

English Grammar for Students of Russian

***The Study Guide
For Those Learning Russian***

Second Edition

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for Those Learning Russian*

Second edition

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Mount Holyoke College

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English Grammar for Students of Spanish
English Grammar for Students of French
English Grammar for Students of German
English Grammar for Students of Italian
English Grammar for Students of Latin
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English Grammar for Students of Japanese
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Gramática española para estudiantes de inglés

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INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language, in this case Russian, requires that you look at a word in three ways:

1. The **meaning** of the word. An English word must be connected to a Russian word that has an equivalent meaning. For example, the English word *horse* has the same meaning as the Russian word **лошадь**.

You learn new vocabulary in Russian by memorizing each new word and its English equivalent. Memorizing vocabulary is a time consuming, but essential part of learning a foreign language. Here are a few tips to help you remember the meanings of Russian words.

Many times knowing one Russian word will help you learn another; Russian has many **cognates**, that is, words related to each other because they are based on a common stem or root.

The verb **писа́ть**, *to write*, for example, with its root **пис-**, is connected to

писа́тель	<i>writer</i>
письмо́	<i>letter</i>
описа́ние	<i>description</i>
переписа́ть	<i>to rewrite</i>

and many other words which share the same root. If you take the time to study common Russian roots (which your textbook and your teacher will point out) you will find it easier to remember vocabulary.

Sometimes words with the same or related meanings are similar in English and Russian. Russian has borrowed many words from English; these borrowed or **loan words** are especially prevalent in sports, transport and technology.

English	Russian
<i>radio</i>	ра́дио
<i>television</i>	телеви́зор
<i>transport</i>	тра́нспорт
<i>volleyball</i>	волейбо́л
<i>bus</i>	авто́бус

2. The **class** of the word. Words are grouped by types, each type being a **part of speech**. Depending on its part of speech, a word will

follow certain rules. You must be able to identify what part of speech a word belongs to so that you will know what rules to apply.

In this handbook we will discuss seven different parts of speech.

noun	verb
pronoun	adverb
adjective	preposition
	conjunction

Look at the word *love* in the following sentences.

I *love* speaking Russian.
|
verb

My *love* is like a beach ball: round.
|
noun

He is famous for writing *love* stories.
|
adjective

In English the word “love” looks the same in all three sentences, but each “love” belongs to a different part of speech. To translate these three meanings of *love* into Russian we would need to use three different words, each following a different set of rules. This handbook will help you to recognize parts of speech so that you can choose the correct Russian equivalent and know which rules apply.

3. The **use** of the word. In addition to its class as a part of speech, a word must be defined according to the role it plays in the sentence. Each word, whether English or Russian, serves a unique function within the sentence. Determining the function of a word will help you to use it properly in English and will help you to find the proper Russian equivalent.

Look at the word *her* in the following sentences.

All the students admire *her*.
|
direct object

The teacher gave *her* an “A.”
|
indirect object

Are you going to graduate with *her*?
|
object of preposition *with*

In English the word for “her” looks the same in all three sentences, but in Russian the word will be different in each instance because it has a different use in each sentence.

As a student of Russian you must pay special attention to the relationship of words within a sentence. Look at the differences between the two sentences below. Note the changes that occur as the subject of the sentence changes from *woman* to *man*.

*This is that young **woman** who was reading.*

Это **та** молодáя **жéнщина**, котóрая читáла.

*This is that young **man** who was reading.*

Это **тот** молодóй **человéк**, котóрый читáл.

In the English sentence we have changed one word, *woman*, to *man*. This change does not affect any other word in the sentence. In the Russian sentence, by contrast, the substitution of the word *man* for *woman* affects the endings for *that*, *young*, *who* and *was reading*.

For most English speakers, studying Russian presents a special challenge: we must be able to understand the precise grammatical relationship of words to each other so that we can select the correct form of each word to express that relationship.

8. WHAT ARE OBJECTS ?

Objects are nouns or pronouns that receive the action of verbs or complete prepositional phrases.

Most sentences consist, at the very least, of a *subject* and a *verb*.

Students study.
 | |
 subject verb

The subject of a sentence is a *noun* or a *pronoun* (see **What is a Noun?**, p. 4 and **What is a Pronoun?**, p. 33). Most sentences, however, contain other nouns and pronouns. Many of these words function as objects. Objects are divided into three categories, depending on how they are used in a sentence. The three types of objects are: direct objects, indirect objects, and objects of a preposition (see **What is a Preposition?**, p. 93).

Direct Object

IN ENGLISH

The **direct object** receives the action of the verb directly, without prepositions separating the verb from the receiver. It answers the one-word question *whom?* or *what?* asked after the verb.

Pierre hugged the bear.

Pierre hugged *whom?* Answer: The bear.

Bear is the direct object.

Oblomov loves his bed.

Oblomov loves *what?* Answer: His bed.

Bed is the direct object.

IN RUSSIAN

The direct object behaves the same way as it does in English. It answers the one-word question **кого?** (*whom*) or **что?** (*what*) asked after the verb. The direct object is expressed by the accusative case.

Alexei loved the **peasant girl**.

Alexei loved *whom?* Answer: The peasant-girl.

Peasant-girl is the direct object in the accusative case.

Алексей любил **крестьянку**.

Ivan drinks the vodka.

Ivan drinks *what*? Answer: The vodka.

Vodka is the direct object in the accusative case.

ИВАН ПЬЁТ **ВОДКУ**.

Indirect Object

IN ENGLISH

The **indirect object** also receives the action of the verb, but as its name implies, it differs from the direct object by receiving the action indirectly. The indirect object answers the two-word question *to whom?* or *for whom?* or *to what?* or *for what?* asked after the verb.

Tatiana wrote Onegin a letter.

Tatiana wrote *to whom*? Answer: Onegin.

Onegin is the indirect object.

She prepares her friends supper.

She prepared *for whom*? Answer: Her friends.

Friends is the indirect object.

In the two examples above the words “to” or “for” do not appear. We can rewrite these sentences inserting *to* and *for* without changing their meaning.

Tatiana wrote a letter *to* Onegin.

She prepared supper *for* her friends.

As the sentences above illustrate, the indirect object can be expressed in two different ways:

- with the indirect object before the direct object

Tatiana wrote Onegin a letter.

indirect direct
object object

In sentences of this type, where *to* or *for* is not included, the indirect object always comes after the verb, but before the direct object.

- with the indirect object after the direct object as part of a prepositional phrase starting with the preposition *to* or *for* (see below):

prepositional phrase
└──────────┘
Tatiana wrote a letter to Onegin.
direct indirect
object object

In sentences of this type, when the indirect object comes after the direct object, the preposition *to* or *for* will always be included.

Careful

Not every use of *to* or *for* identifies an indirect object. *To* and *for* can also introduce other types of prepositional phrases (see **What is a Preposition?**, p. 93).

In sentences which do not contain a direct object the indirect object may be written with or without the *to* or *for*:

Tatiana wrote Onegin.

Tatiana wrote *to* Onegin.

Not all sentences contain objects. Never assume the presence of an object; always ask the appropriate questions first.

The women work well.

The women work *whom* or *what*? No answer possible.

The women work *to* or *for whom*? or *to* or *for what*? No answer possible.

The sentence above has no objects. *Well* is an adverb telling how the women worked (see **What is an Adverb?**, p. 99).

IN RUSSIAN

As in English, the indirect object answers the question **кому́?** (*to* or *for whom*) **чему́?** (*to* or *for what*). The indirect object is expressed by the dative case.

She prepares supper for friends.

She prepares supper *for whom*? Answer: For friends.

Friends is the indirect object in the dative case.

Она́ гото́вит **друзья́м** у́жин.

|
dative

I am writing a letter to my mother.

I am writing a letter *to whom*? Answer: To (my) mother.

Mother is the indirect object in the dative case.

Я пишу́ письмо́ **ма́тери**.

|
dative

When a sentence has both a direct object and an indirect object their order is not fixed. Case endings enable us to distinguish the direct object from the indirect object.

I found the book for Ivan.

Я нашл^а Ив^ану кн^игу.

|
direct object → accusative
fem. sing. noun

|
indirect object → dative
masc. sing. noun

We gave the books to Maria.

Мы дал^и кн^иги Мар^ии.

|
indirect object → dative
fem. sing. noun

|
direct object → accusative
fem. pl. noun

In the two sentences above both objects end in the same letter, but the endings refer to different cases of words of different genders. It is very important to memorize the gender of nouns and the case endings so that you can correctly distinguish one object from another.

Object of a Preposition

IN ENGLISH

The noun or pronoun which follows the preposition (see **What is a Preposition?**, p. 93) is called the **object of the preposition**. The object of the preposition answers the two-word question made up of the preposition + *what?* or *whom?*

The tree is in the forest.

The tree is *in what?* Answer: In the forest.

Forest is the object of the preposition *in*.

Dobchinsky is walking with Bobchinsky.

Dobchinsky is walking *with whom?* Answer: With Bobchinsky.

Bobchinsky is the object of the preposition *with*.

IN RUSSIAN

The object of a preposition is as easy to identify as it is in English. Russian prepositions, however, have objects in several different cases: genitive, accusative, dative, instrumental, and, of course, the prepositional case, which is the only case always preceded by a preposition. As you memorize a preposition, you will need to learn the case (or cases) in which its objects are expressed.

To show you the variety of cases possible after a preposition, here are five different prepositions, each requiring a different case:

для этого человека *for this person*
 genitive case after для

курс по Ахматовой *a course on Akhmatova*
 dative case after по

через парк *through the park*
 accusative case after через

перед домом *in front of the house*
 instrumental case after перед

о моих лошадях *about my horses*
 prepositional case after о

Careful

As a student of Russian you must watch out for the following pitfalls: some verbs that in English are followed by a prepositional phrase (a preposition and an object of the preposition) may have Russian equivalents without a preposition.

She is looking for the book.

She is looking *for what*? Answer: The book.

The book is the object of the preposition *for*.

Она ищет книгу.

 accusative case

The verb **искать** (*to look for*) here takes a direct object.

I am interested in sports.

I am interested *in what*? Answer: Sports.

Sports is the object of the preposition *in*.

Я интересуюсь спортом.

 instrumental case

The verb **интересоваться** (*to be interested in*) takes the instrumental case.

Listen to me!

Listen to whom? Answer: Me.

Me is the indirect object, expressed here as the object of the preposition *to*.

Слушайте **меня!**

↓
accusative case

The verb **слушать** (*to listen to*) takes a direct object.

When you memorize Russian verbs do not automatically assume that they will behave in the same way as their English equivalents. Study carefully the case of the object that follows them.

▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼**REVIEW**▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼

Below are sentences with direct and indirect objects.

- Circle the direct objects.
- Underline the indirect objects.

1. I baked mother a cake.
2. Throw mama from the train a kiss.
3. I picked flowers for Vika.
4. I drank mother's tea.
5. Mother, give me a kiss.

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