back: which verb means *to know*, and what is its English cousin? (That is **знать**, and the cousin is *know*.)

20.2 я хочу читать — two verbs in a row, and no word between them

Yesterday's verb, and one from a long way back.

- *Recall*: **хотеть**, with no cousin outside Slavic, and **я хочу**
- *Recall*: **говорить**, which is **not** related to *govern*, and the two verb families Russian sorts its endings into
- *Recall*: **и** joining two whole clauses
- *Recall*: **потому что**, and the comma that stands in front of the pair
- *Recall*: **быть** and **жить**, the first two verbs, and the root behind **жить** that means **quick**

Grammar lens — the infinitive finally has somewhere to stand

This book has taught you fourteen verbs, and every one of them arrived in its **infinitive** — **читать, писать, говорить**, the dictionary form ending in **-ть**. Until now that form has had nothing to do except be the name of the verb.

Put it straight after a finite verb and it goes to work:

- **я хочу читать** — *ya khachú chítát* — I want **to read**.
- **я хочу писать** — *ya khachú písát* — I want **to write**.

Count the words between the two verbs: **none**. English needs *to*; Russian needs nothing at all. The second verb stays in the form you learned it in.

That single fact turns every infinitive in this book into something you can say you want to do, which is fourteen new sentences from one pattern.

Your turn

- *Say it:* я хочу читать
- *Say it:* я хочу говорить
- *Build:* run through the verbs you own, each one after я хочу

Before you move on

What goes between the two verbs in я хочу читать? (**Nothing** — Russian has no word for English’s *to*.) Which form does the second verb take? (**The infinitive**, exactly as the book taught it.) And one look back: is говорить related to English *govern*? (**No** — the resemblance is an accident.)

20.3 чтобы — “in order to,” which is что wearing a wish

The very first word in the book, and one of the joiners.

- *Recall:* привет, the word you opened with
- *Recall:* понимать, whose root means **to take hold of**
- *Recall:* или, built from и plus ли, and the comma at every seam
- *Recall:* видеть, and когда on the same ancient question-stem as как
- *Recall:* видеть’s cousin *wit*, the consonant that swaps in я вижу, and the г that is sometimes said as a в

Grammar lens — a purpose is a wish with что on the front

- чтобы — *shtóby* — **in order to, so that**

Two pieces, both nearly yours: что, and бы, the small particle Russian puts on anything that is wished for rather than done. A purpose, in Russian, is literally a *that*-clause said in the mood of a wish.

Put an infinitive after it and you have your reason for doing something:

- я читаю, чтобы понимать — *ya chitáyu, shtóby panimát* — I read **in order to** understand.

The comma before **чтобы** is compulsory, like every subordinator's. The verb after it is the infinitive, exactly as after **хочу** — so the pattern you learned in the last lesson is doing a second job here without changing.

Note the stress: **чтобы** is stressed on its **first** syllable, unlike **что**, which has only one.

Your turn

- *Say it:* я читаю, чтобы понимать
- *Say it:* **чтобы** with the stress on the front — *SHTÓ-by*
- *Build:* something you do, a comma, **чтобы**, and the reason you do it

Before you move on

Which two pieces make **чтобы**? (**что** plus **бы**.) What form of the verb follows it? (**The infinitive**.) Which syllable carries the stress? (**The first**.) And one look back: what was the very first word in this book? (That was **привет**.)

20.4 МОЧЬ — “can,” and you have been reading it for fifteen chapters

Two verbs from the early chapters, and one pattern.

- *Recall:* **идти**, the one-way verb whose past comes from a different root
- *Recall:* **помогать**, and the fact that its second half was a verb meaning **to be able**
- *Recall:* **ни ... ни ...**, standing in front of both halves
- *Recall:* **когда** joining two clauses, with the comma at the seam

You'll want to know first — МОЧЬ

- **мочь** — *moch* — to be able, can

- я могу — *ya magú* — I can
- ты можешь — *ty mózhesh* — you can

You have seen this word already. When the book took **помогать** apart it said in so many words that the verb is **по-** plus **мочь**, “to be able” — and then moved on without ever giving **мочь** a lesson of its own. It is here now.

Like **хотеть**, it takes a bare infinitive after it:

- я могу читать — *ya magú chítát* — I can read.
- я не могу идти — *ya ne magú idtí* — I cannot go.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

мочь is PIE ***mag^h-**, “to be able, to have power” — and the English descendants are three of the plainest words in the language:

- **may** — permission, which began as ability
- **might** — both the verb and the noun meaning *strength*
- **main**, as in *with might and main*

So **я могу** and *I may* are, underneath, the same sentence. Russian kept the whole verb; English wore it down into a modal that no longer conjugates at all.

Your turn

- *Say it:* я могу читать
- *Say it:* я не могу идти
- *Build:* something you can do, then the same thing denied

Before you move on

Say “I can read.” (That is **я могу читать**.) Which taught verb has this one inside it? (That is **помогать** — **по-** plus **мочь**.) Name two English words from the same root. (*May, might* — or *main*.) What form follows it? (**The infinitive**, with nothing in between.)

20.5 надо — a whole sentence with nobody in it

The verb of the mind, and the two newest words.

- *Recall:* думать, the verb inside the name of the Russian parliament, and its partner verb
- *Recall:* мочь, English *may* and *might*, and тоже with не after it

You'll want to know first — надо

- надо — *náda* — it is necessary, one must

Stress the first syllable; the о at the end is unstressed and says *a*, so the word comes out *NÁ-da*.

Like хотеть and мочь, it is followed by a bare infinitive:

- надо читать — *náda chítát* — one must read.

Grammar lens — the sentence with no subject

Look at надо читать again and count the people in it. There are none.

There is no я, no ты, and no verb agreeing with anybody. English cannot do this: it has to invent a subject — *one* must read, *it* is necessary, *you* should read — because an English sentence is not allowed to go without one.

Russian is allowed. надо is an **impersonal** word: the obligation is stated and left hanging in the air, belonging to nobody in particular. This is the same freedom you met when the present tense of быть turned out to be missing altogether — Russian is content to leave out what it does not need.

Naming the person who must do it needs a case this book has not opened yet, so for now the impersonal form is the whole of it — and it is genuinely useful on its own.

Your turn

- *Say it:* надо читать — *NÁ-da*, first syllable
- *Say it:* надо думать
- *Build:* three things one must do, using verbs you own

Before you move on

How many people are named in **надо читать**? (**None** — it is impersonal.) What must English add that Russian does not? (**A subject** — *one, it, or you.*) Which other missing word does that remind you of? (**The present tense of быть**, which Russian also leaves out.) And one look back: which council is named after the verb *to think*? (**The Duma.**)

Chapter 21

Excuse Me, and Say It Again

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can apologise in both the light and the heavy way, open a request to a stranger, ask for a repeat, ask somebody to speak slowly, and ask for help.

The track could say ya ne ponimayu and ya ne znayu in full and had no word for sorry, no way to ask for a repeat and no way to open a request to a stranger: it could report a failure and do nothing about it. Five words close that. The chapter also names the -ite ending, which turns three words the reader would otherwise memorise separately into one set – and the last of the five, pomogite, is built entirely out of parts the reader already had.

21.1 ИЗВИНИТЕ — the word the book has been missing since page one

The two courtesy words you have had since the first chapter, and a verb.

- *Recall:* понимать, on a root meaning **to take hold of**
- *Recall:* спасибо, and чтобы with an infinitive after it
- *Recall:* но, the contradicting *but* with no secure English cousin
- *Recall:* надо with nobody in the sentence, and хотеть, which has no cousin outside Slavic

You'll want to know first — ИЗВИНИТЕ

- ИЗВИНИТЕ — *izvinít'ye* — **excuse me, sorry**

Four syllables, stress on the third: *iz-vi-NÍ-tye*. It is the single most useful word left in this book, and it does two separate jobs:

- **an apology**, when you have got something wrong
- **an opening**, when you want to speak to somebody you do not know

The second is the one to notice. A Russian does not walk up to a stranger and start; they say **ИЗВИНИТЕ** first, every time. It is the equivalent of *excuse me* at the front of a question, and without it the question can sound abrupt in a way you did not intend.

The ending **-ите** is the polite one, the same **вы** that **здравствуйте** carries. Said to a friend it would be **ИЗВИНИ**, without the **те** — but reach for the long one by default, exactly as you do with the greeting.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ИЗВИНИТЕ is **из-** (“out of”) plus **вина** (“guilt, fault”), with the polite ending on the end.

So the word literally asks the other person to take you **out of the blame** — which is a real picture, still visible in the Russian, and one English threw away when *excuse* stopped meaning anything at all on its own.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **ИЗВИНИТЕ** — *iz-vi-NÍ-tye*, stress on the third
- **ИЗВИНИТЕ, пожалуйста** — the two courtesy words together
- it as an opening, before anything else you know how to ask

Before you move on

Say “excuse me.” (That is **ИЗВИНИТЕ**.) Name its two jobs. (**An apology**, and **the opening of a request to a stranger**.) What does it literally ask for? (**To be taken out of the guilt**.) And one

look back: what does **понимать** literally do? (**Takes hold.**)

21.2 простите — the heavier apology

Yesterday's word, and a verb from long before it.

- *Recall:* **читать**, which sits with the words for **honour** and **number** on a root meaning *to count, to heed*
- *Recall:* that Russian has no separate *I am reading*
- *Recall:* **извините**, and **хотеть**
- *Recall:* **а**, the *whereas* word, and the test that tells it from **но**

You'll want to know first — простите

- **простите** — *prastít'ye* — **forgive me**

Same shape as yesterday's word, same polite **-ите** ending, and the informal **прости** sitting behind it in exactly the same way.

- **извините** asks to be **let off**
- **простите** asks to be **forgiven**

Both come out as *sorry* in English and they are not interchangeable in Russian.

Why it's said this way

What separates them is **weight**, not politeness — both words are polite.

- **извините** for the small thing: bumping somebody, interrupting, opening a request to a stranger. Nobody is really being blamed.
- **простите** for the real one: you have let somebody down and you are asking them to release you from it.

Use **простите** for a trodden foot and you sound as though you had wrecked their week. Use **извините** after a genuine wrong and you sound as though it did not matter.

This is the same pair-with-a-rule that **здравствуйте** and **привет** form for greetings — Russian keeps a formal and a casual option side by side and expects you to choose. The difference here is that the choice is about the size of the offence rather than about who you are talking to. The etymology carries the same weight: **простите** is built on **простой**, *simple, straight* — to forgive is to make something straight again.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **простите** — *pras-TÍ-tye*
- *Say it:* both words in turn, and say what each is for
- *Build:* pick the right one for stepping on a foot, and for missing a meeting

Before you move on

Which of the two is the heavier apology? (That is **простите**.) What separates the two? (**The size of the offence**, not politeness.) What does the root of **простите** mean? (**Simple, straight** — to forgive is to make straight.) And one look back: which greeting is the formal one? (That is **здравствуйте**.)

21.3 повторите — asking for it again

A verb from the hand chapter, and yesterday's apology.

- *Recall:* **писать**, on a root meaning **to scratch** — the same root as *paint* — and the letter **ш**
- *Recall:* a bare infinitive after **я хочу**, with nothing in between
- *Recall:* **простите**, the heavier of the two apologies
- *Recall:* **один**, whose root became English *one, an, a, alone* and *only*
- *Recall:* **чтобы**, the purpose word built from **что** plus **бы**

You'll want to know first — повторите

- повторите — *paftarítye* — say it again, repeat it

Until now the book could report a failure and do nothing about it. Я не понимаю said something had gone wrong; it did not ask anybody to change anything. This word does.

- извините, повторите, пожалуйста — *izvinítye, paftarítye, pazhálusta* — sorry, please say that again.

Three words you own, in the order a Russian says them: the opening, the request, the politeness. That is a complete repair turn.

Grammar lens — the -ите ending is an order

Three words in two lessons now end in -ите: извините, простите, повторите. That is not a coincidence and it is worth naming. -ите is Russian's polite **imperative** — the ending that turns a verb into an instruction addressed to вы. Drop the -те and you get the ты form: извини, прости, повтори.

So the two apologies were never nouns. They were commands all along, and seeing the ending makes them a set instead of three things to memorise.

The word itself is по- plus втор-, *second* — the same втор- in вторник, Tuesday, the second day. To repeat is to do a thing a second time.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- повторите, пожалуйста
- the whole turn — извините, повторите, пожалуйста
- the three -ите words in a row, and hear the ending they share

Before you move on

Ask somebody to say it again, politely. (That is повторите, пожалуйста.) What does the ending -ите do? (Turns a verb into a polite instruction addressed to вы.) Which day of the

week shares a piece with this word? (The day is **вторник**, Tuesday, the second day.) And one look back: which letter did **писать** teach you? (That is **ш**.)

21.4 медленно — asking for it slower

A verb from the hand chapter, and the divider from earlier.

- *Recall:* **братъ**, English *bear*, whose partner verb comes from a completely different root
- *Recall:* **другой**, the split **один ... другой ...**, and **повторите**

You'll want to know first — медленно

- **медленно** — *myédlen-na* — slowly

Stress the first syllable, and let the two unstressed **о** and **е** at the end soften: *MYÉD-len-na*.

Its shape is worth a moment. Russian makes an adverb by putting **-о** on the end of a describing word, and that is the whole rule — no ending to agree with anything, nothing to change. It is the simplest piece of grammar in this chapter and one of the most productive in the language.

Grammar lens — the second repair move

Take **говорить**, put the polite **-ите** on it, and add the adverb:

- **говорите медленно, пожалуйста** — *gavarít'ye myédlen-na, pazhálusta* — please speak slowly.

That is a genuinely different move from **повторите**. Asking for a repeat gets you the same sentence at the same speed; asking for **медленно** changes what the other person is doing. A listener who owns both can steer a conversation instead of only reporting on it. The repair kit is now complete, and it is four words long: **извините, повторите, говорите медленно, пожалуйста**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- медленно — *MYÉD-len-na*
- говорите медленно, пожалуйста
- the whole kit in order — sorry, again, slower, please

Before you move on

Ask somebody to speak slowly. (That is **говорите медленно, пожалуйста.**) How does Russian make an adverb? (**By putting -o on the end.**) What does asking for **медленно** get you that a repeat does not? (**A change in what the speaker is doing**, not the same sentence again.) And one look back: which verb means *to take*? (That is **брать.**)

21.5 ПОМОГИТЕ — the request you already knew how to make

The asking verb, and yesterday's adverb.

- *Recall:* спрашивать, on the root that gave Latin its word for **pray**
- *Recall:* говорите медленно, and тоже
- *Recall:* the dot on the line, and the single question mark at the end

You'll want to know first — ПОМОГИТЕ

- ПОМОГИТЕ — *pomagítye* — **help me**

There is almost nothing new in this word, and that is the point of putting it here. You have had **помогать** since the verbs of the hand. You learned **-ите** two lessons ago. Put them together and you have the most important single word in any emergency, built entirely out of parts you owned already.

- ИЗВИНИТЕ, ПОМОГИТЕ, ПОЖАЛУЙСТА — *izvinítye, pomagítye, pazhálusta* — excuse me, please help.

Say it once out loud. A course that can greet, thank, apologise, ask for a repeat, ask for slower speech and ask for help has covered every move a beginner needs to survive a conversation that goes wrong — and every one of those moves arrived in this chapter or the two behind it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **помогите** — *pa-ma-GÍ-tye*
- **извините, помогите, пожалуйста**
- the four **-ите** words together — excuse, forgive, repeat, help

Before you move on

Ask for help, politely and completely. (That is **извините, помогите, пожалуйста**.) What two things is **помогите** made of, and did you own both? (**помогать** and the polite **-ите** — yes, both.) And one look back: which verb sits inside **помогать**, and what are its English cousins? (The verb is **мочь**; the cousins are *may*, *might* and *main*.)

Chapter 22

The Words That Ask, and the Word That Points Back

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 👁️ eyes (1) 🖐️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask who, which and how many, hang a whole clause onto a noun with kotoryy, and both ask and embed a yes-or-no question with li.

The question family the book opened at poka closes here at seven members, all one ancient stem: kto, chto, kakoy, kak, kogda, pochemu, skolko. Two of them supply their own answers by swapping the question-stem for the pointing-stem. kotoryy is the eighth relative of the same root and the one that does the most work – it is how a Russian noun gets described at any length. li ends the chapter by turning out to have been inside ili since the joining chapter.

22.1 КТО — “who,” the twin of ЧТО

The friend, the helping verb, and yesterday’s request.

- *Recall:* помогать, and помогите with the polite -ите on it
- *Recall:* друг, on the root meaning **to accompany**
- *Recall:* надо, the sentence with nobody in it
- *Recall:* извините, which literally asks to be taken **out of the guilt**

You'll want to know first — КТО

- КТО — *kto* — **who**

Three letters, one syllable, and — unlike ЧТО — it is said **exactly as it is written**. No Ш ambush here.

The two words are a matched pair, and Russian keeps the division sharper than English does:

- КТО asks about **people**
- ЧТО asks about **things**
- КТО? on its own is a complete question, exactly as ЧТО? is.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

КТО is PIE ***k^wis**; ЧТО is PIE ***k^wid**. The same stem, twice, with two different endings — one for people and one for things — and the split is older than Russian, older than Latin, older than English.

Latin kept the same pair as **quis** and **quid**. English kept **who** and **what**. Russian kept КТО and ЧТО. Three languages, one ancient distinction, none of them has ever let it go.

That is now six of the family: как, какой, что, почему, когда, кто.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- КТО and ЧТО in turn, and hear that only one of them lies about its spelling
- КТО? as a whole question
- the six of the family in a row

Before you move on

Say “who.” (That is КТО.) Which of КТО and ЧТО is said as it is spelled? (КТО is; ЧТО is not.) Which asks about people? (КТО.) Name the Latin pair that matches them. (*Quis* and *quid*.) And one look back: how do you ask for help? (That is ПОМОГИТЕ.)

22.2 какой — “which,” and the word the book already told you about

The verb of the heart, and two recent words.

- *Recall:* любить, English *love* itself, and the л that appears from nowhere in я люблю
- *Recall:* простите, the heavier apology, and кто
- *Recall:* что hanging a whole clause under a verb, and the rule that tells извините from простите

You’ll want to know first — какой

- какой — *kakóy* — **which, what kind of**

You have been told about this word once before, and by a farewell. When the book took пока apart it said that the old pronoun inside it became **какой** — so the word has been named in this book for six chapters without ever being taught. It is taught now.

Look at its ending and compare it with другой. The same -ой does the same job in both: it turns a stem into a word that stands in front of a noun.

- какой чай ты любишь? — *kakóy chai ty lyúbish* — **which** tea do you like?

Where что asks *what thing*, какой asks *which one of these* — and it is the natural partner of или when you are offering a choice out loud.

Your turn

- *Say it:* какой — *ka-KÓY*, stress on the end
- *Say it:* какой чай ты любишь?
- *Build:* offer a choice with или, then ask the same thing with какой

Before you move on

Say “which.” (That is **какой**.) Which farewell already told you about this word? (That was **пока**.) Which other word you own ends the same way and stands in front of a noun? (That is **другой**.)

What is the difference between **что** and **какой**? (**что** asks *what thing*; **какой** asks *which one*.)

22.3 СКОЛЬКО — “how many,” and the family assembled

The two siblings, and two recent words.

- *Recall:* **брат** and **сестра**, the securest cognate pair in the book
- *Recall:* **медленно**, and **какой**
- *Recall:* how a Russian noun’s ending tells you its gender
- *Recall:* **я думаю, что ...**, and **повторите** with its polite **-ите**

You’ll want to know first — СКОЛЬКО

- **СКОЛЬКО** — *skólka* — **how many, how much**

Stress the first syllable; the final **о** is unstressed and says *a*.

English splits this question in two and makes you choose: *how many* for things you can count, *how much* for things you cannot. Russian does not. One word covers both, and the noun after it changes shape instead — which is a case this book has not opened, so for now keep to the question on its own.

- **СКОЛЬКО?** — a complete question, like the rest of the family.

The smallest answer it can take is **ОДИН**, the number whose root became English *one, an, a, alone* and *only*.

Its answer word is **СТОЛЬКО**, “that many” — the same swap you saw when **почему** became **потому**: question-stem out, pointing-stem in.

Grammar lens — seven words, one stem

The whole set is now yours, and every member of it is the same ancient question-stem wearing a different ending:

- **кто** — who

- **что** — what
- **какой** — which
- **как** — how
- **когда** — when
- **почему** — why
- **сколько** — how many

Seven questions, one root. And two of them have pointing-word answers built by the same swap — **потому** for **почему**, **столько** for **сколько** — so the family supplies its own replies.

Learning any one of these in Russian really is most of the way to learning all of them, which is not true of the English set at all.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **сколько** — *SKÓL-ka*
- the seven of the family in order
- the two pairs — **почему** / **потому**, **сколько** / **столько**

Before you move on

How many English questions does **сколько** cover? (**Two** — *how many* and *how much*.) How many members does the question family have now? (**Seven**.) What single move turns two of them into their own answers? (**Swapping the question-stem for the pointing-stem**.) And one look back: which word means *sister*? (That is **сестра**.)

22.4 который — the word that hangs a sentence onto a noun

The drink with the long journey, and the newest pattern.

- *Recall:* кофе, which travelled Arabic to Turkish to Dutch, and the letter ф it needed
- *Recall:* я хочу with a bare infinitive after it, and сколько
- *Recall:* я не знаю, что ..., and говорите медленно

You'll want to know first — который

- который — *katóryy* — **who, which, that**

Four syllables, stress on the second. It is the last member of the question family, and the one that does the most work, because it does not only ask — it **joins**.

It goes back to PIE ***k^wo-teros**: the question-stem you now know well, plus an ending that means *which of two*. Greek made **poteros** from it. English made **whether** — which is why *whether* still means *which of the two* underneath.

Grammar lens — a whole clause, stuck onto a noun

что hangs a clause under a **verb**. который hangs one onto a **noun**:

- друг, который читает — *drug, katóryy chitáyet* — the friend **who** reads.

Name a thing, put a comma, say **который**, and say a whole sentence about it. That is how a noun in Russian gets described at any length at all, and it is the last of the joining devices this book owes you. The comma is compulsory, as it is in front of every subordinator. English lets you drop *that* — *the book I read* — and Russian never does: **который** stays, and its comma stays with it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* друг, который читает
- *Build:* name any person you own and hang a sentence on them
- *Say it:* который and English *whether*, and hear the shared ending

Before you move on

What does **который** attach a clause to? (**A noun** — where **что** attaches one to a verb.) May it be dropped the way English drops *that*? (**No** — never, and neither may its comma.) Which English word is its cousin? (*Whether*.) And one look back: which drink came by sea through three languages? (That is **кофе**.)

22.5 ли — the small word that has been hiding inside или

The overland drink, and the word from yesterday.

- *Recall*: **чай**, carried west along the Silk Road while English *tea* came by sea
- *Recall*: **который** hanging a clause onto a noun, and **или** built from **и** plus **ли**
- *Recall*: the long dash standing where the missing verb would be, and **помогите**
- *Recall*: **вода**, English *water*, and the request pattern you have used since the first chapter

Grammar lens — the doubting particle, alone

- **ли** — *li* — **whether**

You met this word six chapters ago, welded to the end of **и**, and the book promised nothing about it then. Here it is on its own.

ли does two jobs, and they are the same job seen from two sides.

One: it makes a yes-or-no question, without changing the word order at all. Put the word you are asking about first and **ли** second:

- **понимаешь ли ты?** — *panimáyesh li ty* — **do you understand?**

Two: it embeds one. English has to swap words for this — *do you understand* becomes *whether you understand*. Russian does not swap anything; it uses the same **ли**:

- **я не знаю, понимаешь ли ты** — *ya ne znáyu, panimáyesh li ty* — I do not know **whether** you understand.

The comma is there for the same reason as everywhere else in this book: a clause is hanging under a verb.
So Russian's smallest joining word is also its question particle, and the doubt inside **или** turns out to have been the same doubt all along.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- понимаешь ли ты?
- я не знаю, понимаешь ли ты
- или and then ли alone, and hear the piece that was always in there

Before you move on

Name the two jobs **ли** does. (**It makes a yes-or-no question**, and **it embeds one as *whether***.) Which word have you been carrying it inside since the joining chapter? (That is **или**.) Does Russian change the word order to embed a question? (**No** — the same **ли** does both.) And one look back: which drink came overland? (That is **чай**.)

Chapter 23

One to Five, and an Answer to Skolko

Modes: 🗣 voice (5) 🗣 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say, hear, read and write the Russian numbers one to five, answer skolko with each of them, and name the English cousin of each.

Five numbers, five Indo-European roots and five everyday English cousins – the first answers this book can give to a question it has been able to ask since the last chapter.

23.1 два — two, and the question this book could already ask

Ask **сколько** — *how many*. Then say **один** and the root it goes back to.

You'll want to know first — one word

два — *dva* — **two**

Twenty-two chapters in, this book can ask **сколько?** and could not understand any answer to it. **один** is in the corpus, but it arrived as half of the **один ... другой** pattern — *one ... the other* — which is a joining word wearing a number's clothes. **два** is the first number this track teaches as a number.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

два continues Indo-European **dwóh₁*, “two.” English **two**, Latin **duo**, Greek **ἄϋο** and Sanskrit **dvá** are the same word, and Russian’s form is among the least worn of them.

Say *dva* and *two* one after the other. That is not something to learn; it is something to recognise, and it will be true of nearly every number in this slice.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **два** — two
- *Connect:* **два** $\leftarrow$ **dwóh₁* $\rightarrow$ English **two**, Latin **duo**
- *Run through:* **один, два**

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **два**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

23.2 три — three

Say **два** and its English cousin.

You’ll want to know first — one word

три — *tri* — **three**

Three letters, and every one of them is a Cyrillic shape this book taught long ago. Say it and read it at the same time: **т-р-и**.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

три continues Indo-European **tréyes*, “three.” English **three**, Latin **trēs**, Greek **treîs** and Sanskrit **tri** are the same word.

This is the plainest of the whole set. Nothing has shifted: the *t*, the *r* and the vowel are all where they were, which is why **три** and **three** sound like each other and **сто** and **hundred**, later in this slice, will not.

Your turn

- *Say it:* три — three
- *Connect:* три ← *tréyes → English **three**, Latin trēs
- *Run through:* один, два, три

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: три; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

23.3 четыре — four, and one consonant’s three fates

Say три and its Latin cousin, then два.

You’ll want to know first — one word

четыре — *chetýre* — **four**

Three syllables, stressed on the second, and the vowel in that stressed syllable is ы — the sound this book warned has no English equivalent. Hold it there and the word falls into place.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

четыре continues Indo-European **k^wetwóres*, “four.”

The opening **k^w* is the interesting part, because the branches split three ways over it. Latin kept it whole: **quattuor**. English lost the lip-rounding and softened the *k* to *f*: **four**. Slavic pushed it forward to a **ch**, which is what you are saying.

Your turn

- *Say it:* четыре — four, stress on the ы
- *Connect:* четыре ← **k^wetwóres* → Latin **quattuor**, English **four**
- *Run through:* два, три, четыре

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **четыре**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

23.4 пять — five, and a cousin English kept whole

Say **четыре** and what three branches did with its first sound.

You'll want to know first — one word

пять — *pyat* — five

One syllable, ending in the soft sign that this book has been putting on the ends of words since its first chapters. It softens the **Т** and is not a sound of its own.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

пять continues Indo-European **pénk^we*, “five.” Greek **pénte**, Latin **quīnque** and English **five** are the same word.

The Greek form is the one an English speaker already owns:

pentagon, **pentathlon**, **Pentecost** — all of them carry *five* in a shape much closer to **пять** than English **five** is. The number was in the reader's vocabulary before the lesson was.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **пять** — five
- *Connect:* **пять** ← **pénk^we* → Greek **pénte**, English **five**
- *Run through:* **один, два, три, четыре, пять** — the whole first five

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **пять**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

23.5 Payoff — one to five, and an answer to СКОЛЬКО

Ask **СКОЛЬКО**, say **пять**, then say what **один** goes back to.

Your turn

1. Hear each of the five named singly and out of order, and say what it is.
2. Count backwards from **пять** to **один**.
3. Read the five printed shuffled — **пять, один, четыре, три, два** — and say each.
4. Write all five from dictation. No new Cyrillic letter appears in any of them.
5. Hear **сколько?** and answer it with each of the five in turn.

Then say the English cousin of each: **one, two, three, four, five**. All five have one. That is not luck — Russian's numerals are among the least worn in the family, and this book's reader already owned most of them.

Before you move on

Source: Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

Chapter 24

Six to Ten, and the Pairs That Shaped Each Other

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count aloud from one to ten in Russian and say why vosem ends like sem and devyat begins like desyat.

Five more numbers with no new letter, two pairs shaped by standing next to each other, and the whole run of ten scored shuffled rather than recited.

24.1 ШЕСТЬ — six

Count one to five, then five to one.

You'll want to know first — one word

шесть — *shest* — six

One syllable, ending like ПЯТЬ in the soft sign.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ШЕСТЬ continues Indo-European **swéks*, “six.” English **six**, Latin **sex** and Greek **héx** are the same word.

Notice what survived: the *s*. Hold on to it, because the very last number in this slice is where that *s* turns into the fact that names half the Indo-European family.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **шесть** — six
- *Connect:* **шесть** ← **swéks* → English **six**, Latin **sex**
- *Run through:* **четыре, пять, шесть**

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **шесть**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

24.2 семь — seven

Say **шесть** and its Latin cousin.

You'll want to know first — one word

семь — *sem* — **seven**

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

семь continues Indo-European **septm*, “seven.” Latin **septem**, English **seven**, Greek **heptá** and Sanskrit **saptá** are the same word. The *p* has gone and the *s* has stayed. That combination is worth marking, because the Iranian branch did the opposite: Persian’s seven is **haft**, from the same word, with the *s* turned into an *h*. Two branches, one word, and each kept the piece the other lost.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **семь** — seven
- *Connect:* **семь** ← **septm* → Latin **septem**, English **seven**
- *Run through:* **пять, шесть, семь**

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **семь**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

24.3 ВОСЕМЬ — eight, and the seven inside it

Say **семь**, and which sound it lost that Latin kept.

You'll want to know first — one word

ВОСЕМЬ — *vósem* — **eight**

Say **семь** and **ВОСЕМЬ** one after the other. Seven is audible at the end of eight, and the unstressed **о** at the front reduces towards *a* — the reduction this book named long ago.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

ВОСЕМЬ continues Indo-European **oktōw*, “eight” — Latin **octō**, Greek **oktō**, English **eight**.

There is no *s* and no *m* anywhere in that history, so neither is inherited. They came from **семь**, standing next to it. Seven and eight are said together more often than almost any other pair of words in any language, and the pair pulls each other into shape: Persian's **hasht** borrowed its *h-* from **haft** for exactly the same reason, in a different family, with no contact between them.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **ВОСЕМЬ** — eight
- *Connect:* **ВОСЕМЬ** ← **oktōw* → Latin **octō**, English **eight**
- *Run through:* **шесть, семь, ВОСЕМЬ**

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **ВОСЕМЬ**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

24.4 ДЕВЯТЬ — nine

Say **ВОСЕМЬ**, and where its ending came from.

You'll want to know first — one word

ДЕВЯТЬ — *dévyat* — **nine**

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

девять continues Indo-European **h1newn*, “nine.” Latin **novem**, English **nine** and Greek **ennéa** are the same word; the *n* at the front became a *d* in Slavic.

That change is not an accident either, and the next lesson is the reason: **ten** begins with a *d* in every branch, and **nine** stands directly in front of it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **девять** — nine
- *Connect:* **девять** ← **h1newn* → Latin **novem**, English **nine**
- *Run through:* **семь, восемь, девять**

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **девять**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

24.5 десять — ten, and the letter nine borrowed

Say **девять** and which sound changed at its front.

You’ll want to know first — one word

десять — *désyat* — **ten**

Say **девять** and **десять** back to back. They differ in one consonant in the middle and nothing else, which makes them the pair this whole run is likeliest to confuse — so drill them together rather than in order.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

десять continues Indo-European **dekm*, “ten.” Latin **decem** — and through it **decimal**, **December**, **decade** — English **ten** and Greek **déka** are the same word.

The *d* here is the original one. **девять** copied it: nine stands in front of ten in every count anybody has ever said aloud, and it took its neighbour’s first consonant, exactly as **восемь** took its ending from **семь** two lessons ago. Two of the last four numbers in this chapter

were shaped by the number standing beside them, which is what counting aloud does to words.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **десять** — ten
- *Connect:* **десять** ← **dekm* → Latin **decem**, English **ten**
- *Pair:* **девять** and **десять**, one consonant apart

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **десять**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

24.6 Payoff — one to ten

Count one to five, then ask **сколько**.

Your turn

1. Count aloud one to ten without a model, then ten to one.
2. Hear all ten named singly and out of order, and say each.
3. Read the ten printed shuffled and say each.
4. Write all ten from dictation. Not one new Cyrillic letter appears in any of them — this whole slice adds no sign to the alphabet.
5. Drill the two pairs that shaped each other: **семь** / **восемь**, where eight took seven's ending, and **девять** / **десять**, where nine took ten's *d*.
6. Answer **сколько?** ten times, once with each number.

Then say the English cousin of each. All ten have one.

Before you move on

Source: Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

Chapter 25

Twenty, a Hundred, and the Number That Named a Family

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say twenty and a hundred, take twenty apart into its two pieces, name which side of the centum/satem split Russian is on, and say what a Russian number still does to the noun after it that I cannot yet produce.

The tens taken apart into numbers already known, the hundred that gives the satem branch its name, and an explicit account of the case government the numerals impose and the chapter that owes it.

25.1 двадцать — twenty, and both halves still audible

Count one to ten, then say ten on its own.

You'll want to know first — one word, and a piece

двадцать — *dvádsat* — twenty

Take it apart and both pieces are words you have: два at the front, and -дцать, which is десять worn down, at the back. Two tens.

That worn ending does the same job further up: тридцать is three tens, thirty. Russian's tens are not a new vocabulary; they are numbers you already know with десять ground down onto the end of them.

Your turn

- *Say it:* двадцать — twenty
- *Split:* два + -дцать
- *Build:* три + -дцать → тридцать, thirty

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **двадцать**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

25.2 сто — a hundred, and the number that named a family

Say двадцать and its two pieces.

You'll want to know first — one word

сто — *sto* — a hundred

Three letters, and the largest number this book teaches is the shortest word in it.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

сто continues Indo-European **kmtom*, “hundred.” English **hundred**, Greek **hekatón** and Latin **centum** are the same word — and **centum** is where this stops being an etymology and becomes the name of a division.

Some branches kept that first **k* as a *k* sound. Latin **centum**, Greek **hekatón**, Welsh **cant** — these are the **centum** languages, named after the Latin word for a hundred.

Others turned it into an *s* or an *sh*. Russian **сто**, Avestan **satəm**, Sanskrit **śatám**, Lithuanian **šimtas** — these are the **satem** languages, named after the Avestan word for the same number.

A word for a hundred is what the two halves of the Indo-European family are named after, and **сто** is on the **satem** side. It is the same *s* that survived in **шесть** and **семь**, doing the same work on a different consonant.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **СТО** — a hundred
- *Connect:* **СТО** ← **kmtom* → Latin **centum**, English **hundred**
- *Name:* **centum** and **satem**, and which side Russian is on
- *Run through:* **десять, двадцать, сто**

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **СТО**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

25.3 Payoff — twelve numbers, and what they still cannot do

Count one to ten, then ask **СКОЛЬКО**.

Grammar Lens: what a Russian number does to the noun after it

A number in Russian does not simply sit in front of a noun. It **governs** it: **два, три** and **четыре** take one form of the following noun and **пять** upward takes another, and neither is the dictionary form. This book cannot teach that yet, and saying so is more useful than skirting it. The forms it needs are the genitive singular and the genitive plural, and this track has taught the genitive in exactly one place — after **до**, in **до свидания**. Counting THINGS is therefore a genitive chapter rather than a numeral one.

What the twelve numbers are already good for: answering **СКОЛЬКО?** with a bare figure, giving an age, saying a price, reading a room number, and every place a number stands alone.

Your turn

1. Count aloud one to ten, then say **двадцать** and **сто**.
2. Hear twelve amounts named singly and out of order; say each.
3. Read the twelve printed shuffled and say each.
4. Write all twelve from dictation.

5. Split **двадцать** into its two pieces and build **тридцать** from **три**.
6. Say which side of the centum/satem split Russian is on, and name the number the split is named after.

Before you move on

Source: Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

Chapter 26

Which One: the Ordinals, Said and Written

Modes:  voice (4)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say first, second and third, build the ordinal of any number I can count to, and read and write an ordinal as a figure with its ending hyphenated on.

Two forms outside the pattern, one adjective ending for everything above them, and the written 1-y whose letters after the hyphen are the agreement rather than decoration.

26.1 первый — first

Count one to ten, say **двадцать** and **сто**, say **один** and its root, and say what a number still does to the noun after it.

You'll want to know first — one word

первый — *pérvyy* — first

Counting says *how many*. Ordering says *which one* — a floor number, a date, a queue, a chapter heading — and twelve numbers do not give you one of them.

The word, taken apart — and its English cousins

первый is not built from **один**. It goes back to Indo-European **per-*, “forward, in front,” which is also behind English **fore**, **before** and

former — and behind **first** itself, which is *fore* with a superlative ending on it.

So Russian and English break in the same place and for the same reason: the word for *first* means *foremost* in both, and neither is built from the word for *one*. The series comes into line at *second*.

Your turn

- *Say it:* первый — first
- *Contrast:* один counts, первый orders
- *Connect:* первый ← *per- → English fore, first

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: первый; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

26.2 второй and третий — second, third, and the ending above them

Say первый and why it is not built from один. Then say три.

You'll want to know first — two words and an ending

второй — *vtoróy* — second

третий — *trétiy* — third

три is audible whole inside третий. And from four upward the pattern settles completely: the ordinal is **the plain number with an adjective ending on it** — четвёртый, fourth; пятый, fifth; десятый, tenth.

That is worth saying plainly, because it means the reader who has twelve cardinals has twelve ordinals as soon as they have one ending, with only первый and второй outside it.

Russian ordinals are adjectives, and that carries a debt as well as a rule: an adjective changes its ending to agree with what it describes, and this book has not taught an adjective yet. So the forms here are the ones a masculine noun takes, and agreeing them with anything else is an adjective chapter rather than a numeral one.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **второй** — second; **третий** — third
- *Hear:* три inside третий
- *Build:* четыре → четвёртый; десять → десятый

Before you move on

Sources: Wiktionary: **второй**; Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

26.3 1-й — writing an ordinal as a figure

Say **первый** and **второй**, then build **пятый** from **пять**.

Script — the figure and its ending

1-й — *pérvyy* — first **2-е** — *vtoróye* — second

A Russian ordinal written as a figure carries the tail of its own ending after a hyphen. **1-й** is **первый** with everything but the last letter replaced by the figure; **2-е** is **второе** in the same way.

This is not decoration. Ordinals are adjectives, so the ending is the agreement — change what is being ordered and the letters after the hyphen change with it. That is why the figure alone will not do, and why an English reader who writes **1st** for all of them is losing information the Russian page is carrying.

The hyphen is the short dash this book taught among its punctuation, not the long dash that stands for a missing verb.

Your turn

- *Write it:* **1-й**, **2-е**, **3-й**
- *Read it:* each aloud as the full word
- *Say it:* why the letters after the hyphen are not always the same

Before you move on

Source: Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

26.4 Payoff — which one, said and written

Count one to ten, say **двадцать** and **сто**, and name the side of the family Russian is on.

Your turn

1. Say **первый, второй, третий** in order, then out of order.
2. **Build**, do not recall: fourth, fifth, tenth, twentieth.
3. Write **1-й, 2-е, 3-й** and read each aloud as a full word.
4. Say which two of the series are not built from their numbers, and what English does in the same place.
5. Count one to ten, say **двадцать** and **сто**, and say what a number still does to the noun after it that this book has not taught.

Before you move on

Source: Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

26.5 Close the numeral slice

Say the first three ordinals, count one to five, and ask **сколько**.

Your turn

Everything this slice added, with nothing in front of you.

1. Count aloud one to ten, then say **двадцать** and **сто**.
2. Write all twelve from dictation, shuffled.
3. Say the first three ordinals, build three more, and write **1-й** and **2-е**.
4. Say the English cousin of each of the ten cardinals. Every one has one.
5. Say the two pairs that shaped each other — **семь / восемь, девять / десять** — and which side of the centum/satem split **сто** puts Russian on.

6. Say the one thing these numbers still cannot do, and which chapter owes it.

Then say what the whole slice cost the hand: **no new Cyrillic letter at all.**

Before you move on

Source: Omniglot, Numbers in Russian.

Chapter 27

Reading — Six Words, Six Lines, and a First Passage

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 👁️ eyes (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: none of the 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read Russian words off a board, read the lines I would say to a stranger, and hold a whole passage without translating it word by word.

The introduction the book has been saying since chapter 2, read in order for the first time, with no new word in it.

27.1 (reading) — six words off a board

You have written every letter in every one of these. Not one word is new.

What is new is that nobody says them before you read them.

Read this

вода хлеб чай кофе суп сыр

Read down the list once. Do not spell each one out — look at the whole word and let it arrive.

Again, and notice which came at once and which you had to spell. Both are fine. The difference is what practice removes.

What to know first

These six would be on a board over a counter, and they are the six you would want first.

Two of them are traps of exactly the kind this book warned you about. **суп** and **сыр** look like *cyn* and *cbip* to an eye trained on English, and they are *sup* and *syr*.

That is the whole reason to read a word cold rather than after hearing it. Heard first, you never test whether the letters actually reached you.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six words down the list, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

Which two look most like English and are not? (**суп** and **сыр**.)

27.2 (reading) — three to open, three to rescue

The last lesson gave you six things on a board. These are six things you would say.

Nothing here is new. What is new is meeting them in writing.

Read this

привет спасибо пожалуйста извините медленно
помогите

Read down once, without stopping.

Again — and notice the list turns over halfway. The first three open a conversation. The last three rescue one.

What to know first

пожалуйста is the longest word on the list and the one you will read most often. It is worth recognising by shape rather than by spelling it out, because it does two jobs: *please*, and *you're welcome*.

ПОМОГИТЕ and ИЗВИНИТЕ end the same way, and both are requests you make to somebody you have not met. That shared ending is the one piece of grammar visible on this page.

Six lines, and half of them exist for the moment something goes wrong.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six lines, once, in order, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

Where does the list turn over? (**After пожалуйста** — three to open, three to rescue.)

27.3 (reading) — the first passage

Six words, then six lines. Now the whole thing at once.

Not one word in it is new.

Read this

Привет! Меня зовут Анна. Сестра и мама. Папа тоже. Я читаю. Я хочу читать. Вода, хлеб и чай. Кофе или чай? Я не знаю. Спасибо. До свидания.

Read it through once without stopping. Do not translate as you go. Again — and this time notice that two lines differ by one word, and that the one word changes when the reading happens.

What to know first

Я читаю is now. Я хочу читать is not yet. Russian marks that difference by changing the ending of the verb in the first and leaving it whole in the second, which is the opposite of what an English speaker expects.

Look at и and или as well. One letter apart on the page, and the difference between a list and a choice. Read quickly, that is the easiest mistake on this page to make.

This is the first whole passage the book has asked you to hold at once, and it works because every line was paid for.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the passage aloud, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many words in that passage were new? (**None.**)

Which two words are one letter apart and mean different things? (**и** and **или.**)

Pronunciation & Cyrillic Reference

A **reference**, not a chapter — a place to look things up. You are *not* meant to read this before the lessons: the lessons teach reading through real words, introducing each letter as a word needs it. This page gathers the system in one spot. Full letter-by-letter decomposition (components + stroke order) lives in the machine-readable Cyrillic script reference.

The one thing that trips everyone: false friends

Cyrillic descends, like the Latin and Greek alphabets, from the Greek alphabet — so some letters are shared, but others look identical to Latin letters and say something completely different. These four cause 90% of beginner misreadings:

- **Cyrillic: В**
looks like Latin...: B
actually says: v
mnemonic: Greek *beta* drifted to a “v” sound
- **Cyrillic: Р**
looks like Latin...: P
actually says: r
mnemonic: Greek *rho*
- **Cyrillic: С**
looks like Latin...: C
actually says: s
mnemonic: Greek *sigma* (a “c” that hisses)
- **Cyrillic: Н**
looks like Latin...: H
actually says: n
mnemonic: Greek *eta* / Latin N with a level bar

Two vowels also mislead: *y* looks like Latin *y* but says “oo”; *x* looks like Latin *x* but says a raspy “kh.”

The letters, grouped by how they behave

- **Same look, same sound:** а (a), е (ye), к (k), м (m), о (o), т (t).
- **False friends** (look Latin, sound different): в (v), р (r), с (s), н (n), у (oo), х (kh).
- **Greek-shaped:** г (g, gamma Γ), д (d, delta Δ), л (l, lambda Λ), п (p, pi Π), ф (f, phi Φ).
- **Sounds English writes with two letters:** ж (zh, as in *measure*), ч (ch), ш (sh), щ (shch), ц (ts), ю (yu), я (ya), ё (yo).
- **The vowel English hasn’t got:** ы (yery-vowel) — not the *ee* of и, but a tighter sound made with the tongue **drawn back**. Say English *ill*, then say it again with your tongue pulled towards your throat. It is the single hardest Russian vowel for an English speaker, and it carries real meaning: ты (*you*) and вы (*you*, formal) both turn on it.
- **The two signs** — ъ (hard sign) and ь (soft sign) — spell *no sound of their own*; they only tell you how to pronounce the consonant before them (ь softens it).

Two rules that make you sound native

- **Stress is unmarked and it matters.** Russian never prints its stress accent, but stress governs the vowels — so you learn each word *with* its stress. (This reference marks it with an acute, *privét*, but real text won’t.)
- **Unstressed о → “a” (akanye).** An о not under stress reduces toward an *a*-ish sound: спасибо is said “spa-SEE-ba,” хорошо as “kha-ra-SHO.”

Sound ids used in the lessons

The lessons' **sounds**: frontmatter points here: **cyrillic-false-friends** (the table above), **stress-unmarked** and **o-reduction** (the two rules), **e-ye** (**е** carries a *y*-glide), **zh-sound** (ж), **b-vs-v** (б vs в), **silent-v** (the dropped в in **здравствуйте**), **syllable-drop** (spoken contractions like *pa-ZHAL-sta*), **a-clear** / **a-father** (the pure *a*).

Russian in the Slavic family

Slavic is a branch of **Indo-European**, so Russian is a distant cousin of English, Latin, and Sanskrit — which is why its deepest words (**нет** ← **ne*, **есть** “is” ← the same root as English *is*) line up with words you already own. Cyrillic itself was built in the 9th century from Greek letters (plus a few invented for Slavic sounds Greek lacked) to write Old Church Slavonic — which is why so many letters are Greek in disguise.

Glossary

This glossary collects every word and phrase taught in the book. Pronunciation appears when it differs from the written form; chapter numbers show where each entry is introduced.

а *a*

and-but — the second half of English’s but, and the second joining word that is a single letter

Introduced in Chapter 17.

один *adín*

one — and the English words one, an, a, alone and only are all the same word

Introduced in Chapter 17.

отец *atéts*

father — formal register, and an old word that is NOT related to English father at all

Introduced in Chapter 12.

брат *brat*

brother — masculine, one soft sign away from a verb you already know, and this time it really is your English cousin

Introduced in Chapter 7.

брать *brat’*

to take — English bear, and a partner from a completely different root

Introduced in Chapter 5.

быть *byt’*

to be — and the one tense in which Russian refuses to say it

Introduced in Chapter 3.

чай *chai*

tea — masculine, regular this time, and the overland twin of кофе’s sea route

Introduced in Chapter 6.

четыре *chetýre*

four — where a kw became a ch, as it did in every Slavic language

Introduced in Chapter 23.

читать *chítát’*

to read — and why Russian has no separate way to say I am reading

Introduced in Chapter 4.

да *da*

yes (da)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

до встречи *da fstréchi*

see you later — literally 'until the meeting'

Introduced in Chapter 11.

до скорого *da skórava*

see you soon — literally 'until the soon [one]'

Introduced in Chapter 11.

до свидания *da svidániya*

goodbye (formal / neutral) — literally 'until [our] seeing each other again'

Introduced in Chapter 11.

до завтра *da záftra*

see you tomorrow — literally 'until [the] morning-after'

Introduced in Chapter 11.

десять *désyat*

ten — the word behind decimal, and the one nine copied

Introduced in Chapter 24.

девять *dévyat*

nine — and the ten it is about to rhyme with

Introduced in Chapter 24.

друг *drug*friend (male, or unspecified) — masculine, and the reason you own **ТЫ** at all

Introduced in Chapter 7.

другой *drugóy*

other, another — your word for friend, doing a second job, and half of a joining pattern

Introduced in Chapter 17.

думать *dúmat'*

to think — and the fact that shapes every Russian verb you will ever meet

Introduced in Chapter 4.

два *dva*

two — the second number in the book, twenty-two chapters after the first

Introduced in Chapter 23.

двадцать *dvádstat*

twenty — two tens, with both halves still audible

Introduced in Chapter 25.

глаз *glaz*

eye — masculine, and the word that quietly evicted Russian's inherited word for eye

Introduced in Chapter 9.

говорить *govorít'*

to speak — one new letter, and a false friend worth killing early
Introduced in Chapter 3.

и *i*

and — one letter, one sound, and the commonest word in the language
Introduced in Chapter 16.

идти *idtí*

to go — the one-way verb, and a past tense from a different root entirely
Introduced in Chapter 3.

или *íli*

or — and it is **и** with a small question-word stuck on the end
Introduced in Chapter 16.

извините *izviníte*

excuse me, sorry — the word this book had no way of saying, and the way every request to a stranger starts
Introduced in Chapter 21.

когда *kagdá*

when — the fifth of the question family, and the one whose spelling and sound part company again
Introduced in Chapter 19.

как вас зовут? *kak vas zovút*

what's your name? — literally 'HOW do they call you?', not 'what'
Introduced in Chapter 2.

какой *kakóy*

which, what kind of — the family member the book named two chapters before it taught it
Introduced in Chapter 22.

который *katóryy*

who, which, that — the word that hangs a whole clause onto a noun, and English 'whether' is its cousin
Introduced in Chapter 22.

хотеть *khatét*

to want — the verb this book has been able to describe everything except desire without
Introduced in Chapter 20.

хлеб *khleb*

bread — masculine, and not a Slavic word at all
Introduced in Chapter 6.

кофе *kófe*

coffee — masculine, the one exception worth meeting on purpose
Introduced in Chapter 6.

КТО *kto*

who — **ЧТО**'s twin, and the one Russian says exactly as it is spelled
Introduced in Chapter 22.

любить *lyubít'*

to love, and to like — English love itself, with a letter that appears from nowhere
Introduced in Chapter 5.

МОЛОКО *malakó*

milk — neuter, and a straight cousin of the English word, hand-motion and all
Introduced in Chapter 13.

мама *máma*

mom — feminine, and a word that is not really a language-family cousin of anything
Introduced in Chapter 12.

мать *mat'*

mother — formal register, and the real, ancient cousin behind the babble-word
мама

Introduced in Chapter 12.

меня зовут... *menyá zovút*

my name is... — literally 'they call me', with no word for 'my' and no word for 'name'
Introduced in Chapter 2.

МОЧЬ *moch*

to be able, can — the verb the book has been printing inside **ПОМОГАТЬ** without ever owning it
Introduced in Chapter 20.

медленно *myédlenna*

slowly — the second half of the repair kit, and the request that actually fixes listening
Introduced in Chapter 21.

надо *náda*

it is necessary — a sentence with a verb, an infinitive, and no subject at all
Introduced in Chapter 20.

НО *no*

but — the flat contradiction, one of two words English hides under a single but
Introduced in Chapter 17.

НОС *nos*

nose — masculine, and the same word as English nose and Latin nasus
Introduced in Chapter 9.

НЕТ *nyet*

no (nyet)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

очень приятно *óchen priyátno*

pleased to meet you — literally 'very pleasant', and a cousin of English FRIEND
Introduced in Chapter 2.

почему *pachemú*

why — literally 'after what', and the fourth member of the question family
Introduced in Chapter 19.

повторите *paftarít'ye*

say it again — the first thing you can do about not understanding, and the book's first named imperative
Introduced in Chapter 21.

пока *paká*

bye — casual, and much younger than it sounds
Introduced in Chapter 11.

помогите *pamagít'ye*

help me — a verb you have owned since the hand chapter, wearing the ending you learned two lessons ago
Introduced in Chapter 21.

папа *pápa*

dad — masculine despite the -a ending, the first noun in this book where biology beats the spelling rule
Introduced in Chapter 12.

потому что *patamú shto*

because — the question **почему** answered by turning it round, word for word
Introduced in Chapter 19.

первый *pérvyy*

first — which one, not how many, and a word not built from *odin*
Introduced in Chapter 26.

писать *pisát'*

to write — one new letter, and the one stress mistake you must not make
Introduced in Chapter 4.

подруга *podrúga*

friend (female) — feminine, and **друг** with a prefix and an ending stitched on
Introduced in Chapter 7.

помогать *pomogát'*

to help — built on *can*, which is English *may* and *might*
Introduced in Chapter 5.

понимать *ponimát'*

to understand — literally to take hold of, which is what *comprehend* means too
Introduced in Chapter 4.

пожалуйста *pozhalústa*

please / you're welcome (*pozhalústa*)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

простите *prastítie*

forgive me — the heavier of the two apologies, and the one that asks for something
Introduced in Chapter 21.

привет *privét*

hi / hello (privét — informal)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

пять *pyat*

five — the number inside a word English borrowed whole

Introduced in Chapter 23.

рот *rot*

mouth — masculine, and this time the resemblance to English is not there to trust

Introduced in Chapter 9.

семь *sem*

seven — the s that Persian turned into an h, kept

Introduced in Chapter 24.

семья *sem'yá*

family — feminine, and an unexpected cousin of the English word home

Introduced in Chapter 8.

сердце *sérdtse*

heart — neuter, a silent letter, and one of the surest cognates in the entire

Indo-European family

Introduced in Chapter 10.

сестра *sestrá*

sister — feminine, brat's other half, and a cognate just as secure

Introduced in Chapter 7.

шесть *shest*

six — and the first sign of the split that names half the family

Introduced in Chapter 24.

что *shto*

what — the question word, and the one Russian spells with a ч and says with a sh

Introduced in Chapter 18.

сколько *skólka*

how many, how much — the question word Russian uses for both, where English
needs two

Introduced in Chapter 22.

сок *sok*

juice — masculine, an ancient root that never surfaces in English

Introduced in Chapter 13.

спокойной ночи *spakóynay nóchi*

good night — literally 'of a calm night,' the last thing you say before sleep

Introduced in Chapter 11.

спасибо *spasíbo*

thank you (spasíbo)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

спрашивать *spráshivat'*

to ask a question — the verb behind the question you have asked since Chapter 2

Introduced in Chapter 5.

сто *sto*

a hundred — three letters, and the word that names half the Indo-European family

Introduced in Chapter 25.

суп *sup*

soup — masculine, and an 18th-century French loan, exactly like кофе before it

Introduced in Chapter 13.

сыр *syr*

cheese — masculine, and secretly the same word as сырой, 'raw'

Introduced in Chapter 13.

тоже *tózhe*

also, too — two little words fused, and the way to say 'me neither'

Introduced in Chapter 16.

три *tri*

three — three letters, and three of them shared with English

Introduced in Chapter 23.

ты, вы *ty, vy*

you (informal) and you (formal) — the split English threw away

Introduced in Chapter 2.

ухо *úkho*

ear — neuter, the first word Russian gives its third gender, and a word-for-word cousin of the English ear

Introduced in Chapter 9.

видеть *videt'*

to see — the root behind both vision and wisdom

Introduced in Chapter 3.

вода *vodá*

water — feminine, and the first noun in this book, so it also teaches how every Russian noun announces itself

Introduced in Chapter 6.

восемь *vósem*

eight — and the seven standing inside it

Introduced in Chapter 24.

второй третий *vtoróy trétiy*

second and third — where the numbers come back

Introduced in Chapter 26.

Я *ya*

I — one letter, and one of the oldest words in Europe
Introduced in Chapter 2.

здравствуй *zdrástvuyte*

hello (zdrástvuyte — formal / polite)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

ЖИТЬ *žit'*

to live — and the English word that used to mean 'alive'
Introduced in Chapter 3.

ЗНАТЬ *znat'*

to know — the same root as English know, and the sentence you will use most
Introduced in Chapter 3.

Review Questions

Try these without looking ahead. Every prompt comes from the same canonical lesson data as its chapter. Answers begin in the next section.

Chapter 1

1.1 привет — *watch one word move*

Trace the visible word once, then type the Russian greeting you traced.

1.2 привет — *one supported copy*

Copy the visible Russian word for informal hi once, then type your copy.

1.3 привет — *look, hide, write, compare*

After hiding the model for five seconds, write the Russian word for informal hi and then compare it.

1.4 One heard greeting — *write what you know*

From the heard cue privet alone, write the known Russian word for informal hi.

Chapter 2

2.1 Why plural **вы** became polite

Which Russian form is safest with an adult when you are unsure?

2.2 Why Russian asks how, not what

Which language in this comparison asks what instead of how?

2.3 Chapter 2 practice — *run the exchange*

Turn Как вас зовут? into the form you use with one friend.

Chapter 15

15.1 а — *a true friend, and the sound Russian keeps landing on*

Is а a true friend, a false friend, or a new shape?

15.2 о — *the letter that is not always itself*

How is the letter o pronounced when it is NOT the stressed vowel of the word?

15.3 г — *a corner, and a hard g*

Is the letter g in Russian ever soft, as in English 'gem'?

15.4 х — *an x that is not an x*

The letter written x in Russian is which of the three kinds — true friend, false friend, or new shape?

15.5 ф — *a circle on a stick*

What does the presence of the letter f usually tell you about a Russian word?

15.6 ц — *one letter for two sounds*

What separates the letter ts from the letter sh on the page?

15.7 й — *и in a hat*

Which letter is underneath the cap, and is the capped letter a vowel or a consonant?

15.8 ю — *a syllable in one letter, again*

Which other letter you have learned writes a whole syllable in one shape, the way yu does?

15.9 Practice — *eight more letters, sorted*

Of this chapter's eight letters, which one is a false friend, and why is that the dangerous kind?

Chapter 23

23.1 два — *two, and the question this book could already ask*

Someone asks *skolko*. Answer: two.

23.2 три — *three*

Count aloud from one to three in Russian.

23.3 четыре — *four, and one consonant's three fates*

Which language kept the original kw of four whole?

23.4 пять — *five, and a cousin English kept whole*

Count aloud from one to five in Russian.

23.5 Payoff — *one to five, and an answer to СКОЛЬКО*

Count backwards from five to one in Russian.

Chapter 24

24.1 шесть — *six*

Say six in Russian, and its English cousin.

24.2 семь — *seven*

Which sound has Russian *sem* lost that Latin *septem* still has?

24.3 восемь — *eight, and the seven inside it*

Where did the *-sem* of *vosem* come from, if not from *oktow*?

24.4 девять — *nine*

Latin has *novem* and Russian has *devyat*. Which sound changed at the front?

24.5 десять — *ten, and the letter nine borrowed*

Say nine and ten one after the other.

24.6 Payoff — *one to ten*

Count aloud from one to ten in Russian.

Chapter 25

25.1 двадцать — *twenty, and both halves still audible*

What are the two pieces of *dvadtsat*?

25.2 сто — *a hundred, and the number that named a family*

Russian *sto* and Latin *centum* are the same word. Which side of the *centum/satem* split is Russian on, and why?

25.3 Payoff — *twelve numbers, and what they still cannot do*

Can this book yet say 'two books' in Russian? Say why or why not.

Chapter 26

26.1 первый — *first*

Is *pervyy* built from *odin*?

26.2 второй and третий — *second, third, and the ending above them*

Build fifth and tenth from *pyat* and *desyat*.

26.3 1-й — *writing an ordinal as a figure*

Read *1-y* aloud as a full Russian word.

26.4 Payoff — *which one, said and written*

Say first, second, third in Russian, then write the first of them as a figure.

26.5 Close the numeral slice

Say ten and tenth in Russian.

Chapter 27

27.1 (*reading*) — *six words off a board*

Which word is cheese?

27.2 (*reading*) — *three to open, three to rescue*

Which line asks for it slower?

27.3 (*reading*) — *the first passage*

What is her name?

Answer Key

The first response is the canonical display answer. When a question accepts other authored forms, they appear underneath.

Chapter 1

1.1 привет — *watch one word move*

Answer: привет

1.2 привет — *one supported copy*

Answer: привет

1.3 привет — *look, hide, write, compare*

Answer: привет

1.4 One heard greeting — *write what you know*

Answer: привет

Chapter 2

2.1 Why plural **вы** became polite

Answer: **вы**

Also accepted: вы

2.2 Why Russian asks how, not what

Answer: English

2.3 Chapter 2 practice — *run the exchange*

Answer: Как тебя зовут?

Also accepted: Kak tebya zovut?; Как тебя зовут; Kak tebya zovut

Chapter 15

15.1 а — *a true friend, and the sound Russian keeps landing on*

Answer: a true friend

Also accepted: true friend; true; a true one

15.2 о — *the letter that is not always itself*

Answer: as a

Also accepted: like a; as an a; it becomes a; a

15.3 г — *a corner, and a hard g*

Answer: no

Also accepted: never; no it is always hard; always hard; no, always hard

15.4 х — *an x that is not an x*

Answer: a false friend

Also accepted: false friend; false; a false one

15.5 ф — *a circle on a stick*

Answer: it is borrowed

Also accepted: it was borrowed; it is a loanword; borrowed from greek or western europe; it came from another language

15.6 ц — *one letter for two sounds*

Answer: the tail below the line

Also accepted: a tail; the descender; the little tail at the foot; two uprights and a tail; it has a tail

15.7 й — *и in a hat*

Answer: i, and it is a consonant

Also accepted: и, a consonant; i - consonant; и and it is a consonant; the letter i, consonant

15.8 ю — *a syllable in one letter, again*

Answer: ya

Also accepted: я; the letter ya

15.9 Practice — *eight more letters, sorted*

Answer: x, because it can be read confidently and wrongly

Also accepted: x; x; kh; the x one; x - it looks like a latin letter but sounds different

Chapter 23

23.1 два — *two, and the question this book could already ask*

Answer: два

Also accepted: dva; два — dva

23.2 три — *three*

Answer: один два три

Also accepted: odin dva tri; один, два, три; odin, dva, tri

23.3 четыре — *four, and one consonant's three fates*

Answer: Latin

Also accepted: Latin, in quattuor; quattuor

23.4 пять — *five, and a cousin English kept whole*

Answer: один два три четыре пять

Also accepted: odin dva tri chetyre pyat; один, два, три, четыре, пять; odin, dva, tri, chetyre, pyat

23.5 Payoff — *one to five, and an answer to сколько***Answer:** пять четыре три два один**Also accepted:** pyat chetyre tri dva odin; пять, четыре, три, два, один; pyat, chetyre, tri, dva, odin**Chapter 24****24.1 шесть** — *six***Answer:** shest — six**Also accepted:** шесть — six; shest, six; шесть six**24.2 семь** — *seven***Answer:** the p**Also accepted:** p; the p sound**24.3 восемь** — *eight, and the seven inside it***Answer:** from sem, seven**Also accepted:** from семь; from seven next to it; семь**24.4 девять** — *nine***Answer:** n became d**Also accepted:** the n became a d; n > d; n to d**24.5 десять** — *ten, and the letter nine borrowed***Answer:** девять десять**Also accepted:** devyat desyat; девять, десять; devyat, desyat**24.6 Payoff** — *one to ten***Answer:** один два три четыре пять шесть семь восемь девять десять**Also accepted:** odin dva tri chetyre pyat shest sem vosem devyat desyat; один, два, три, четыре, пять, шесть, семь, восемь, девять, десять**Chapter 25****25.1 двадцать** — *twenty, and both halves still audible***Answer:** dva and desyat**Also accepted:** два and десять; dva + dtsat; two and ten**25.2 сто** — *a hundred, and the number that named a family***Answer:** satem — the k became an s**Also accepted:** satem, because the k became s; satem; the satem side**25.3 Payoff** — *twelve numbers, and what they still cannot do***Answer:** no — dva changes the form of the noun after it**Also accepted:** no, the noun changes form; no — it needs the genitive; no, it governs the noun

Chapter 26

26.1 первый — *first*

Answer: no

Also accepted: no — it means foremost; no, it is a separate root; foremost

26.2 второй *and* третий — *second, third, and the ending above them*

Answer: пятый десятый

Also accepted: pyatyy desyatyy; пятый, десятый; pyatyy, desyatyy

26.3 1-й — *writing an ordinal as a figure*

Answer: первый

Also accepted: pervyy; первый — pervyy

26.4 Payoff — *which one, said and written*

Answer: первый второй третий — 1-й

Also accepted: pervyy vtoroy tretiy — 1-y; первый, второй, третий, 1-й; pervyy, vtoroy, tretiy, 1-y

26.5 Close the numeral slice

Answer: десять десятый

Also accepted: desyat desyatyy; десять, десятый; desyat, desyatyy

Chapter 27

27.1 (*reading*) — *six words off a board*

Answer: сыр

Also accepted: сыр; cheese

27.2 (*reading*) — *three to open, three to rescue*

Answer: medlenno

Also accepted: медленно; slowly

27.3 (*reading*) — *the first passage*

Answer: anna

Also accepted: Анна

A note on sources

Etymologies are traced against standard comparative sources for Slavic and Indo-European, and every English cousin claimed here is one the evidence actually supports. Where a resemblance is only a resemblance, the text says so rather than quietly banking it.

Index

Look up an English meaning, a dedicated language topic, or a chapter topic. Each linked reference opens the chapter where the material is introduced; the focus labels name only explicitly typed lesson sections.

0–9

1-й — writing an ordinal as a figure

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 26, p. 205

A

a hundred — three letters, and the word that names half the Indo-European family сто (sto)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 25, p. 201

also, too — two little words fused, and the way to say 'me neither' тоже (tózhe)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 16, p. 133

and-but — the second half of English's but, and the second joining word that is a single letter а (a)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 17, p. 141

and — one letter, one sound, and the commonest word in the language и (i)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 16, p. 133

And, Or, and Neither

chapter topic; Chapter 16, p. 133

B

because — the question почему answered by turning it round, word for word потому что (patamú shto)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 19, p. 157

- bread — masculine, and not a Slavic word at all** хлеб (khleb)
explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 63
- brother — masculine, one soft sign away from a verb you already know, and this time it really is your English cousin** брат (brat)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 7, p. 71
- but — the flat contradiction, one of two words English hides under a single but** но (no)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 17, p. 141
- But, Twice Over**
chapter topic; Chapter 17, p. 141
- bye — casual, and much younger than it sounds** пока (paká)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 11, p. 89

C

- cheese — masculine, and secretly the same word as сырой, 'raw'** сыр (syɾ)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 107
- coffee — masculine, the one exception worth meeting on purpose** кофе (kófe)
explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 63

D

- dad — masculine despite the -a ending, the first noun in this book where biology beats the spelling rule** папа (pápa)
explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 12, p. 99

E

- ear — neuter, the first word Russian gives its third gender, and a word-for-word cousin of the English ear** ухо (úkho)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 79
- eight — and the seven standing inside it** восемь (vósem)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 24, p. 195
- Eleven Letters, Sorted Into Three Kinds**
chapter topic; Chapter 14, p. 113
- Excuse Me, and Say It Again**
chapter topic; Chapter 21, p. 173
- excuse me, sorry — the word this book had no way of saying, and the way every request to a stranger starts** извините (izviníte)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 21, p. 173

eye — masculine, and the word that quietly evicted Russian’s

inherited word for eye глаз (glaz)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 79

Eyes, Ears, Mouth, and Nose

chapter topic; Chapter 9, p. 79

F

Family

chapter topic; Chapter 8, p. 77

family — feminine, and an unexpected cousin of the English

word home семья (sem’yá)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 8, p. 77

father — formal register, and an old word that is NOT related to

English father at all отец (atéts)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 99

first — which one, not how many, and a word not built from

odin первый (pervyy)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 26, p. 205

five — the number inside a word English borrowed

whole пять (pyat)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 23, p. 189

forgive me — the heavier of the two apologies, and the one that

asks for something простите (prastít’ye)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 21, p. 173

four — where a kw became a ch, as it did in every Slavic

language четыре (chetýre)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 23, p. 189

Friend and Siblings

chapter topic; Chapter 7, p. 71

friend (female) — feminine, and друг with a prefix and an ending

stitched on подруга (podrúga)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 7, p. 71

friend (male, or unspecified) — masculine, and the reason you

own ты at all друг (drug)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 7, p. 71

G

good night — literally ‘of a calm night,’ the last thing you say

before sleep спокойной ночи (spakóynay nóchi)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 11, p. 89

goodbye (formal / neutral) — literally 'until [our] seeing each other again' ДО СВИДАНИЯ (da svidániya)
 explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 11, p. 89
Greetings and courtesy
 chapter topic; Chapter 1, p. 1

H

Heart
 chapter topic; Chapter 10, p. 85
heart — neuter, a silent letter, and one of the surest cognates in the entire Indo-European family сердце (sértse)
 explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 10, p. 85
hello (zdrávstvuyte — formal / polite) здравствуйте (zdrávstvuyte)
 explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1
help me — a verb you have owned since the hand chapter, wearing the ending you learned two lessons
ago ПОМОГИТЕ (pamagíte)
 Chapter 21, p. 173
hi / hello (privét — informal) привет (privét)
 explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1
how many, how much — the question word Russian uses for both, where English needs two сколько (skólka)
 explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 181

I

I — one letter, and one of the oldest words in Europe я (ya)
 explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 23
Introducing yourself
 chapter topic; Chapter 2, p. 23
it is necessary — a sentence with a verb, an infinitive, and no subject at all надо (náda)
 explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 165

J

juice — masculine, an ancient root that never surfaces in English сок (sok)
 explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 107

M

Milk, Cheese, Juice, and Soup

chapter topic; Chapter 13, p. 107

milk — neuter, and a straight cousin of the English word, hand-motion and all МОЛОКО (malakó)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 107

mom — feminine, and a word that is not really a language-family cousin of anything МАМА (máma)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 99

Mother and Father

chapter topic; Chapter 12, p. 99

mother — formal register, and the real, ancient cousin behind the babble-word МАМА МАТЬ (mat')

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 99

mouth — masculine, and this time the resemblance to English is not there to trust РОТ (rot)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 79

my name is... — literally 'they call me', with no word for 'my' and no word for 'name' МЕНЯ ЗОВУТ... (menyá zovút)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 2, p. 23

N

nine — and the ten it is about to rhyme with ДЕВЯТЬ (dévyat)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 24, p. 195

no (nyet) НЕТ (nyet)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

nose — masculine, and the same word as English nose and Latin**nasus НОС (nos)**

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 79

O

one — and the English words one, an, a, alone and only are all the same word ОДИН (adín)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 17, p. 141

One heard greeting — write what you know

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

One to Five, and an Answer to Skolko

chapter topic; Chapter 23, p. 189

One Word, and a Whole Sentence After It

chapter topic; Chapter 18, p. 149

or — and it is и with a small question-word stuck on the end или (íli)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 16, p. 133

other, another — your word for friend, doing a second job, and half of a joining pattern другой (drugóy)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 17, p. 141

P**Parting Words**

chapter topic; Chapter 11, p. 89

please / you're welcome (pozhalusta) пожалуйста (pozhalusta)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

pleased to meet you — literally 'very pleasant', and a cousin of English FRIEND очень приятно (óchen priyátno)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 23

R**Reading — Six Words, Six Lines, and a First Passage**

chapter topic; Chapter 27, p. 211

S**say it again — the first thing you can do about not understanding, and the book's first named****imperative повторите (paftarítye)**

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 21, p. 173

second and third — where the numbers come back второй третий (vtoróy trétiy)

Chapter 26, p. 205

see you later — literally 'until the meeting' до встречи (da fstréchi)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 11, p. 89

see you soon — literally 'until the soon [one]' до скорого (da skórava)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 11, p. 89

see you tomorrow — literally 'until [the] morning-after' до завтра (da záftra)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 11, p. 89

seven — the s that Persian turned into an h, kept семь (sem)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 24, p. 195

sister — feminine, brat's other half, and a cognate just as

secure сестра (sestrá)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 71

six — and the first sign of the split that names half the

family шесть (shest)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 24, p. 195

Six to Ten, and the Pairs That Shaped Each Other

chapter topic; Chapter 24, p. 195

Six Verbs, and the One You Never Say

chapter topic; Chapter 3, p. 37

slowly — the second half of the repair kit, and the request that

actually fixes listening медленно (myédlenna)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 21, p. 173

soup — masculine, and an 18th-century French loan, exactly like

кофе before it суп (sup)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 107

T

Taking, Asking, Helping, Loving

chapter topic; Chapter 5, p. 55

tea — masculine, regular this time, and the overland twin of

кофе's sea route чай (chai)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 63

ten — the word behind decimal, and the one nine

copied десять (désyat)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 24, p. 195

thank you (spasíbo) спасибо (spasíbo)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

, — the comma, and the rule with no exceptions

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, grammar; Chapter 19, p. 157

— the dash that stands where the verb would have been

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, grammar; Chapter 18, p. 149

. ? ! — the three marks that close a Russian sentence

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, grammar; Chapter 17, p. 141

The Two Letters You Already Knew, and Six You Did Not

chapter topic; Chapter 15, p. 123

The Verb That Takes Another Verb

chapter topic; Chapter 20, p. 165

The Words That Ask, and the Word That Points Back

chapter topic; Chapter 22, p. 181

three — three letters, and three of them shared with

English три (tri)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 23, p. 189

to ask a question — the verb behind the question you have asked

since Chapter 2 спрашивать (spráshivat')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 5, p. 55

to be able, can — the verb the book has been printing inside

помогать without ever owning it мочь (moch)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 20, p. 165

to be — and the one tense in which Russian refuses to say

it быть (byt')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 37

to go — the one-way verb, and a past tense from a different root

entirely идти (idtí)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 37

to help — built on can, which is English may and

might помогать (pomogát')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 55

to know — the same root as English know, and the sentence you

will use most знать (znat')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 37

to live — and the English word that used to mean

'alive' жить (zhit')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 37

to love, and to like — English love itself, with a letter that

appears from nowhere любить (lyubít')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 55

to read — and why Russian has no separate way to say I am

reading читать (chitát')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 47

to see — the root behind both vision and wisdom видеть (vídēt')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 37

to speak — one new letter, and a false friend worth killing

early говорить (govorít')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 37

to take — English bear, and a partner from a completely

different root брать (brat')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 55

to think — and the fact that shapes every Russian verb you will

ever meet думать (dúmat')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 47

to understand — literally to take hold of, which is what

comprehend means too понимать (ponimát')

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 47

to want — the verb this book has been able to describe

everything except desire without хотеть (khatét)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 20, p. 165

to write — one new letter, and the one stress mistake you must

not make писать (pisát')

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 47

Twenty, a Hundred, and the Number That Named a Family

chapter topic; Chapter 25, p. 201

twenty — two tens, with both halves still

audible двадцать (dvádsat)

Chapter 25, p. 201

two — the second number in the book, twenty-two chapters after

the first два (dva)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 23, p. 189

V

Verbs of the Mind and the Page

chapter topic; Chapter 4, p. 47

W

Water, Coffee, Tea, and Bread

chapter topic; Chapter 6, p. 63

water — feminine, and the first noun in this book, so it also

teaches how every Russian noun announces itself вода (vodá)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 6, p. 63

what's your name? — literally 'HOW do they call you?', not

'what' как вас зовут? (kak vas zovút)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 2, p. 23

what — the question word, and the one Russian spells with a ч

and says with a sh что (shto)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 18, p. 149

when — the fifth of the question family, and the one whose

spelling and sound part company again когда (kagdá)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 19, p. 157

Which One: the Ordinals, Said and Written

chapter topic; Chapter 26, p. 205

which, what kind of — the family member the book named two chapters before it taught it какой (kakóy)

Chapter 22, p. 181

who, which, that — the word that hangs a whole clause onto a noun, and English 'whether' is its cousin **который** (katóryy)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 181

who — **что's** twin, and the one Russian says exactly as it is spelled **кто** (kto)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 22, p. 181

Why, Because, When

chapter topic; Chapter 19, p. 157

why — literally 'after what', and the fourth member of the question family **почему** (pachemú)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 19, p. 157

Why plural Вы became polite

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 2, p. 23

Why Russian asks *how*, not *what*

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 2, p. 23

Y

yes (da) **да** (da)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

you (informal) and you (formal) — the split English threw away **ты, вы** (ty, vy)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 23

Other

a — a true friend, and the sound Russian keeps landing on

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

б and д — letters that hide nothing

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 1, p. 1

в and р — writing the two great false friends

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

г — a corner, and a hard g

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

е and т — the last two letters of **привет**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

ж — the beetle

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

з — a letter shaped like the digit 3

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

и between two sentences — the book's first long sentence

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 16, p. 133

Й — и in a hat

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

К — a true friend

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

КОГДА as a hinge — two things happening at once

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 19, p. 157

Л — a new shape

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

ЛИ — the small word that has been hiding inside ИЛИ

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 181

М — a true friend, and its capital

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

НИ ... НИ ... — refusing both halves at once

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 16, p. 133

О — the letter that is not always itself

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, usage and culture; Chapter 15, p. 123

П and И — filling in ПРИВЕТ

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 1, p. 1

ПРИВЕТ — look, hide, write, compare

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

ПРИВЕТ — one supported copy

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

С and Н — the last two false friends

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

У — the letter that looks like Latin y and says 'oo'

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

Ф — a circle on a stick

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

Х — an x that is not an x

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

Ц — one letter for two sounds

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

Ч — one letter for a sound English spells with two

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

ЧТО as a hinge — one word carrying a whole sentence

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 149

ЧТОБЫ — “in order to,” which is ЧТО wearing a wish

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 165

Ш — the comb

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

Ы — the vowel English has no name for

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

Ь — a letter that makes no sound of its own

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

ю — a syllable in one letter, again

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 123

Я — one letter that is a whole syllable

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 113

я думаю, что ... — saying that an opinion is yours

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 149

я не знаю, что ... — admitting it, in a whole sentence

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 18, p. 149

я хочу читать — two verbs in a row, and no word between them

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 20, p. 165