

**Your handy guide  
to everyday words and expressions**

# **Russian Phrases**

FOR  
**DUMMIES**

**A Reference for the Rest of Us!**

- ✓ Quick & easy approach gives you language fundamentals up front
- ✓ Words to Know sections help you find the right words fast
- ✓ Pronunciation key helps you talk the talk

**Andrew Kaufman, PhD**  
**Serafima Gettys, PhD**  
**Nina Wieda**  
*Coauthors of Russian For Dummies®*



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# ***Russian Phrases For Dummies***<sup>®</sup>

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**by Andrew Kaufman, PhD, and Serafima  
Gettys, PhD, with Nina Wieda**



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## **Russian Phrases For Dummies®**

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# The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Honey, please! Be patient! How's anyone going to know what's wrong unless I find the Russian word for 'alligator'?"



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# Introduction

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Speaking more than one language is like living more than one life, one of the ancient philosophers said. And it's true — traveling in a foreign country such as Russia suddenly becomes a lot more exciting when you can engage in elegant small talk with a hotel receptionist, compliment your tour guide's dress, or actually read the menu and order the food that you really want. Being able to ask for things instead of pointing at them, and being able to get directions from the locals instead of staring at a map, are some of the little things that make you feel at home.

You don't even need to cross the ocean to immerse yourself in Russian culture; you can find little Russian neighborhoods (or even pretty big ones!) in many American cities. Whether your colleagues, your neighbors, or your friends speak Russian, the best way to win their hearts is to speak their language to them.

Now, *Russian Phrases For Dummies* won't make you a fluent reader of Dostoevsky in the original (most Russians themselves need somewhat of a preparation for that). It will, however, equip you with phrases necessary to function in many real-life situations, from shopping to visiting the theater. So, buckle up, and good luck on your journey! Or, as the Russians like to say, **Zhelayem vam udachi!** (*zhih-lah-eem vahm oo-dah-chee*; We wish you good luck!)

## About This Book

The best thing about *Russian Phrases For Dummies* is that you don't have to read all the way through it to get the information you need. You can open the table of contents, find the section that interests you at the moment, and start talking! You don't have to read the previous chapters to understand any of the sections of this book.

Another thing you don't need to do is memorize long vocabulary lists or grammar rules. We give you ready-made phrases; you just need to read them and start using them right away to impress your Russian friends!

## Conventions Used in This Book

Here are some conventions that allow you to navigate through this book with maximum

ease:

- ✓ We present Russian phrases in transliteration (Russian sounds represented with English characters). You can see the Cyrillic alphabet in Chapter 1. Russian terms are easily found in the text because they're set in **boldface**.
- ✓ Each Russian word is followed by its pronunciation and English translation in parentheses. In each pronunciation, the stressed syllable is in *italics*.

A little example to give you an idea of what we mean: The phrase for "I love you" in Russian is **Ya tebya lyublyu**, (*ya tee-b'ah l'oo-bl'oo*; I love you).

## Foolish Assumptions

When we started writing this book, we tried to imagine what our future reader was going to be like. In the end, we came up with a list of foolish assumptions about who we think wants to read this book. Do you recognize yourself in these descriptions?

- ✓ You know no Russian — or if you took Russian in high school or college, you don't remember a word of it.
- ✓ You're not looking for a book that will make you fluent in Russian; you just want to know some words, phrases, and sentence constructions so that you can communicate basic information in Russian.
- ✓ You don't want to have to memorize long lists of vocabulary words or a bunch of boring grammar rules.
- ✓ You want to have fun and learn a little bit of Russian at the same time.

## Icons Used in This Book

For your convenience, we marked some information in this book with special icons. Check out this guide to the icons, and the next time you see one of them, you'll know what to expect!



From famous Russian writers to a polite way to decline an invitation, this icon marks a wide variety of curious and useful facts about Russian culture.



If you're curious about how the Russian language works, and if you want to expand your command of Russian to the extent of making up your own phrases, these bits of grammatical information may be of interest to you.



This icon points out some important information about Russian that's worth remembering.

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This icon signals a useful bit of information that can make life easier for you, whether it's a handy way to remember a useful word or an insider's advice on how to better handle a certain situation.



This icon draws your attention to something you need to know to avoid a common mistake.

## Where to Go from Here

Go ahead and start anywhere. You don't have to read in a specific order. Just choose a topic that seems appealing, find the corresponding chapter in the table of contents, and start speaking Russian!

If you've never taken Russian before, you may want to read Chapters 1 and 2 before tackling the later chapters. They give you some basics, such as how to pronounce the sounds.

## Chapter 1

# I Say It How? Speaking Russian

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding the Russian alphabet
  - ▶ Pronouncing words properly
  - ▶ Discovering popular expressions
- 

Welcome to Russian! Whether you want to read a Russian menu, enjoy Russian music, or just chat it up with your Russian friends, this is the beginning of your journey. In this chapter, you get all the letters of the Russian alphabet, discover the basic rules of Russian pronunciation, and say some popular Russian expressions and idioms.

## Looking at the Russian Alphabet

If you're like most English speakers, you probably think that the Russian alphabet is the most challenging aspect of picking up the language. But not to worry. The Russian alphabet isn't as hard as you think.

### From A to Ya: Making sense of Cyrillic

The Russian alphabet is based on the Cyrillic alphabet, which was named after the ninth-century Byzantine monk, Cyril. But throughout this book, we convert all the letters into familiar Latin symbols, which are the same symbols we use in the English alphabet. This process of converting from Cyrillic to Latin letters is known as *transliteration*. We list the Cyrillic alphabet here in case you're adventurous and brave enough to prefer reading real Russian instead of being fed with the ready-to-digest Latin version of it. And even if you don't want to read the real Russian, check out Table 1-1 to find out what the whole fuss is about regarding the notorious "Russian alphabet."



Notice that, in most cases, a transliterated letter corresponds to the way it's actually pronounced. As a rule, you may assume that the transliteration fairly well represents the actual pronunciation. The biggest exceptions to this are the letter **й**, which is transcribed as **j** but pronounced like an English **y**, and the soft sign **ь**, which is



transcribed as ‘ but only softens the preceding consonant.



Scholars do not agree on the letter **j**. Some believe that it’s a consonant; others think that it’s a vowel. We don’t want to take sides in this matter and are listing it both as a consonant and a vowel.



Consonants are pronounced softly if they are followed by **ye, yo, ya, or yu** (е, ё, я, ю). These letters (**ye, yo, ya, and yu**) preserve the *y* sound if they are at the beginning of the word (as in *yes, your, yard, and youth*).

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**Table 1-1      The Russian Alphabet in Cyrillic**

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<i>The Letter in Cyrillic</i>	<i>Transliteration (The Corresponding Letter or Sound in the English Alphabet)</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Vowel or Consonant</i>
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Aa	A	<i>ah</i> if stressed as in <i>father</i> ; <i>uh</i> if appearing in any unstressed syllable, as in <i>human</i>	Vowel
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<b>The Letter in Cyrillic</b>	<b>Transliteration (The Corresponding Letter or Sound in the English Alphabet)</b>	<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Vowel or Consonant</b>
Бб	B	<i>b</i> as in <u>b</u> ook; <i>p</i> if at the end of the word	Consonant
Вв	V	<i>v</i> as in <u>v</u> ictor; <i>f</i> if at the end of the word	Consonant
Гг	G	<i>g</i> as in <u>g</u> reat; <i>k</i> if at the end of the word	Consonant
Дд	D	<i>d</i> as in <u>d</u> uck; <i>t</i> if at the end of the word	Consonant
Ее	Ye	<i>ye</i> as in <u>y</u> es if at the beginning of the word; <i>eh</i> as in <u>t</u> en if preceded by any consonant, making that consonant sound soft; <i>ee</i> as in <u>s</u> eek if appearing in any unstressed syllable before a stressed syllable; <i>eh</i> after a stressed syllable and at the end of the word, making the preceding consonant sound softly	Vowel
Ёё	Yo	<i>yo</i> as in <u>y</u> our	Vowel
Жж	Zh	<i>zh</i> as <u>mea</u> sure; <i>sh</i> if at the end of the word	Consonant
Зз	Z	<i>z</i> as in <u>z</u> ebra; <i>s</i> if at the end of the word	Consonant
Ии	I	<i>ee</i> as in <u>p</u> ee <u>k</u>	Vowel



<b>The Letter in Cyrillic</b>	<b>Transliteration (The Corresponding Letter or Sound in the English Alphabet)</b>	<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Vowel or Consonant</b>
Йй	J	very short <i>y</i> as boy or May	Vowel or Consonant
Кк	K	<i>k</i> as in <u>king</u>	Consonant
Лл	L	<i>l</i> as in <u>lamp</u>	Consonant
Мм	M	<i>m</i> as in <u>mommy</u>	Consonant
Нн	N	<i>n</i> as in <u>note</u>	Consonant
Оо	O	<i>oh</i> as in <u>as</u> in <u>talk</u> ; <i>ah</i> as in <u>park</u> , if appearing one syllable before the stressed syllable; <i>uh</i> as in <u>Mormon</u> , if appearing in any other unstressed syllable	Vowel
Пп	P	<i>p</i> as in <u>port</u>	Consonant
Рр	R	flap <i>r</i> , similar to trilled <i>r</i> in Spanish, as in <u>madre</u> , for example	Consonant
Сс	S	<i>s</i> as in <u>sort</u>	Consonant
Тт	T	<i>t</i> as in <u>tie</u>	Consonant
Уу	U	<i>oo</i> as <u>shoot</u>	Vowel
Фф	F	<i>f</i> as in <u>fact</u>	Consonant
Хх	Kh	<i>kh</i> like you're clearing your throat, or like the German <i>ch</i>	Consonant



<b><i>The Letter in Cyrillic</i></b>	<b><i>Transliteration (The Corresponding Letter or Sound in the English Alphabet)</i></b>	<b><i>Pronunciation</i></b>	<b><i>Vowel or Consonant</i></b>
Цц	Ts	<i>ts</i> as in <u>ca</u> ts	Consonant
Чч	Ch	<i>ch</i> as in <u>ch</u> air	Consonant
Шш	Sh	<i>sh</i> as in <u>sh</u> ock	Consonant
Щщ	Sh'	soft <i>sh</i> , as in <u>sh</u> ee <u>p</u>	Consonant
Ъ	"	hard sign (makes the preceding letter hard)	Neither
Ыы	Y	<i>ih</i> (similar to <i>i</i> in <u>bi</u> g)	Vowel
Ь	'	soft sign (makes the preceding letter soft)	Neither
Ээ	E	<i>e</i> as in <u>e</u> nd	Vowel
Юю	Yu	<i>yu</i> as in <u>u</u> se if at the beginning of the word; <i>oo</i> as in <u>to</u> oth if preceded by any consonant, making that consonant sound soft	Vowel
Яя	Ya	<i>ya</i> if stressed as in <u>ya</u> rd; if at the beginning of the word; <i>ah</i> if preceded by any consonant, making that consonant sound soft; <i>ee</i> if unstressed and not in the final syllable of the word; <i>uh</i> if unstressed and in the final syllable of the word	Vowel

## I know you! Familiar-looking, same-sounding letters

You may notice that some of the Russian letters in the previous section look a lot like English letters. The letters that look like English and are pronounced like English letters are

✓ Аа

✓ Кк

✓ Мм

✓ Оо

✓ Тт

Whenever you read Russian text, you should be able to recognize and pronounce these letters right away.

## Playing tricks: Familiar-looking, different-sounding letters



Some Russian letters look like English letters but are pronounced differently. You want to watch out for these:

✓ Вв : It looks like English Bb, at least the capital letter does, but it's pronounced like the sound *v* as in *victor* or *vase*.

✓ Ее : This one's a constant annoyance for English speakers, who want to pronounce it like *ee*, as in the English word *geese*. In Russian, it's pronounced that way only if it appears in an unstressed syllable. Otherwise, if it appears in a stressed syllable, it is pronounced like *ye* as in *yes*.

✓ Ее : Don't confuse this with the letter Ee. When two dots appear over the Ee, it's considered a different letter, and it's pronounced like *yo* as in *your*.

✓ Нн : It's not the English Hh — it just looks like it. Actually, it's pronounced like *n* as in *nick*.

✓ Рр : In Russian it's pronounced like a trilled *r* and not like the English letter *p* as in *pick*.

✓ Сс : This letter is always pronounced like *s* as in *sun* and never like *k* as in *victor*.

✓ Уу : This letter is pronounced like *oo* as in *shoot* and never like *y* as in *yes*.

✓ Хх : Never pronounce this letter like *z* or *ks* as in the word *Xerox*. In Russian, the

sound it represents is a coarse-sounding, guttural *kh*, similar to the German *ch*. (See “Surveying sticky sounds,” later in this chapter, for info on pronouncing this sound.)

## How bizarre: Weird-looking letters

As you’ve probably noticed, quite a few Russian letters don’t look like English letters at all:

✓ Бб

✓ Гг

✓ Дд

✓ Жж

✓ Зз

✓ Ии

✓ Йй

✓ Лл

✓ Пп

✓ Фф

✓ Цц

✓ Чч

✓ Шш

✓ Щщ

✓ ь

✓ Ыы

✓ Ь

✓ Ээ

✓ Юю

✓ Яя



Don’t panic over these letters. Just because they look weird doesn’t mean they’re any harder to say than the others. It’s just a matter of memorizing their proper pronunciations. (Refer to Table 1-1 for details on how to say each letter.)

You may recognize several of these weird letters, such as *Ф, Г, Э, Л, П*, from learning the Greek alphabet during your fraternity or sorority days.

## Sounding Like a Real Russian with Proper Pronunciation



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