

Lesson 1

This lesson introduces 7 letters of the Russian alphabet. Some of these letters may look familiar to you because they look like letters in the English alphabet and, in some cases, may be pronounced in ways that seem similar to the English alphabet. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to recognize and read out loud the Russian abbreviation USSR (which stands for "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics") as well as a number of other Russian words.

New Letters

This lesson presents to you 7 Russian letters. Of these seven letters, two are vowel letters and five are consonant letters. The letters will be presented in a sequence that makes pedagogical sense, not in the order in which they occur in the alphabet. However, to start you off, here is the Russian alphabet, with the letters of Lesson 1 underlined:

Аа Бб Вв Гг Дд Ее Ёё Жж Зз Ии Йй Кк Лл Мм Нн Оо Пп
Рр Сс Тт Уу Фф Хх Цц Чч Шш Щщ Ъъ Ыы Ьь Ээ Юю Яя

1.1 Аа *Aa* (1.1 = audio file number)

The first letter of Lesson 1 is the first letter of the Russian alphabet. Just as in English, this letter represents a vowel sound. In Russian, this is considered a hard-series vowel. (Trust us for now; we'll explain more what this means before the end of this lesson.) When this letter occurs in a word of only one-syllable, it is always pronounced in a way that rhymes with the English words "pot" or "cot" in midwestern American (not British) pronunciation. When the letter occurs in words of longer than one syllable, the pronunciation will vary according to the rules that will be presented in lesson 11.

1.2 Тт *Tt* (1.2 = audio file number)

This letter is a voiceless consonant letter. (The term "voiceless" will be explained in section 1.5 below.) It may be a **hard** or **soft consonant**, as will be explained in section 1.7 below. For now, practice pronouncing these letter combinations:

Ат

Та

Am

Ta

The italics version of the lower case may look like another English letter.

Important Note: In the materials presented above and throughout this manual, romanface (Ат) and italics (*Am*) will alternate so that you can learn to recognize both styles of print.

1.3 Cc Cc

This letter is another voiceless consonant letter that may represent a hard or soft consonant sound, as will be explained in section 1.7 below. For now, practice these letter combinations:

Caт

Tacc

Acт

Atc

Tca

*Cam**Tacc**Acm**Amc**Tca*

1.4 Pp Pp

This letter is a voiced consonant (see section 1.5) known as a liquid. It is "rolled" or "trilled" as you might expect to hear it in Spanish or Italian, rather than French or German. It, too, may be hard or soft, as will be explained in section 1.7.

1.4.1

Paт

Pac

Tpa

Cap

Tap

Caт

Cтaт

Tpac

*Pam**Pac**Tpa**Cap**Tap**Capm*

Тра

Трам

1.4.2 TP TP

It's very important to note that in English, the combination "tr" is often pronounced like |chr| as in the words "train" or "tree". In Russian, the combination "TP" is never pronounced with a "ch" sound. Practice with these combinations:

Тра

Тра

Тра

Тра

1.4.3

Now that you've learned this letter, you can recognize and pronounce the abbreviation USSR:

СССР



1.5 Зз Зз

Some of the consonant letters thus far have been marked as "voiceless". But what does that mean? It means that the consonant sounds they represent are created without the vibration of the vocal cords. Put the palm of your hand on your throat and pronounce the woman's name "Sue". Now, keeping the palm of your hand on your throat, pronounce the English word "zoo". You should feel a vibration in your throat when you pronounce "zoo," but not when you pronounce "Sue." That's because |s| is a voiceless consonant sound, but |z| is a voiced consonant sound. This is an important distinction because Russian has a pronunciation rule called

The rule of regressive assimilation

This is a big phrase that means simply that the pronunciation of one consonant is influenced by the consonant that follows it.

1.5.1 Cc / Зз

In Russian, there are many pairs of consonants, each pair consisting of a voiced and voiceless consonant. One of these pairs is C / З.

Practice with these sounds:

Заг

Заг

Заг

Заг

Загг

Загг

Заг

Заг

Заг

Заг

Загг

Загг

Here is a very important rule about voiced and voiceless consonants:

In word-final position, a voiced consonant is pronounced like its voiceless mate.

1.5.2 Voiced consonants in word-final positions

Each pair of letter combinations below (in the same row) is pronounced *the same*: there is no difference in their pronunciation.

Тас Таз

Рас Раз

Зас Заз

Трас Траз

Зрас Зраз

Тас Таз

Рас Раз

Зас Заз

Трас Траз

Зрас Зраз

1.6 Дд Дд

This is another voiced consonant (like Зз). Its voiceless mate is Тт. Like the letters Сс and Тт, it can also be a hard or soft consonant (see section 1.7). Remember, in word-final position, Дд will be pronounced like Тт. Note that the lower-case italic form of this letter looks different from the other versions of the letter: it has a spine that rises up and "bends" to the left. This is an important detail that will help you distinguish this form of the letter from another letter whose spine rises up and bends to the right.

1.6.1

Да

means "YES"

Дас

Даз

Дра

Драс

Драз

Драт

Драд

Дар

means "gift" or "talent" - the title of a novel by Nabokov

Рат

Рад

Сат

Сад

Зат

Зад

*Дас**Даз**Дар**Дра**Драс**Драз**Драт**Драд**Рат**Рад**Сат**Сад**Зат**Зад*

1.6.2 СД сд

When Дд is preceded by the voiceless consonant Сс, the voiceless consonant Сс is pronounced like Зз! This is another example of the rule of regressive assimilation. Practice with these combinations; each row presents contrasting sounds:

Стар

Сдар

Стра

Сдра

Ста

Сда

*Стар**Сдар**Стра**Сдра*

Ста Сда

1.7 Яя Яя

The last letter of this lesson is the last letter of the Russian alphabet. This letter is a soft-series vowel. If you've been wondering about the references to hard and soft consonants in sections 1.2 through 1.6, now you'll get your answer.

All Russian consonants can be divided into three categories based on the way they are pronounced. In one category we have consonants that are always "hard". (There are only three such consonants and you haven't learned any of them just yet.) In another category we have consonants that are always "soft". (There are only three of those and you haven't learned them yet, either.) The rest of the consonants of the Russian alphabet may be hard or soft depending on the letter that follows them. (This is another example of the rule of regressive assimilation.)

A soft consonant is either:

- One of the three consonants that is always soft (you'll learn them later)
- A consonant that is followed by a soft-series vowel (such as Яя)
- A consonant that is followed by a soft-sign (you'll learn that in lesson 9)

A hard consonant is either:

- One of the three consonants that is always hard (you'll learn them later)
- A consonant that is followed by a hard-series vowel (such as Аа)
- A consonant that is followed by a hard-sign (you'll learn that in lesson 9)
- A consonant that is not always soft and is in word-final position

The pronunciation of a consonant that can be either hard or soft depends on the pronunciation of the letter that follows it. When we use the terms "hard" and "soft" we are referring to the nature of the pronunciation of the sound. The pronunciation is determined by the placement of the tongue in the mouth when the sound is pronounced.

When the consonants are soft, they are pronounced by the middle of the tongue touching upper soft palate (the soft part of the roof of your mouth). The tendency in English is to pronounce sounds at the front of the mouth, so this will be a challenge for you at first. Practice it now, even if it makes you feel self-conscious, until it becomes easy for you to do without thinking about.

Practice listening to and repeating the sounds below:

1.7.1

Initial Soft Consonant

Тяс

Тяр

Тят

Сяс

Сяр

Сят

Initial Hard Consonant

Тас

Тар

Тат

Сас

Сар

Сат

Зяс	Зас
Initial Soft Consonant	Initial Hard Consonant
Зяр	Зар
Зят	Зат
Дяс	Дас
Дяр	Дар
Дят	Дат
Ряс	Рас
Ряр	Рар
Рят	Рат
Зря	Зра
Дря	Дра
Тря	Тра

1.7.2 Яя and the y-glide

The soft-series vowel Яя has a special characteristic. When it is in word-initial position, it is pronounced with a "y-glide" as in the word "yawn" or "yes". Practice with these combinations; the sounds in each row are DIFFERENT.

Яс	Ас	
Яр	Ар	
Ят	Ат	
Яд	Ад	<i>the first means "poison", the second means "hell"</i>
Яз	Аз	
<i>Яс</i>	<i>Ас</i>	
<i>Яр</i>	<i>Ар</i>	
<i>Ят</i>	<i>Ат</i>	
<i>Яд</i>	<i>Ад</i>	<i>the first means "poison", the second means "hell"</i>
<i>Яз</i>	<i>Аз</i>	

Summary Practice

1.8 Practice pronouncing the letter combinations below. Remember that voiced consonants in word final position are pronounced as their voiceless mates. Some of the words are in Italics in order to give you practice reading and recognizing the Italic letters.

- | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Тра | 15. <i>Старт</i> | 29. Раз | 43. Ряст |
| 2. Дра | 16. <i>Зря</i> | 30. <i>Драс</i> | 44. <i>Рязд</i> |
| 3. <i>Сат</i> | 17. Сра | 31. <i>Драз</i> | 45. Яр |
| 4. <i>Сяд</i> | 18. Рат | 32. Тарт | 46. Ар |
| 5. Дас | 19. <i>Рад</i> | 33. Тарс | 47. Ас |
| 6. Даз | 20. <i>Рас</i> | 34. <i>Тарз</i> | 48. Яс |
| 7. <i>Рас</i> | 21. Раз | 35. Зарт | 49. Ат |
| 8. <i>Раз</i> | 22. Дар | 36. Сарт | 50. Яд |
| 9. Драс | 23. <i>Тар</i> | 37. Стра | 51. Стра |
| 10. Дряс | 24. <i>Сар</i> | 38. <i>Здра</i> | 52. Сдра |
| 11. <i>Дряз</i> | 25. Дат | 39. <i>Драз</i> | 53. Стар |
| 12. <i>Тряс</i> | 26. <i>Дад</i> | 40. <i>Дряз</i> | 54. <i>Сдар</i> |
| 13. Трас | 27. <i>Тас</i> | 41. Раст | 55. <i>Сдяр</i> |
| 14. Траз | 28. Рас | 42. <i>Разд</i> | 56. <i>Стяр</i> |

Self-Quiz

Part 1. Listen to the sounds in the sound file and circle the letter combination that best represents the spelling of that sound.

1	Тар	Трас	Тяс
2	Дар	Дяр	Дас
3	Зат	Зас	Зяд
4	Дра	Дря	Дар
5	Ста	Стя	Стра
6	Раст	Ряст	Рад
7	Аст	Яст	Ат
8	Стар	Сдар	Сдяр
9	Зра	Зря	Стра
10	Рас	Ряз	Трас
11	Ярт	Ард	Дарт
12	Тяс	Тас	Трас
13	Дас	Дяс	Тяс
14	Трас	Тряс	Трат
15	Драс	Дряс	Драт
16	Старт	Сдарт	Сдар
17	Язд	Аст	Ят
18	Дяр	Дяс	Даз
19	Тас	Зас	Тяс
20	Дат	Дят	Дас

Part 2. Circle the letters that best fit the category presented in each question.

- | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Voiced consonants: | С | Т | З | Д | Р |
| 2. | Voiceless consonants: | С | Т | З | Д | Р |
| 3. | Hard-series vowels: | А | Я | | | |
| 4. | Soft-series vowels: | А | Я | | | |

Considering each combination of letters below, underline the ...

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| 5. | Hard consonants: | Стар | Тяс | Зат | Дяс | Ряд | Тар | Сдяс | Драт |
| 6. | Soft consonants: | Стар | Тяс | Зат | Дяс | Ряд | Тар | Сдяс | Драт |