Bootstrap Russian Grammar

Learn Russian grammar step-by-step with 200 topics and over 3,000 examples

First Edition

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Declan Software Ltd.

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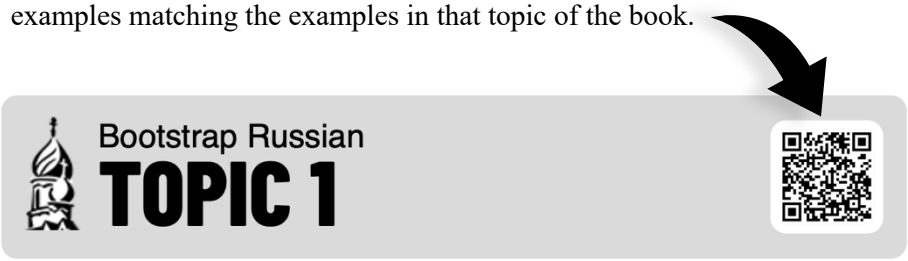

Bootstrap Russian

TOPIC 1

❖ The verb 'to be'

The Russian verb 'to be' ('is', 'are' etc.) does not appear in the present tense.

- So in Russian we say 'Sergei here' when we mean 'Sergei is here'. But only in the present tense.

In phrases like 'A is B', when both A and B are nouns, a dash '—' is used in place of the verb 'to be'.

Note that Russian has no concept of articles like [a] and [the]. They are implied from context.

EXAMPLES:

1 **Сергей здесь.**
Sergei is here.
The present tense verb 'to be' [is] is implied
здесь means 'here'.

2 **Ульяна там.**
Ulyana is there.
The present tense verb 'to be' [is] is implied
там means 'there' or 'over there'.

3 **Вот Ольга.**
Here is Olga.
The present tense verb 'to be' [is] is implied
вот means 'here is' - like the French 'voilà'

4 **Дом там.**
[The] house is there.
дом means 'house' or 'home'
Here the article [the] is inferred from the context

5 **Иван дома.**
Ivan is at home.
дома means 'at home' from the word **дом**

6 **Татьяна — женщина.**
Tatiana is [a] woman.
Note the use of a dash '—' when using 'to be' with two nouns (and no pronoun)
Here the article [a] is inferred from the context
женщина means 'woman'

7 **Виктор — мужчина.**
Victor is [a] man.
Note the use of a dash '—' when using 'to be' with two nouns (and no pronoun)
Here the article [a] is inferred from the context
мужчина means 'man'

8 **Татьяна — профессор.**
Tatiana is [a] professor.
Note the use of a dash '—' when using 'to be' with two nouns (and no pronoun)
профессор means '(university) professor'

9 **Виктор — водитель.**
Victor is [a] driver.
Note the use of a dash '—' when using 'to be' with two nouns (and no pronoun)
водитель means 'driver'

TOPIC 2

❖ Personal pronouns

The Russian personal pronouns are: **я** (I), **ты** (you, singular), **он** (he), **она** (she), **мы** (we), **вы** (you, plural), **они** (they).

- The pronoun used for the singular 'you' depends on formality. This is explained in the next topic.

EXAMPLES:

1. **Он Сергей.**
   He is Sergei.

2. **Она Ольга.**
   She is Olga.

3. **Я русский.**
   I am Russian (male).
   русский (masculine adjective) means 'Russian'.

4. **Она русская.**
   She is Russian (female).
   русская (feminine adjective) means 'Russian'.

5. **Она здесь.**
   She is here.

6. **Он там.**
   He is (over) there.

7. **Они дома.**
   They are at home.

8. **Вы дома.**
   You (plural) are at home.

9 **Я учитель.**
I am [a/the] teacher.

учитель means 'teacher'

The article could be [a] or [the] - inferred from the context.

10 **Мы здесь.**
We are here.

11 **Она профессор.**
She is [a/the] professor.

Note that despite both subject and object being nouns, if the subject is a pronoun we do not use a dash '—' in the place of the verb 'to be'

The article could be [a] or [the] - inferred from the context.

12 **Он водитель.**
He is [a/the] driver.

Note that despite both subject and object being nouns, if the subject is a pronoun we do not use a dash '—' in the place of the verb 'to be'

The article could be [a] or [the] - inferred from the context.

TOPIC 3

❖ Это : this, that, it

The word **это** means 'this', 'it' or 'that'.

It can refer to people, animals, objects and concepts.

It does not depend on gender or number.

In these examples (as usual) the verb 'to be' is absent in the present tense.

EXAMPLES:

1. **Это я!**
   It's me!

2. **Это Иван.**
   That is Ivan.

3. **Это учитель.**
   This is [a/the] teacher.

4. **Это водитель.**
   This is [a/the] driver.

5. **Это кот.**
   This is a (male) cat.
   кот means 'male cat'

6. **Это яблоко.**
   It is [an/the] apple.
   яблоко means 'apple'

7. **Это музей.**
   It is [a/the] museum.
   музей means 'museum'

8. **Это дом.**
   That is [a/the] house.
   дом means 'house' or 'home'

9 **Это здесь.**
It is here.

10 **Это понятно.**
This is clear. / That is understandable.
понятно means 'understandable', 'obvious', or 'clear'.

11 **Это верно.**
This is true.
верно means 'true' or 'correct'

❖ Simple negation

Negation (making a negative statement with 'not') in Russian is straightforward:
- Simply place the negative particle **не** before the word you want to negate.

не- can also be attached to words as a prefix to invert the meaning - like 'un' in English.

EXAMPLES:

1. **Я не учитель.**
   I am not a/the teacher.

2. **Она не Ольга.**
   She is not Olga.

3. **Это не кошка, это собака.**
   It's not a cat, it's a dog.
   кошка means 'female cat'
   собака means 'dog'

4. **Это не профессор.**
   This is not the professor.

5. **Он не ребёнок.**
   He is not a child.
   ребёнок means 'child'

6. **Она не актриса.**
   She is not an actress.

7. **Я ещё не там.**
   I am not there yet.
   ещё means 'yet' or 'still'.

8. **Они не всегда здесь.**
   They are not always here.
   всегда means 'always'.

9 **Мы не дома.**
We are not at home.

10 **Это непонятно.**
That is incomprehensible.
не (un) + **понятно** (clear) ⇒ **непонятн**о
непонятно means 'incomprehensible' or 'not understandable'

11 **Это неверно.**
That is incorrect.
не (un) + **верно** (true) ⇒ **неверн**о
неверно means 'untrue' or 'incorrect'

TOPIC 5

❖ Asking and answering questions

Russian uses both a raising intonation and word order to formulate questions.

And answer using **да** (yes) and **нет** (no).

EXAMPLES:

1. **Ольга русская?**
   Is Olga Russian (female)?
   русская (feminine adjective) means 'Russian'
   No dash is required when a noun is used in combination with an adjective.

2. **Да, Ольга русская.**
   Yes, Olga is Russian (female).
   да means 'yes' - the opposite of **нет**.

3. **Это не Иван?**
   Isn't that Ivan?

4. **Нет, это не Иван.**
   No, it's not Ivan.
   нет means 'no' - the opposite of **да**.

5. **Он не русский?**
   Is he not Russian (male)?

6. **Нет, он русский.**
   No, he is Russian (male).
   Note the negative response to a negative question.

7. **Где Таня?**
   Where is Tanya?
   где means 'where'.

8. **Таня там?**
   Is Tanya there?

9 **Нет, она не там. Она здесь.**
No, she is not there. She is here.

10 **Где вы?**
Where are you (plural)?

11 **Это собака?**
Is that a dog?

12 **Да, это собака.**
Yes, that is a dog.

13 **Почему ты не здесь?**
Why aren't you (informal) here?
почему means 'why'.

TOPIC 6

❖ Formality in Russian: вы and ты

The Russian word for 'you' (the second person pronoun) depends on who is talking and who is being addressed.

- **вы** is used when addressing someone formally or politely.
- **ты** is used when talking to friends and family.

Grammatically **вы** behaves just like the second person plural ('you guys', 'ya'll').

So when first using it imagine you are talking to two people.

EXAMPLES:

1. **Ты ученик?**
   Are you (informal) a student?
   ты is the informal 'you'
   ученик means 'student'

2. **Ты уже здесь?**
   Are you (informal) here yet?
   ты is the informal 'you'
   уже means 'yet' or 'already'.

3. **Вы профессор?**
   Are you (formal) a/the professor?
   вы is the formal 'you'.

4. **Вы русский?**
   Are you (formal) Russian (male)?
   вы is the formal 'you'
   русский is the male adjective for 'Russian'.

5. **Когда вы дома?**
   When are you (formal) at home?
   вы is the formal 'you'
   когда means 'when'.

6 **Вы всегда дома.**
You (formal) are always at home.
вы is the formal 'you'
всегда means 'always'.

7 **Почему ты здесь?**
Why are you (informal) here?
ты is the informal 'you'
почему means 'why'.

8 **Вы иногда там?**
Are you (formal) sometimes there?
вы is the formal 'you'
иногда means 'sometimes'.

9 **Вы часто там?**
Are you (formal) often there?
вы is the formal 'you'
часто means 'often'.

TOPIC 7

❖ Who and what - кто and что

The interrogative particles 'who' and 'what' are defined somewhat differently in Russian.

- **кто** means 'who' or 'what'.
- **кто** refers to all animate things - not just people but also animals and creatures.
- **что** means 'what'.
- **что** should refer only to inanimate objects or concepts.

EXAMPLES:

1. **Что это?**
   What is this?
   Meaning 'What is this inanimate object?'

2. **Что это? Это чашка.**
   What is this? This is a cup.
   чашка means 'cup'

3. **Кто это?**
   Who/what is it?
   Meaning 'What is this animate thing?'

4. **Кто это? Это муравей.**
   Who/what is it? It is an ant.
   Here '**кто**' refers to the insect.

5. **Кто это? Это тигр! Осторожно!**
   Who/what is that? It is a tiger! Be careful!
   Here '**кто**' refers to the tiger.
   тигр means 'tiger'

6. **Кто это? Это я.**
   Who is it? It is me.

7 **Кто он?**
Who/what is he/it?

Recall that in Russian pronouns can refer to objects - though the genders must agree.

8 **Кто он? Он Иван.**
Who is he? He is Ivan.

9 **Что это такое?**
What is this?

A very common extension of **Что это?** The word **такое** adds a little bit more curiosity to the question

такой means 'such' or 'suchlike'

10 **Что такое лампа?**
What is 'лампа'?

A common way to ask what a word means.

11 **Что это за зверь?**
What is that animal? / What kind of animal is that?

что это за is a common way to ask what something is. **что за** translates to 'what kind'

зверь means 'animal'

12 **Что это за ключ?**
What is the key (for)?

что это за is a common way to ask what something is. **что за** translates to 'what kind'

ключ means 'key'

13 **Что это за парень?**
Who is that guy?

что это за is a common way to ask what something is. **что за** translates to 'what kind'

парень means 'guy' or 'boy'

14 **Что за ерунда!**
What nonsense!

TOPIC 8

❖ Gender and adjectives

All Russian nouns (things) have a gender.

Russian has 3 genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter.

- Most masculine nouns end in a consonant, «-**й**» or the soft sign «-**ь**»
- Most feminine nouns end in «-**а**» or «-**я**». And occasionally with the soft sign «-**ь**».
- Most neuter nouns end in «-**о**» or «-**е**».

The form of the adjective must agree the gender of the noun it modifies.

- Typically a masculine adjective ends in «-**ый**» or «-**ой**»
- Typically a feminine adjective ends in «-**ая**»
- Typically a neuter adjective ends in «-**ое**»

EXAMPLES:

1. **Новый учитель.**
   A new teacher (male).
   - **учитель** is masculine
   - **новый** ⇒ **новый** (masculine)

2. **Большой дом.**
   A big house.
   - **дом** is masculine
   - **большой** ⇒ **большой** (masculine)

3. **Старая учительница.**
   An old teacher (female).
   - **учительница** is feminine
   - **старый** ⇒ **старая** (feminine)

4. **Красное яблоко.**
   A red apple.
   - **яблоко** is neuter
   - **красный** ⇒ **красное** (neuter)

5 **Интересный музей.**
An interesting museum.
- **музей** is masculine
- **интересный** ⇒ **интересный** (masculine)

6 **Первый ребёнок.**
The first child (male).
- **ребёнок** is masculine
- **первый** ⇒ **первый** (masculine)

7 **Известный актер.**
A famous actor (male).
- **актер** is masculine
- **известный** ⇒ **известный** (masculine)
- **актер** means 'actor'

8 **Известная актриса.**
A famous actress.
- **актриса** is feminine
- **известный** ⇒ **известная** (feminine)
- **актриса** means 'actress'

9 **Закрытая дверь.**
Closed door.
- **дверь** is feminine
- **закрытый** ⇒ **закрытая** (feminine)
- **дверь** (fem.) means 'door'

10 **Открытое окно.**
An open window.
- **окно** is neuter
- **открытый** ⇒ **открытое** (neuter)
- **окно** means 'window'

11 **Первый снег.**
The first snow.
- **снег** is masculine
- **первый** ⇒ **первый** (masculine)
- **снег** means 'snow'

12 **Первая любовь.**
The first love.
- **любовь** is feminine
- **первый** ⇒ **первая** (feminine)
- **любовь** means 'love'

13 **Белое облако.**
A white cloud.
- **облако** is neuter
- **белый** ⇒ **белое** (neuter)
- **облако** means 'cloud'

14 **Красивая лилия.**
A beautiful lily.
- **лилия** is feminine
- **красивый** ⇒ **красивая** (feminine)

15 **Популярное кафе.**
A popular café.
- **кафе** is neuter
- **популярный** ⇒ **популярное** (neuter)

16 **Разве это не красивый дом?**
Isn't that a beautiful house?
- **дом** is masculine
- **красивый** ⇒ **красивый** (masculine)
- **разве** means 'isn't it'

17 **Она красивая девушка.**
She is a beautiful girl.
- **девушка** is feminine
- **красивый** ⇒ **красивая** (feminine)

18 **Это красивое платье.**
That is a beautiful dress.
- **платье** is neuter
- **красивый** ⇒ **красивое** (neuter)

19 **Это красивая девушка.**
This is a beautiful girl.
- **девушка** is feminine
- **красивый** ⇒ **красивая** (feminine)

20 **Это сильный мужчина.**
This is a strong man.
- **мужчина** is masculine
- **сильный** ⇒ **сильный** (masculine)

21 **Молодой человек там.**
The young man is there.
- **человек** is masculine
- **молодой** ⇒ **молодой** (masculine)

TOPIC 9

❖ The conjunctions и, но and а

Conjunctions are words that link objects or clauses within a sentence.

- The conjunction **и** means 'and'
- The conjunction **но** means 'but' or 'however' and marks a contradiction to expectations.
- The conjunction **а** also means 'but' but simply adds, compares/contrasts, or asks for new information.

- It is common to begin a question with **а**.

EXAMPLES:

1. **Он сосед и друг.**
   He is a neighbour and a friend.
   New information but no contrast intended
   сосед means 'neighbour'
   друг means 'friend'

2. **Она студентка и учитель.**
   She is a student and a teacher.
   New information but no contrast intended.

3. **Вера здесь, и Таня тоже здесь.**
   Vera is here and Tanya is also here.
   New information but no contrast intended.

4. **Вы француз, и они французы.**
   You (formal) are French, and they are French.
   New information but no contrast intended.

5. **Она актриса, но не известная актриса.**
   She is an actress but not a famous actress.
   Contrary to expectations.

6 **Дом большой, но дверь маленькая.**
It's a big house but the door is small.
Contrary to expectations.

7 **Машина старая, но хорошая.**
The car is old, but good.
Contrary to expectations.

8 **Это дом, а не школа.**
This is a house, not a school.
New infromation with some contrast.

9 **Он здесь, а она там.**
He is here but/and she is there.
New infromation with some contrast.

10 **Она студентка а он учитель.**
She is a student but/and he is a teacher.
New infromation with some contrast.

11 **Это не яблоко, а груша.**
That is not an apple, but a pear.
New infromation with some contrast.

12 **Я водитель. А вы?**
I am a driver. And you (formal)?
Asking for new infromation and suggesting contrast.

TOPIC 10

❖ Plurals

Rules for forming plurals depend on the gender.

● Masculine:

- ends with a consonant, add «-**ы**»
- ends with «-**й**» or «-**ь**», replace with «-**и**»

● Feminine:

- ends with «-**а**», replace with «-**ы**»
- ends with «-**я**» or «-**ь**», replace with «-**и**»

● Neuter:

- ends with «-**о**», replace with «-**а**»
- ends with «-**е**», replace with «-**я**»

There are lots of exceptions and irregular plurals - these are covered in the next topic.

EXAMPLES:

1 **Это птицы.**
These are birds.
птица (fem.) ⇒ **птицы** : «-**а**» → «-**ы**»

2 **Это коровы.**
These are cows.
корова (fem.) ⇒ **коровы** : «-**а**» → «-**ы**»

3 **Он студент, и мы тоже студенты.**
He is a student, and we are also students
студент (masc.) ⇒ **студенты** : consonant ending → add «-**ы**»

4 **Вот стол, а там столы.**
There is a table here, and there are tables there.
стол (masc.) ⇒ **столы** : consonant ending → add «-**ы**»

5 **Театр рядом, а музеи далеко.**
The theatre is close by, but the museums are far away.
музей (masc.) ⇒ **музеи** : «**-й**» → «**-и**»
рядом means 'close by'

6 **Один словарь здесь, а все словари там.**
One dictionary is here, but all the dictionaries are over there.
словарь (masc.) ⇒ **словари** : «**-ь**» → «**-и**»

7 **Все газеты здесь, одна газета там.**
All newspapers are here, one newspaper is there.
газета (fem.) ⇒ **газеты** : «**-а**» → «**-ы**»

8 **Старая машина и новые машины.**
The old car and new cars.
машина (fem.) ⇒ **машины** : «**-а**» → «**-ы**»

9 **Это не здания, это только одно здание.**
Those are not buildings; it is just one building.
здание (neu.) ⇒ **здания** : «**-е**» → «**-я**»

10 **Это груша, а это яблоки.**
That is a pear but those are apples.
яблоко (neu.) ⇒ **яблоки** : «**-о**» → «**-и**»

11 **Это двери, а это окно.**
Those are doors, and that is a window
дверь (fem.) ⇒ **двери** : «**-ь**» → «**-и**»

12 **Это дверь, а это окна.**
That is a door and those are windows.
окно (neu.) ⇒ **окна** : «**-о**» → «**-а**»

13 **Это облака, не туман.**
They are clouds, not fog.
облако (neu.) ⇒ **облака** : «**-о**» → «**-а**»

14 **Вот платья.**
Here are the dresses.
платье (neu.) ⇒ **платья** : «**-е**» → «**-я**»

15 **Мужчины вон там.**
The men are over there.
мужчина (masc.) ⇒ **мужчины** : «**-а**» ⇒ «**-ы**»
вон emphasises distance (over there).

16 **Женщины здесь.**
The women are here.
женщина (fem.) ⇒ **женщины** : «**-а**» → «**-ы**»

17 **Это лампы.**
Those are lamps.
лампа (fem.) ⇒ **лампы** : «**-а**» → «**-ы**»

18 **Это не истории.**
These are not stories.
история (fem.) ⇒ **истории** : «**-ия**» → «**-ии**»

19 **Это моря, а не океаны.**
They are seas, not oceans.
море (neu.) ⇒ **моря** : «**-е**» → «**-я**»

20 **Вот те здания.**
Here are those buildings.
здание (neu.) ⇒ **здания** : «**-ие**» → «**-ия**»
те means 'those'

Other Russian learning mobile apps

Declan Software also offers two more mobile Russian language learning apps:

Words: Language FlashCards

Learn 3400 of the most useful and common Russian words. Words are organised by topic with high quality native speaker audio. Start by reviewing the words and then jump into the exercises - multiple choice, spelling, listening and more.

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