

Here all aspects of Russian pronunciation will be considered. Right on this page you will find only basic pronunciation rules which might be enough for you to pronounce Russian words more or less correct. But if you want to dig deeper into Russian phonetics follow the link at the bottom of the page which will bring you to the comprehensive guide of Russian phonetics. Now let's discuss each letter of the Russian alphabet in their alphabetic order and see in what ways it can be pronounced. As already mentioned in Basic facts about Russian language Russian language is almost phonetic that is there is one-to-one correspondence between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds. But this almost means that there are some exceptions. The most important of them are discussed here, for others go to the comprehensive guide of Russian phonetics.

In this lesson, you will learn how to pronounce the letters of the Russian alphabet. This page contains several basic pronunciation rules which might be enough for you to pronounce Russian words more or less correctly. We will discuss each letter of the Russian alphabet (as they appear in the alphabetical order) and see all possible ways how they can be pronounced.

Russian alphabet

Here's the whole alphabet from A to Я:

А Б В Г Д Е Ё Ж З И Й К Л М Н О П Р С Т У
Ф Х Ц Ч Ш Щ Ъ Ы Ь Э Ю Я

- **letters in black are consonants**
- **letters in blue color are vowels**
- letters in green color are **signs**

Now let's take a look at each of the letters. As you go through each of the letters below, you will notice that some vowels have different pronunciation depending on whether they are stressed or not. You will also find that two letters (called "signs" do not make any sounds). You can always listen to proper Russian pronunciation by clicking on the words given as examples.

А а

pronounced like "a" in "part" but shorter зима (winter), дать (to give), да (yes)

Б б

pronounced like "b" in "bone" банан (banana) (hard), берёза (birch) (soft)

В в

pronounced like "v" in "vast" ворота (gate) (hard), ковёр (carpet) (soft)

Г г

pronounced like "g" in "get" город (town), огурец (cucumber) (both hard), гений (genius) (soft)

Д д

pronounced like "d" in "day" вода (water) (hard), делать (to do) (soft)

Е е

at the beginning of the word, after all vowels and letters "ь" and "ъ" like [je] in "yes" ель (fir), диета (diet) in other positions it marks the softness of the preceding consonant (except "ж", "ш" and "ц") женщина (woman), шесть (six), цены (prices), and other consonants in some foreign words, e.g. фонетика (phonetics)) and is pronounced almost like Russian "э", i.e. like "e" in "let", e.g. петь (to sing), газета (newspaper)

Ё ё

at the beginning of the word, after all vowels and letters "ь" and "ъ" like [jo] in "yawn" but shorter ёж (hedgehog), даёт ((he) gives), бьёт ((he) beats) in other positions it marks the softness of the preceding consonant (except "ж" and "ш", e.g. шёлк (silk), жёлтый (yellow)) and is pronounced like stressed Russian "о", i.e. like English "o" in "corn" but shorter мёд (honey), ковёр (carpet). Note that "ё" is always stressed in Russian.

Ж ж

like "g" in "rouge" жёлтый (yellow), жить (to live) (both hard); "ж" is very seldom pronounced in soft form so in the previous examples letters "ё" and "и" did not soften it.

З з

like "z" in "zest" звать (to call) (hard), зелёный (green) (soft)

И и

like "ee" in "teen" but shorter зима (winter), пить (to drink). Note that the consonant preceding "и" is always soft except for letters "ж", "ш" and "ц" which are always hard in Russian (in these cases letter "и" is pronounced identical to "ы"), e.g. жизнь (life), широкий (wide, masculine), цирк (circus).

Й й

1. when beginning a syllable (very seldom) like "y" in "yes" or like "j" in German "ja" йод (iodine), койот (coyote) 2. when terminating a syllable - like "y" in "may" ("й" is pronounced like a semivowel in this case so it is called "и краткое" (и short)) мой (my), майка (T-shirt). Note that "й" can have only soft form since it is a palatal sound, i.e. it is pronounced with the tongue touching the hard palate, so it is already palatalized and can't be pronounced without palatalization.

К к

like "k" in "kick" but not aspirated корова (cow), сок (juice) (both hard), кисть (paintbrush) (soft)

Л л

like "l" in "look" голубь (pigeon) (hard), лес (forest) (soft)

М м

like "m" in "moon" мыть (to wash) (hard), место (place) (soft)

Н н

like "n" in "not" она (she) (hard), они (they) (soft)

О о

Russian Pronunciation

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like "o" in "port" but shorter молоко (milk), дом (house)

П п

like "p" in "pay" but not aspirated папа (dad) (hard), пиво (beer) (soft)

Р р

no exact counterpart in English but it is like rolled "r" in "rock" in Scottish pronunciation
работать (to work) (hard), река (river) (soft)

С с

like "s" in "say" совет (advice) (hard), семья (family) (soft)

Т т

like "t" in "time" тот (that, masculine) (hard), тень (shadow) (soft)

У у

like "oo" in "moon" but shorter стул (chair), луна (moon)

Ф ф

like "f" in "fast" факел (torch) (hard), кофе (coffee) (soft)

Х х

no exact counterpart in English since English "h" is pronounced as a pharyngeal sound and Russian "x" is articulated by the back part of the tongue touching the soft palate, it is rather like German "ch" in "Buch" плохой (bad) (hard), хитрый (cunning, crafty) (soft)

Ц ц

like "ts" in "cats" (but pronounced as one sound) or like "Z" in German "Zeit" отец (father), цыган (Gipsy) (both hard). Note that this consonant never appears in soft form in Russian unlike Ukrainian and Belorussian.

Ч ч

like "ch" in "check" чай (tea), чёрный (black) (both soft). Note that this consonant never appears in hard form unlike Belorussian

Ш ш

like "sh" in "shock" but not so soft душа (soul), шум (noise) (both hard). Note letter "ш" never denotes soft consonant since there is another letter "щ" for this purpose

Щ щ

this letter denotes long and soft "ш" like "sh" in "she" but a bit softer and longer щука (pike), плащ (raincoat). Of course this letter can't appear in hard form like "ш" can't appear in soft form

Ъ

This letter is not pronounced in Russian and it never starts a word. It is usually a partitive sign between the prefix and the root, it can only appear between a consonant and letters "е", "ё", "ю", "я" which are then pronounced as at the beginning of the word or after a vowel, i.e. with consonant [j] preceding a vowel: [je], [jo], [ju], [ja] (in stressed position). Example: подъехать (to drive up), объявление (advertisement)

Ы ы

no exact and even similar counterpart in English, this sound is very hard to describe, you should pronounce [i:] as in "mean" then lower the middle part of your tongue a bit and bring your lips to neutral position, then you will hear somewhat similar to Russian sound. But it's better to listen to the examples. мыло (soap), дышать (to breathe), забыть (forget), крыса (rat)

Ь

This letter like is not pronounced in Russian, like "ъ" it is a partitive sign between the parts of the word, also like "ъ" it can appear between a consonant and letters "е", "ё", "ю", "я" which are then pronounced with a consonant [j] preceding them, e.g. пьяный (drunken), бьёт ((he) beats). But "ь" can also appear at the end of the word, e.g. моль (moth), конь (horse). In both cases the consonant preceding "ь" is pronounced soft (except for "ж", "ш" which never appear soft). There are no words starting with this letter.

Э э

like "е" in "set" этот (this, masculine), мэр (mayor) (quite rare in Russian)

Ю ю

1. In the beginning of the word, after all vowels and letters "ь" and "ъ" like [ju] in "mute" but shorter юг (south), поют ((they) sing), шьют ((they) sew) 2. In other positions it marks the softness of the preceding consonant and is pronounced like Russian "y" клюв (beak), нюхать (to smell)

Я я

1. In the beginning of the word, after all vowels and letters "ь" and "ъ" like [ja] in "yard" but shorter ящик (box), маяк (beacon), пьяный (drunken) 2. In other positions it marks the softness of the preceding consonant and is pronounced like Russian "a" понять (to understand), пять (five).