

If you're in a Russian speaking country while learning the language, then you'll soon be recognizing a lot of short expressions that aren't typically covered in a step by step program for learning Russian.

The greetings are an obvious one, and it's good to focus on trying to get good pronunciation.

Привет! (Hi!) (with friends and younger people)
Здравствуй^{те}. (Hello.) (formal/polite) (the first 'в' isn't really pronounced)

And it is quite often pronounced as "Здрас^ьте" if not very formal.

Доброе утро! (Good morning!)
Добрый день! (Good day. / Good afternoon.)
Добрый вечер! (Good evening.)

In English, we typically don't use the expression 'Good day.' or 'Good afternoon.' but in Russian it's very common. We also often just say 'Morning!', either as the first greeting or in reply to someone else greeting us. You can't do this in Russian but you can give the shorter reply of 'Доброе.'. Sometimes they'll also reply "Доброе! Доброе!" which is very friendly.

Спокойной ночи. (Good night.) (spelling is often difficult to remember, so here's a tip: Споко^йной)

You can also say, Доброй ночи., but it's not common.

It's interesting to note also that in Russian it's still considered night (ночь) at 1 or 2 in the morning, as expressed in English. In fact, it's considered 'night' for the time that most people are sleeping, so about 6am it becomes 'morning', but it can be different for everyone.

From the greetings you can also see that there is some grammar involved with the ending changes and there is a difference in how you pronounce them but it's rather hard to hear when spoken quickly.

утро (morning) (neuter)
день, вечер (day, evening) (masculine)
ночь (night) (feminine)

The ending of the adjective 'good' changes depending on whether the noun is masculine, feminine or neuter. Trying to remember and understand it all at this point is really difficult, so simply remember how to spell and say them correctly.

Notice also that ночь (night) changes from ночь to ночи. Why?

The clearest explanation that I've come across is that it's like, "It is a good morning/day/evening!" and for 'good night' it's like, "I hope you have a good night.", so the structure changes. Like I said before, trying to understand it logically at this point (or ever for these expressions) really isn't necessary or useful.

There's another variation of 'Good morning!' that is quite common (more for written communication like emails).

С добрым утром!

Basically 'With a good morning!', and you can see how the word 'with' (с) changes the noun ending also. No need to understand all the details, and it would all be too overwhelming at this point, so simply get comfortable using these.

When saying 'farewell', there are several options.

Пока! (Bye. / See you.) (most common) (also: Пока, пока! ; mainly by women)
До свидания. (Good bye.) (very common also but more polite and not likely meeting again soon)

Several others are also common and somewhat follow English.

До встречи. (Till meet.) (Till we meet again.)
До завтра. (Till tomorrow.) (See you tomorrow.)
До вечера. (Till this evening.) (See you this evening.)

Again, you can see that the endings are changing, except in the case of 'tomorrow' (завтра). Again, rather than get into grammar rules that don't even make sense to me in English, I look at it like, "It was a good meeting/day/evening.", and you can't say "It was a good tomorrow.". 'Tomorrow' isn't a noun so it doesn't change form.

For nouns following the word 'до', the ending is generally Case 2 (Genitive). Again, no need to dwell on that now, you'll get lots of it later.

Be careful with 'вечера' and don't mix it up or pronounce it like 'вчера' (yesterday). ☺

Later when you start using the 'до' as a prefix, you'll remember that it means 'until/till' and the meaning of the 'altered' verb will be much clearer.

Perhaps even more important than greetings are simply 'please' and 'thank you'.

Спасибо. (thanks / thank you)
Пожалуйста. (please/go ahead) (you're welcome) (Essentially pronounced "Пожалста'.")
Не за что. (you're welcome) [not for what]

Note that 'пожалуйста' is used for saying "you're welcome" and for saying "please" or "go ahead, you first" and "here you are". The following example in a shop shows it quite clearly.

Customer: Два, пожалуйста. (Two, please.)
Staff: Пожалуйста. (Here you are.)
Customer: Спасибо. (Thank you.)
Staff: Пожалуйста. (You're welcome.)

If you bump into someone, or step on someone's foot in the crowded metro, say:

Извините. (excuse me / sorry)
Простите. (sorry / forgive me)

In many cases either expression can be used, as in English, so it's mostly a matter of developing a feeling for which one to use when, and if you use the other it's probably okay.

To reply 'no problem' simply say: Ничего. (nothing)

I sometimes mixed up my replies: "Ничего." and "Не за что." so pay attention to that if you find yourself making the same mistake. Also pay attention and make sure the emphasis is on the first syllable.

Often you want to really show your gratitude and can say:
Спасибо большое. / Большое спасибо. (Thank you very much.)
Спасибо за всё. (Thanks for everything.)

Another very useful expression to get you off on the right foot in any situation is simply 'May I ...?', and also 'Can you ...?' when requesting help or information.

Можно ...? (May I ...? / Can you ...?)

In many situations, nothing follows a greeting or 'thank you' and 'excuse me', so master them and use them.

What do you say after a greeting? For starters, "How are you?"

Как дела? (How are you? / How are things?)
Хорошо. / Нормально. / Отлично. (Fine. / Normal. / Excellent.)
And it's good to add "спасибо", which can be said first also.

А у тебя? / А у Вас? (And you?)
(А твои? / А Ваши?) (not common)

Note there's more than one way to express this idea, and again, some grammar issues get involved that you don't need to understand why, but need to learn to use correctly and not mix them up with half and half of each expression.

Как ваши дела?
Спасибо, отлично. А ваши?

А как твои дела?
Нормально. А твои?

As in English, there are a variety of other ways to ask 'How are you?'

Что там? (What's up?) (and also means 'What's there?' for given situations)
Как жизнь? (How's life?)

And of course you'll be meeting new people. With casual greetings people may often just give their name after saying hello, and you'd then do the same, and then they'll say "Очень приятно." (Nice to meet you.) to which you also say "Очень приятно." (Nice to meet you too.). Very casually you might hear "Мне тоже.", but it can be considered rude, so better to say "Очень приятно." or "Мне тоже очень приятно."

The more formal and polite reply is "Приятно познакомиться.", but if you're like me, that one ties your tongue in a knot and I just go with the simpler one, "Очень приятно."

- Привет!
- Привет!
- Саша.
- Брайан.
- Очень приятно.
- Очень приятно.

Or more formally:

- Здравствуйте!
- Здравствуйте!
- Меня зовут Саша. Как Вас зовут? (Как тебе зовут?)
- Меня зовут Брайан.
- Очень приятно.
- Очень приятно.

Note that the formal greeting 'Здравствуйте!' can be made less formal by simply saying 'Здравствуй!'

This is a common element for the formal 'Вы' form and the casual 'ты' form : Здравствуй(те)!

Note, that 'Вы' is supposed to be written with a capital when used formally for one person, and written 'вы' for plural 'you', but this rule is not strictly adhered to.

In general, if you're not sure whether to use 'Вы' or 'ты', go with 'Вы' but follow their lead, and use what they use, unless you're young and they're older, then stick with 'Вы'.

You will very, very often hear the expression: Давай!

Following the same pattern the formal and plural form is: Давайте!

You'll hear it a lot on the phone, and it's even used for 'good bye' on the phone. It's good practice to listen to phone conversations and pick out the short expressions, again getting used to the proper pronunciation, emphasis and rhythm.

Here are some variations that you'll hear:
Да, давай! / Ну, давай! / Хорошо, давай.

The word 'хорошо', can mean 'fine', in reply to the question, Как дела? (How are you? / How are things?), and it can also mean 'okay', as in agreeing with someone.

There are a few more expressions that are handy. First, when you're about to begin eating, or if someone comes in and you're already eating, they'll say: Приятного аппетита! (Bon appetit!)

Remember, 2 'п's, the same as in English and French, and it comes from the root word 'аппетит', so note the ending change. Again, it's because you're expressing a wish, like 'Спокойной ночи.' (Good night.).

And after you sneeze, they'll say: Будь здоров! (Bless you!) [Be healthy.] (to a man)

And to a woman: Будь здорова!

And using the formal and plural form: Будьте здоровы.

It takes a while to get used to the ending changes and to use them correctly, so at this point it's simply important to be aware of them and realize that they need to be mastered eventually if you're going to speak Russian well.

When having a shot of vodka you generally hear "Ваше здоровье!!" (for 2 people drinking together) or "За здоровье!!" (for many people). Just be careful how many Vodka shots you drink!

Here's an interesting line from a Russian movie:

Неслыханно! Доктор отказывается
пить за здоровье.

That's unheard of! A doctor refuses to
drink to good health.

And you'll hear the word 'здорово' which can be used for 'hi', and 'cool' or 'great/excellent'. The difference is in the pronunciation.

Здорово! – cool (**Zdor**-ra-va!)

Здорово! – hi (Zda-**ro**-va!)

A key to language learning is to build from one expression to another, so learning the following, helps to also solidify the understanding of 'Будь здоров!'.

Будь счастлив(а)! (Be happy!) (to woman)

Надя и Ипполит, будьте счастливы! (Nadya and Ippolit, be happy!)

And then you may quickly wonder how to say this common expression:

Не волнуйся. Будь счастлив(а)! (Don't worry. Be happy!)

Не волнуйтесь. Будьте счастливы! (formal)

One final phrase that will be useful once you're able to ask questions is:

Скажите, ...? [Tell me, ...?] (Could you tell me?)

And to be more polite you can say:

Скажите, пожалуйста, ...? [Tell me, please, ...?] (Could you please tell me?)

Listen for it, and when someone comes up to you and says: "Скажите, ...?", you can smile and reply: "Извините, я не понимаю по-русски." (Sorry, I don't understand Russian.)

Or better yet, say:

"Извините, я чуть-чуть понимаю по-русски." (Sorry, I only understand a little Russian.)