

Russian Pronunciation Guide for English Speakers


"Master Russian Pronunciation in 10 Minutes: Short Comprehensive Guide"

INTRODUCTION

My name is Adrian, I am a **Polyglot** and **Language Tutor**, on my language learning journey I have found Russian to be the hardest out of the 7 foreign languages I have learned, that's why I decided to help you guys out by creating this short and quick guide on getting the correct pronunciation, I specialize in phonetics and I will attach my own audios of the sounds with example words and phrases, enjoy! Just click the microphone icon and you will be able to listen and read along.

To maximize the effectiveness I highly encourage all of you to read out loud all of the sounds and words that I use, and try to imitate the way I pronounce the different sounds, make sure to really focus on getting your ears used to the new sounds, with a bit of patience you will be able to distinguish them easily from their English approximation. Some Russian sounds don't exist in English, so there isn't really a good written approximation I can provide, pay close attention to the audios.

1. RUSSIAN ALPHABET ESSENTIALS

Focus on the consonants that differ most from English: 

Cyrillic consonants	Sound	English Approximation
Б б	B	as in "baby"
В в	V	as in "van"

Г г	G	as in "go"
Д д	D	as in "dog"
Ж ж	ZH	like "measure"
З з	Z	as in "zoo"
Й й	Y	as in "boy" (short)
К к	K	as in "kite"
Л л	L	as in "lamp"
М м	M	as in "man"
Н н	N	as in "no"

П п	P	as in "pot"
Р р	R	rolled "r"
С с	S	as in "sun"
Ф ф	F	as in "fun"
Х х	KH	as in "ugh" but much harsher, throat sound
Ц ц	TS	as in "cats"
Ч ч	CH	as in "chess"
Ш ш	SH	as in "shut"
Щ щ	SHCH	soft "shch" blend, "harsher" version of the previous sound

Cyrillic Soft Vowels	Sound	English Approximation
Е е	E	as "ye" in "yes"
Ю ю	YU	like "you"
Я я	YA	as "ya" in "yard"
Ё ё	YO	as "yo" in "yoga"
И и	I	as "ee" in "see"

Cyrillic Hard Vowels	Sound	English Approximation
У у	U	as "oo" in "boot"
А а	A	as "a" in "father"
О о	O	as "o" in "bore"
Ы ы	similar to a very short "oo" sound, but with the lips not rounded, or a throat sound between "oo" and "ee"	doesn't have a direct equivalent in English pronunciation
Э э	E	as "e" in "met"

2. STRESS MATTERS

The hard truth is that words' stress in Russian is **unpredictable** and changes the meaning of words. This is something that can't be learned in a short time. Take your time and listen to a lot of spoken Russian, so your brain will **intuitively** know where the stress is, memorizing will only help you short term.

Some examples: 

- за́мок = "castle" (stress on 1st syllable)
- за-мо́к = "lock" (stress on 2nd syllable)

TIP :

Don't guess. Learn stress with each word.

3. COMMON PRONUNCIATION MISTAKES

- Mixing up "B" (B) and "V" (В) ·
- Skipping the rolled "R" (Р) → practice tapping your tongue quickly ·
- Misreading X as "H" → it's not! It's a throaty "kh" ·

4. PRACTICE SENTENCES (with audio)

Make sure to practice and **read out loud** with the audios attached 

- Это моя кошка - (This is my cat)
- У меня есть брат - (I have a brother)
- Пожалуйста, говорите медленно - (Please, speak slowly)
- Меня зовут Адриан - (My name is Adrian)

5. HARD AND SOFT CONSONANTS PAIRS

Most of the time when you need to pronounce a soft consonant, it involves "**palatalizing**" the tongue, in simple words, the tongue, rather the back part, has to touch the top of the palate (roof of the mouth).

Examples: 

Да = "da" (hard)

Дя = "dya" (soft)

TIP :

Smile slightly when saying soft consonants. They almost sound like they have a tiny "y" in them. Although, from a phonetical point of view, what sounds like an "y" is just our tongue on the roof of our mouth

This is a **key** feature of the Russian language, just keep in mind that consonants come in pairs, a hard and a soft one, with the exception of **Ж Ш , and Ц** , which

are always hard, and **Ч, Щ and Ъ** which are always soft. Then you might ask, **how do I know if a consonant is soft or hard?**

Whenever you see a consonant followed by **ь** (called the "soft sign"), that consonant is pronounced soft.

Russian also has a **hard sign — ъ —** which is less common. It ensures that the consonant before it stays hard, even if followed by a soft vowel (**я, е, и, ё, ю**). This also forces you to pronounce the full vowel sound instead of a shortened or unstressed version.

For example, the word **"объект"** is similar to the English word "object."

Additionally, when you see soft vowels like **я, е, и, ё, ю** right after a consonant, that consonant is also soft.

Keep in mind that sometimes the vowel **"ё"** is written simply as **"е"**, so don't be surprised if you see **е** pronounced like **ё**.

Let's look at some examples to compare soft and hard sounds

Examples: 

- Путь (way) - Пьют (they drink)
- Ложка (spoon) - Лёд (ice)
- Хвост (tail) - Химия (chemistry)
- Дорого (expensive) - Дёшево (cheap)
- Подъезд (driveway) - Семь (seven)


What next?

Once you have gone through this course, you can say that you have mastered the basics of Russian pronunciation, practice daily and progress will come very quickly. Down below you can contact me and book a 1:1 lesson with me to check your pronunciation live, it will be a more customized approach and will get more advanced with each lesson, until native speakers can't even tell that you are a foreigner!

Did this guide help you? I'd love to hear your feedback!

If you're interested, I'll be making more in-depth guides soon on Russian grammar, pronunciation, and beyond.

Thanks ! / Спасибо !

Check out my website! 

Contact me! 