

Русский

The Russian Alphabet

Printed	Cursive	English
А а	<i>А а</i>	a
Б б	<i>Б б</i>	b
В в	<i>В в</i>	v
Г г	<i>Г г</i>	g
Д д	<i>Д д</i>	d
Е е	<i>Е е</i>	ye
Ё ё	<i>Ё ё</i>	yo
Ж ж	<i>Ж ж</i>	zh
З з	<i>З з</i>	z
И и	<i>И и</i>	i
Й й	<i>Й й</i>	y
К к	<i>К к</i>	k
Л л	<i>Л л</i>	l
М м	<i>М м</i>	m
Н н	<i>Н н</i>	n
О о	<i>О о</i>	o
П п	<i>П п</i>	p
Р р	<i>Р р</i>	r
С с	<i>С с</i>	s
Т т	<i>Т т</i>	t
У у	<i>У у</i>	u
Ф ф	<i>Ф ф</i>	f
Х х	<i>Х х</i>	kh
Ц ц	<i>Ц ц</i>	ts
Ч ч	<i>Ч ч</i>	ch

Printed	Cursive	English	Printed	Cursive	English
Ш ш	<i>Ш ш</i>	sh	- Ъ	- ъ	—
Щ щ	<i>Щ щ</i>	shch	Э э	<i>Э э</i>	e
- Ъ	- ъ	—	Ю ю	<i>Ю ю</i>	yu
- Ы	- ы	—	Я я	<i>Я я</i>	ya

Russian is one of several Slavic languages that use a form of the Cyrillic alphabet (others include Belarussian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Ukrainian). There are minor variations in the forms of Cyrillic used in the Slavic languages; the alphabet shown here is that used in modern Russian. Pre-1917 Russian documents also used the characters *i* and *v*, equivalent to modern *и*; the character *ѣ*, equivalent to modern *е*; and *ѐ*, equivalent to modern *ф*.

Even a superficial glance at the Cyrillic alphabet reveals that it is not totally foreign. When St. Cyril (traditionally regarded as the author of this alphabet) undertook devising a way to write Slavic sounds, he borrowed extensively from the Greek alphabet, and also modified some characters to represent distinctively Slavic phonemes. A few sounds were so foreign to Greek that he borrowed characters from other sources, e. g., *Ѱ* and *ѱ* from Hebrew to make *ш* and *щ*, representing the *sh* and *ts* sounds.

Besides the printed and cursive forms, italic letters appear in documents. A few italic forms can be puzzling, e. g., *з*, *д*, *т*, but the answer is simple: some italic forms are derived from their cursive equivalents. So *т* = *т*, *д* = *д* (*д* and *г* are both acceptable cursive forms of *д*), *з* = *г*, and so on. Alternate cursive forms of *т* or *м* include *ѳ* and what looks like an *i* with a line over it, rather than a dot.

Russian vowels are roughly similar to those of other European languages: *a* = *a* as in "father," *э* = *e* as in "let," *и* = *i* as in "machine," *о* = a sound somewhere between the *o*'s in "October," and *у* = *u* as in "rude" — but *а*, *э*, *ы*, *о* and *у* follow what are termed "hard" consonants, while the forms *я*, *е*, *и*, *ё* and *ю* follow consonants that are "softened" or palatalized. The basic distinction is illustrated by the word *нет* ("no"), pronounced "nyet" because the *e* vowel follows a palatalized *n* — a word pronounced like English "net," with a hard *n*, would be spelled *нэт*. This is why one often sees *я* transcribed as *ya*, *ё* as *yo*, and so on; the vowels are written differently to reflect the hard or soft quality of the consonants they follow. Standard Russian pronunciation gives full value only to vowels in accented syllables, and the farther the vowel is from the stress the less distinctly it is pronounced: *молоко* ("milk"), accented on the last syllable, is not pronounced like "mo-lo-ko" but more like "muh-lah-ko'."

The table at left shows approximate English equivalents of the sounds represented by Russian consonants, but more must be said. The letter *р* does generally sound like the English *g* in "go," but at the end of words it can sound like *k*, and in the declensional suffixes *-ого*, *-его*, and archaic *-яго* and *-аго* it sounds like English *v*. The letter *ж* (often rendered in English as "zh") sounds like *s* in English "pleasure." The *ч* sounds like the *ch* in "church," the *х* is pronounced like *ch* in German "Bach" or Scottish "loch," the *ш* sounds like the *sh* in "sheet," and *щ* is *sh* and *ch* run together, as in the name "Khrushchev."

Of the letters with no English equivalents given, *ъ* signifies that the preceding consonant is not softened or palatalized, *ь* shows that it is softened or palatalized, and *ы* represents a unique sound somewhat like the *y* in "very."

Source: Shea, Jonathan D., and William F. Hoffman. *Following the Paper Trail: A Multilingual Translation Guide*. Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, Inc., 1994.