

Український The Ukrainian Alphabet

Printed	Cursive	English
А а	<i>А а</i>	<i>a</i>
Б б	<i>Б б</i>	<i>b</i>
В в	<i>В в</i>	<i>v</i>
Г г	<i>Г г</i>	<i>g</i>
Ґ ґ	<i>Ґ ґ</i>	<i>h</i>
Д д	<i>Д д</i>	<i>d</i>
Е е	<i>Е е</i>	<i>e</i>
Є є	<i>Є є</i>	<i>ye</i>
Ж ж	<i>Ж ж</i>	<i>zh</i>
З з	<i>З з</i>	<i>z</i>
И и	<i>И и</i>	<i>y</i>
І і	<i>І і</i>	<i>i</i>
Ї ї	<i>Ї ї</i>	<i>yi</i>
Й й	<i>Й й</i>	<i>y</i>
К к	<i>К к</i>	<i>k</i>
Л л	<i>Л л</i>	<i>l</i>
М м	<i>М м</i>	<i>m</i>
Н н	<i>Н н</i>	<i>n</i>
О о	<i>О о</i>	<i>o</i>
П п	<i>П п</i>	<i>p</i>
Р р	<i>Р р</i>	<i>r</i>
С с	<i>С с</i>	<i>s</i>
Т т	<i>Т т</i>	<i>t</i>
У у	<i>У у</i>	<i>u</i>
Ф ф	<i>Ф ф</i>	<i>f</i>
Х х	<i>Х х</i>	<i>kh</i>

Printed	Cursive	English	Printed	Cursive	English
Ц ц	<i>Ц ц</i>	<i>ts</i>	Ю ю	<i>Ю ю</i>	<i>yu</i>
Ч ч	<i>Ч ч</i>	<i>ch</i>	Я я	<i>Я я</i>	<i>ya</i>
Ш ш	<i>Ш ш</i>	<i>sh</i>	Ь ь	<i>Ь ь</i>	<i>'</i>
Щ щ	<i>Щ щ</i>	<i>shch</i>	—	—	—

Ukrainian is one of several Slavic languages that use a form of the Cyrillic alphabet (others include Belarussian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Russian). The alphabet shown here is that used in standard modern Ukrainian. Under Soviet influence there was a tendency to replace the *г*, which sounds like a hard *g* as in English “go,” with *з*, which sounds somewhat like *h* in English; but *г* should be included in any chart of the alphabet, as one certainly may see it in records. Ukrainian words are almost always pronounced just as they are spelled.

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., *ש* and *צ* from Hebrew to make *ш* and *ц*, representing the *sh* and *ts* sounds.

Besides the printed and cursive forms, italic letters appear in documents. Even after one becomes familiar with the normal printed forms, a few italic forms can be puzzling, e. g., *м*, *д*, *з*, but the answer is simple: some italic forms are derived from their cursive equivalents. So *м* = *т*, *д* = *д* (*д* and *г* are both forms of *д* one may encounter), *з* = *г*, and so on.

The basic sounds of Ukrainian vowels are comparable to those of other European languages. They roughly approximate the following English sounds: *a* = *a* as in “father,” *e* = *e* as in “let,” *и* = *i* as in “sit,” *о* = the *o* in English “more,” and *у* = *u* as in “rude.” The vowels *я*, *е*, *і*, and *ю* have the same sounds as *a*, *e*, *и*, and *у* (though *і* sounds more like the *i* in English “machine”), but are considered “soft” versions of them. These soft vowels, except for *і*, are preceded with a slight *y* sound; when *і* is preceded by that *y* sound, it is spelled *ї* — the name for “Ukraine,” Україна, is pronounced roughly “oo-krah-ye-e’-nah.” This is why one often sees *я* transcribed as *ya*, *е* as *ye*, *ї* as *yi*, and so on; the vowels are written differently to reflect the hard or soft quality of their pronunciation (or of the consonants preceding them). The combination “*ю*” is spelled *йо* if it does not follow a consonant, or *ьо* if it does (e. g., його vs. нього).

The table at left shows approximate English equivalents of the sounds represented by Ukrainian consonants, but more must be said. The letter *ж* (often rendered in English as “zh”) sounds like *s* in English “pleasure.” The *ц* sounds like *ts* in English “cats,” the *ч* sounds like the *ch* in “church,” the *ш* like the *sh* in “sheet,” and *щ* is *sh* and *ch* run together, as in the word *щастя* (“fortune, fate”), pronounced “*shchástya*.” The *х* can be misleading because it is not pronounced like English *x*, but rather like guttural *ch* in German “*Bach*” or Scottish “*loch*.” The *ь* indicates that the preceding consonant is palatalized; an apostrophe *'* indicates that the preceding consonant is not palatalized (e. g., об’ява, “revelation, announcement”). Palatalization affects the pronunciation of consonants, but this feature is best studied by imitating native speakers. Note that *й* is a consonantal *y* in English “yacht,” not like the vowel sound in “very.”

Source: Hoffman, William F., and George W. Helon. *First Names of the Polish Commonwealth: Origins and Meanings*. Chicago: The Polish Genealogical Society of America, 1998.