

Just For Fun: Russian!

Russian is spoken over a huge area: by not only about 143 million people in Russia but also by large numbers of people in the other countries of the former Soviet Union, especially in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Latvia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. There are many speakers in Germany and Israel. Altogether about 260 million people worldwide speak Russian, making it the sixth most spoken language in the world. Russian is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. It is the most geographically widespread language of Eurasia.

Russian is the largest member of the Slavic language family. Other Slavic languages, which are very similar to Russian, include Ukrainian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian.

Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, which has 33 letters. You can follow the link given on the Just for Fun Russian page to see all the letters and learn their sounds. We divided the alphabet up into several groups of letters. There are the five “Perfect Match” letters, which both look and sound like their English counterparts. Then there are the “False Friend” letters, which look like familiar English letters but have very different sounds. Then there are the letters which look very unfamiliar but have sounds which exist in English as well. And finally, there are three letters which both look and sound different from any English letters.

Here are the words we learned to read, using all letters in Cyrillic which both look and sound similar to English letters:

КОТ	<i>a cat</i>
МАМА	<i>mom</i>
КТО	<i>who</i>
КАК	<i>how</i>
ТАМ	<i>there</i>
ТОМ	<i>a volume</i>

Here are a few additional letters we specifically focused on:

И	sounds like “ee”
Я	sounds like “ya”
П	sounds like “p”
Д	sounds like “d”

Practice reading these words:

и	<i>and</i>
я	<i>I</i>
да	<i>yes</i>
дядя	<i>uncle</i>
Дима	<i>Dima, a man's name</i>
папа	<i>dad</i>

Here are the common words and phrases we learned, with a guide for pronunciation:

Да	yes	(Dah)
Нет	no	(Nyet)
Привет!	Hi!	(PreeVYEHT)
Здравствуйте!	Hello!	(ZDRAST-vooy-tyeh)
Как дела?	How are you?	(KAHG dee-LAH)
Россия	Russia	(Rah-SEE-yuh)
Москва	Moscow	(Mahsk-VAH)
Америка	America	(Ah-MYEH-ree-kuh)
русский	Russian	(ROOS-key)
До свидания!	Good-bye	(Duh svec-DAH-nyuh)
Пока!	Bye, see ya	(Pah-KAH)