

Please fasten your 'seatbelts' as we get ready to begin the fastest way to learn Russian. There will be no 'waiting at stations' and nothing will be repeated, but you're welcome to 'take a break' at any point to 'see the sights' and review material covered to that point, then 'get back on the train' to continue your 'high-speed journey'.

With that said, let's begin. If you're learning a new language, the first word to learn is simply 'thank you', so in Russian:

спасибо, [spa'see'ba] [спа'си'бо].

In most languages, there's a short form, like 'thanks', and other forms like 'thanks a lot' and 'thank you very much'. In Russian you'll commonly hear

'пасибо, [pa'see'ba]. (thanks) (but better to just use 'спасибо')

Спасибо большое. [spa'see'ba bal'shoye], (Thanks a lot.) [which literally means 'thanks big'.]

Russian, unlike English, is very flexible in word order so you can also say:

Большое спасибо.

The next useful expression to learn is obviously:

пожалуйста [pa'zshyal'sta] (please; you're welcome)

Unless you're a linguistic genius, you will never be able to remember all words, how to spell them and how to pronounce them after being told once. Thus, everyone will have to get off this 'express train' and 'stretch their legs' (practice what has been introduced so far). But I'm sure nobody needs to do that just yet. ;)

Next, we've got:

привет [pree'vee'yet] (hi) [casual, informal]

здравствуйте [sdras'vootya] (hello) [formal]

здравствуй [sdras'vui] (hello) [formal]

да [da] (yes)

нет [nee'yet] (no)

It's important to know that Russian has a 'formal' and 'informal' form of 'you' and all words will have a different ending depending on whether it's 'formal' or 'informal'. French, German and other languages are the same. For us native English speakers, it takes some practice to get used to using both and switching from one to another as needed.

As you know, learning a word isn't enough, you have to be able to understand the meaning when it's used within a sentence, and often there's no 'logic' to it.

Да нет. [da nee'yet] (Of course not.) (also used as a contradiction to a previous statement)

Now let's learn a few key words that will get you expressing full sentences.

Что это? [shto eta] (What's this/that?)

Где? / Что? [g'dyea / shto] (Where? / What?)

Это. [eta] (This/That.)

Это книга. [eta k'neega] (It's a book.) / (This/That is a book.)

With the word for book, **книга**, it's important to make the 'k' sound distinct and don't say 'knee' and relate it to the English word.

The distinct 'k' sound is found in all Russian words, including '**кто**' (who), and it's not two syllables like 'ke-toe'. It's said quickly '**кто**' (k'toe). And there's a tiny inflection on the 'o' at

the end, which almost sounds like an 'a'. Practice makes perfect, and you'll need plenty of it before you master the word '**пожалуйста**'.

Кто это? (Who's this/that?)

Где? / Кто? (Where? / Who?)

Это. (This/That.)

Это Брэд. (That's Brad.) ('Brad' could also be spelled 'Брад' but 'Брэд' is more common.)

And make sure you don't say 'eto'!! It's an 'a' sound '**это**' (eta).

что [shto] (what)

это [eta] (this/that/it/these/those)

книга [kneega] (book)

кто [k'toe] (who)

Now here's a great expression:

Что что? [shot shto] (Pardon?)

And you'll often hear: **Да, да, да, да ...** mainly meaning 'yes'. It's repeated for emphasis and maybe 'style'.

The Russian word '**это**' is used for 'this, that, these, those', and the concept of 'it' is similar except in the 'first reply' (**Это книга.**). For example:

Что это? (What's this/that?)

Это книга. (It's a book.) / (This/That is a book.)

Где она? (Where is it?)

Она в столе. (It's on the table.)

он [on] (he, it (masculine))

она [ana] (she, it (feminine))

оно [ano] (it (neuter))

они [anee] (they)

And note that Russian doesn't have articles like 'a, an' and 'the'. Russian speakers find this difficult when learning English, and for us, the difficulty is that the endings change depending on the Case.

стол (table)

в столе (on the table)

Another useful word when in a Russian speaking country is '**можно**' [moe'zshna] (may). So if you want to sit down somewhere you could say: **Можно?** [mozshna] (May I?) and they would say: **Пожалуйста.** [pa'zshal'sta] (Go ahead./Please.), and you'd say: **Спасибо.** (Thanks.)

At the beginning of sentences, you will often hear either of these two words:

ну [nu] (well, so, then)

а [a] (and, but, oh)

And you'll also hear **да** (yes) used at the beginning of a sentence but it will have no meaning.

You'll find them easy to learn and use. What you may need a bit of practice with, is to remember to use these next two words when necessary, and not the above two:

и [ee] (and)

но [no] (but) (*don't accidentally say 'ну' when you mean 'но' (but)*)

And again, there are many common expressions from combined words:

Ну да,.. [nu da],.. (Well, yes.) / (You're right.)

And you can reverse if for a completely different meaning:

Да ну! [da nu],.. (Oh really?) / (No kidding, batman.) (*It's not always sarcastic.*)

And you'll need these words:

хорошо [ha'ra'sho] (okay)

конечно [kon'nyesh'nya] (of course, (for) sure)

давай [da'vai] (Come on. / Let's go. / Go!)

Now, let's move on to some other useful things to know:

Что ты делаешь? (What are you doing?)

Я читаю книгу. (I'm reading a book.)

And using the formal 'you':

Что Вы делаете? (What are you doing?)

Я читаю книгу. (I'm reading a book.)

And using plural 'you':

Что вы делаете? (What are you doing?)

Мы читаем книгу. (We're reading a book.)

или... (or...)

Я читаю книгу. (I'm reading a book.)

А я слушаю музыку по радио. (And I'm listening to music on the radio.)

(А он(а) слушает музыку по радио. (And (s)he's listening to music on the radio.))

или... (or...)

А я слушаю радио. (I'm listening to the radio.)

музыка (music)

по (along ; by, over ; according to ; through) [no need to translate, just learn how to use it]

радио (radio)

As you can see, the endings of verbs change depending on 'I, you, we, etc'. And the endings of nouns also change (sometimes) which is the Russian system of Cases. They're a bit of a nightmare, but if you learn them step-by-step and get lots of practice, they're really not so bad.

Let's start with the verbs:

Что я делаю? (What am I doing?)

Что ты делаешь? (What are you doing?)

Что он делает? (What is he doing?)

Что она делает? (What is she doing?)

Что мы делаем? (What are we doing?)

Что вы делаете? (What are you doing?)

Что они делают? (What are they doing?)

The above Russian expressions can also be equivalent to "What do you do?" (*as a routine activity*), and the infinitive from '**делать**' (to do) is also important to know.

Что делать? (What should I/we do?)

Russian speakers like to say Russian has only 3 tenses – past, present, future – but that's not really true. They also have 'perfective' and 'imperfective' forms which have an array of meanings. We'll give them to you here so that you have all the information and can refer back to it as need be.

The past tense is pretty simple and changes ending based on 'gender':

делал (did / was doing) (masculine)

делала (did / was doing) (feminine)

делали (did / was doing) (plural)

делало (did / was doing) (neuter) (Technically it exists, but it's almost never used.)

And the 'imperative' or 'command' form is also pretty simple and has a 'casual' form and a 'formal/plural' form:

делай (do) (casual)

делайте (do) (formal/plural)

Делай(те)! (Do it!) ...but you'll rarely hear such an expression. What you'll hear all the time is:

Давай(те)! (Come on! / Let's go! / Do it! / Okay! / ...)

The above are all the 'imperfective' form. For the 'perfective' form, simply put 'с' at the front.

Here's a table showing all forms.

делать	дела-ю	дела-ешь	дела-ет	дела-ем	дела-ете	дела-ют	1
	делал	делала	делали	делало			2
	делай	делайте					3
сделать	сделаю	сделаешь	сделает	сделаем	сделаете	сделают	4
	сделал	сделала	сделали	сделало			5
	сделай	сделайте					6

Now here's a quick reference for when to use each: *(the numbers represent each line in the table)*

- 1 present tense, imperfective :
describes action ; do, doing ; read, reading ; work, working
- 2 past tense, imperfective :
action occurred in past and not linked to present time ; unknown if completed or not
Что ты делал вчера? (Что Вы делали вчера?) Вчера я работал.
(What did you do yesterday? (formal 'you') I was working yesterday?)
also used to denote duration of action ; how long....
Виктор читал книгу 2 часа.
(Victor was reading a book for 2 hours. / Victor read a book for 2 hours.)
(Victor has been reading a book for two hours.)
Note: Past continuous form will always translate to past imperfective form.
- 3 imperative / command, imperfective :
used for a command to do something
Делай(те)! *(Do it!)*
Читай(те)! *(Read it!)*
Слушай(те)! *(Listen! / Listen to it!)* (And is often used at the beginning of a sentence, meaning 'Listen/Look, ...')
- 4 future tense, perfective:
action which is certain to take place in the future, or must end at a definite moment in the future ; will happen and will be finished....
Я сделаю. *(I'll do it.)*
versus 1. **Я делаю.** *(I'm doing it. / I do it. (regular activity))*
- 5 past tense, perfective :
completed action, whose result is known
Виктор прочитал книгу. *(Victor read (the entire) book.)*
Я сделала. *(I finished it. / I did it.)* (and you know the speaker is female)
The key point to remember is that you use the 'perfective' form for a 'completed action'.

- 6 imperative / command, perfective :
 used for a command to do something, and do it to completion or 'do it quickly'
Сделай(те)! (*Do it!*)
Прочитай(те)! (*Read it!*) (read all, or read over quickly)
Послушай(те)! (*Listen to it!*) (listen to all, or listen to something quick)
 Sometimes it's not 'cut and dry' which one you should use, and both might be okay.
(По)Слушай(те), ... (*Listen, ...*) (used just like we do in English)

Now, there's another 'future form' which uses the Russian equivalent to 'will':

- Я буду делать.** (I will do it.)
Ты будешь делать. (You will do it.)
Он будет делать. (He will do it.)
Она будет делать. (She will do it.)
Мы будем делать. (We will do it.)
Вы будете делать. (You will do it.)
Они будут делать. (They will do it.)

To form a question in Russian, you simply use a rising tone of voice. The word order stays the same.

- Ты будешь делать?** (Will you do it?)
Он будет делать? (Will he do it?)
Она будет делать? (Will she do it?)
Мы будем делать? (Will we do it?)
Вы будете делать? (Will you do it?)
Они будут делать? (Will they do it?)

And to make a 'negative sentence', you use the word '**не**' (not).

- Я не буду делать.** (I won't do it.)
Ты не будешь делать. (You won't do it.)
Он не будет делать. (He won't do it.)
Она не будет делать. (She won't do it.)
Мы не будем делать. (We won't do it.)
Вы не будете делать. (You won't do it.)
Они не будут делать. (They won't do it.)

And you can do the same thing with a question, only it will often mean the same thing as the above set of questions and '**не**' is added without real meaning and in fact makes it more polite.

- Ты не будешь делать?** (Won't you do it?) / (Will you do it?)
Он не будет делать? (Won't he do it?) / (Will he do it?)
Она не будет делать? (Won't she do it?) / (Will she do it?)
Мы не будем делать? (Won't we do it?) / (Will we do it?)
Вы не будете делать? (Won't you do it?) / (Will you do it?)
Они не будут делать? (Won't they do it?) / (Will they do it?)

Pretty simple, right? If you'd like to 'stretch our legs', this is a great point to do it. We've covered a lot of ground already and a bit of practice with it all would do you good.

Here are a few more pointers regarding Russian verbs and 'tenses'.

- 4, 6 perfective verbs have no present tense, since they cannot denote an action coinciding with the moment of speaking.
- 1, 2, 3 some verbs are only imperfective (or perfective) ; verbs denoting a process or state are only imperfective :
жить (live), **знать** (know), **любить** (love), **работать** (work)
- 1, 2, 3 often used to denote habitual or customary action, or action repeated at regular intervals ; used in conjunction with words like :
обычно (usually), **всегда** (always), **каждый день** (every/each day)
каждый вечер, каждое утро, каждое лето (every evening / morning / summer)

- 7 'быть' + infinitive (imperfective) ; future tense, imperfective :
desired, intended future action but not absolutely certain.
sentences often contain words indicating duration of action

(to be) (will / was, were)

быть	буду	будешь	будет	будем	будете	будут
	был	была	были	было		

--- (no perfective form)

Ты будешь здесь? (Will you be here (later)?) (or: "You're not going anywhere, are you?")
Да, буду. (Yes, I'll be here.)

Он будет там? (Will he be there?)

Она будет дома? (Will she be (at) home?)

Мы будем делать? (Will we do it? / Are we going to do it?)

Вы будете читать? (Will you read it?)

Они будут жить здесь? (Will they live/stay here? / Are they going to (be) live/stay(ing) here?)

Ты был(а) в России? (Have you been to Russia?)

Она была там? (Was she there?) / (Has she been there?)

Они были здесь? (Were they here?) / (Have they been here?)

Оно было там? (Was it there?)

здесь (here) (*make sure you get a hard 'z' sound and not an 's' sound at the beginning*)

там (there)

где (where) (*practice to get the pronunciation correct ; g'd'ye ; especially the ending -ye*)

Ты живёшь здесь? (Do you live here?)

Нет. (No.)

А где ты живёшь? (Where do you live?)

В Канаде. (In Canada.)

Я живу в Канаде. (I live in Canada.)

Note that it's very common to add 'А...' at the beginning of a sentence in Russian, such as in the example above.

(to live)

жить	живу	живёшь	живёт	живём	живёте	живут
	жил	жила	жили			

--- (no perfective form)

Где он живёт? (Where does he live?)

Я не знаю. (I don't know.)

(to know)

знать	знаю	знаешь	знает	знаем	знаете	знают
	знал	знала	знали	знало		

--- (no perfective form)

And the common and polite way to ask a question in Russian is:

Вы не знаете? (Do you know...? / You wouldn't happen to know?)

Including 'не' makes it more polite, and without it, it's a bit rude.

Another verb that you'll need for these types of questions is:

Скажите, ... (Tell me, ...)

Скажите, пожалуйста, где здесь туалет?

Вы не скажете, где здесь туалет?
Вы не знаете, где здесь туалет?

And pay attention to the pronunciation of 'туалет' (toilet). It's different than English. Make sure you get the 'oo' sound followed an 'a' sound. [too-a-let].

And pay attention to the pronunciation of 'Скаж~~и~~те' and 'скаж~~е~~те'.

Скаж~~и~~те, .. (Tell me, ...)
Вы не скаж~~е~~те ... (Can you tell me, ...)

And here you'll see that the 'imperfective' form is completely different.

(to speak; to say/tell)

говорить	гов о рю	гов о ришь	гов о рит	гов о рим	гов о рите	гов о рят
	гов о рил	гов о рила	гов о рили	гов о рило		
	гов о ри	гов о рите				
ска з ать	скаж у	скаж е шь	скаж е т	скаж е м	скаж е те	скаж у т
	ска з ал	ска з ала	ска з али	ска з ало		
	скаж и	скаж и те				

And now when someone asks you:

Вы говорите по-русски? (Do you speak Russian?) ...you can reply:
Да, чуть-чуть. (Yes, a little.)

Что ты сказал(а)? (What did you say?) (*just now, brief statement*)
А что ты говорил(а)? (об этом, обо мне, про ...) (What did you say? / What did you tell them/him/her?) (about it, about me, about ...) (*longer story*)

Что он сказал? (What did he say?) (*just now, brief statement, or in reply/answer to something*)
Ничего. (Nothing. / Nothing much.)

Что он говорит? (What's he saying?)
Ничего. (Nothing. / Nothing much.)

О чём он говорит? (What's he talking about?)
Не о чём. / Ни о чём. [Not about anything.]

And don't let this expression fool you. I told Yulia that I'd bought a present for her brother to give to him on his birthday. When she heard what it was, she said:

Он скажет спасибо. [He will say thank you.] (He will like it.)

I was confused because I didn't think of 'ска~~з~~ать' as a 'future' tense.

And note, the meaning of 'ничего' (nothing; no problem, no worries; nothing much) depends on the situation.

Что ты делаешь? (What are you doing?)
Ничего. (Nothing. / Nothing much.)

Извини(те)! (Sorry! / Excuse me.)
Ничего. (No problem. / No worries.)

And another similar word to 'Извини(те)!' that is good to know:

Прости(те)! (Forgive me.)
Ничего. (No problem. / No worries.)

The above gives you a solid 'first overview' of Russian and 'how it works'. And again, unless you're a genius, you're going to need a lot of practice to be able to speak and write Russian correctly on your own. Knowing the rules is one thing. Using them correctly is something else entirely.

I was really surprised at how many times I would forget to use the past tense form. It's super easy, and English has a past tense form, so it should've been easy but it wasn't. It still took practice and focus to begin doing it correctly, consistently.

It's also common to reply using the verb, rather than say 'yes', but you have to remember that the ending changes.

Ты слушаешь? (Are you listening?)

Слушаю. (Yes.)

Хочешь? [You want?]

Хочу. (Yes.) [I want.]

And note that the English reply "Okay, I will." is almost never "Хорошо, я буду.". It's almost always another verb, like: **Хорошо, я сделаю.**, etc. It took me quite a while to stop saying, "Я буду.".

The ending changes for words depending on the 'Case' is the next problem that you'll have to tackle. Remembering all the verb endings will be an ongoing challenge and remembering the gender of words is also important but not as difficult.

Words ending in '-a' are generally feminine, and the ending changes to '-y' after a verb, when it's the direct object of the verb. ... Whatever... it's easy to understand simply by using it.

Это книга. (That's a book.)

Он читает книгу. (He's reading a book.)

Perhaps you remember this expression:

Спасибо большое. (Thanks a lot.)

This expression uses the word '**большой**' (big) in the 'neuter' form. Here are the Case 1 forms.

большой, большая, большое, большие (*masculine, feminine, neuter, plural*)

большой дом (big house)

большая книга (big book)

большое радио (big radio)

большие книги (big books)

Now that may not look too scary, but when you add the changes for 6 Cases, 6x4=24, well, it gets 'interesting'. ☺