

## Chapter 17

# Ten Ways to Pick Up Russian Quickly

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Engaging in activities that will advance your Russian
  - ▶ Practicing Russian in the right places
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**W**e're not breaking any news to you by saying that the best way to learn a language is by using it. You have a much better chance of remembering **Kak dyela?** (kahk dee-lah; How are you?) after you say it to a Russian and actually hear **Normal'no!** (nahr-mahl'-nuh; Fine!) in response — just like you can read about in Chapter 3! You'll feel that your language skills are advanced, to say the least.

Coming up with new and fun ways to practice your Russian isn't always easy, though. That's why we give you some ideas in this chapter on creative ways to bring Russian into your life. Try them and feel free to come up with your own! After all, your life will contain only as much Russian as you let into it.

## *Check Out Russian TV, Movies, and Music*

Whether you're into independent cinema or action movies, classical ballet or rock music, Russians have something to offer for any taste. Browse the foreign section of a DVD rental and the world music shelf of your local library, and you can definitely find something with which to practice your Russian. As far as movies go, be sure to get a Russian-language version with subtitles, rather than a dubbed one. And plenty of Russian-language TV channels exist in America — your cable service may even come with one!

## Listen to Russian Radio Programs

You can advance your Russian without sitting down and giving it your undivided attention by listening to a Russian radio program in the car, during a walk, or while doing the dishes. Who knows how much of that new vocabulary will get stuck in your subconscious!



A variety of Russian radio stations broadcast on the Internet. For a comprehensive guide to Russian radio online, go to [www.multilingualbooks.com/online-radio-russian.html](http://www.multilingualbooks.com/online-radio-russian.html).

## Read Russian Publications

Seeing a phrase in a phrase book, even if it's your favorite *Russian For Dummies*, is one thing. Seeing a phrase in a real Russian newspaper and actually recognizing it is a totally different experience.

Pick up a copy of a Russian publication, which are available in many libraries. Russian immigrant establishments, such as law offices and stores, often have local Russian-language newspapers lying around; the bonus of reading those papers is finding out what's going on locally with Russian social and cultural life. Reading such publications also is a good way to practice recognizing and "decoding" Cyrillic.

## Surf the Internet

Now that the Internet exists, no one can complain about the lack of ways to practice Russian. Just remember that Russian Web sites end in `.ru`. You may want to start your exploit from some of these Web sites:

- ✓ [lenta.ru](http://lenta.ru)
- ✓ [list.mail.ru/index.html](http://list.mail.ru/index.html)
- ✓ [menu.ru](http://menu.ru)
- ✓ [moskva.ru](http://moskva.ru)
- ✓ [www.spb.ru](http://www.spb.ru)
- ✓ [www.theatre.ru/emain.html](http://www.theatre.ru/emain.html)

And on [blogs.mail.ru](http://blogs.mail.ru), you can read **blogi** (*bloh-gee*; blogs) in Russian, or even create your own.



Sometimes, Russian characters don't show properly on the Internet. If, instead of Cyrillic, you see a bunch of characters that look like \$\$\$#%&&, change the encoding to Cyrillic. To do that, go to **View**, then **Encoding**, and try different Cyrillic encodings until you find the one that works.

## Visit a Russian Restaurant

Most major American cities have at least one Russian restaurant. You may get more out of your visit than just a bowl of steaming **borsh'** (bohrsh') and a plate of aromatic **golubtsy** (guh-loop-tsih; rissoule rolled in cabbage leaves). Be ambitious, and talk to the staff exclusively in Russian. You may be pleasantly surprised by how supportive Russians can be when people try to speak their language. And who knows, your language skills may even get you a bargain! See Chapter 5 for details on visiting a restaurant.

## Find a Russian Pen Pal

If you strike a personal connection with someone in a Russian chat room, you may get the chance to not only practice your Russian but also find an interesting interlocutor, and even a good friend. Some Russian **chaty** (*chah-tih*; chat rooms) to go to are [chat.mail.ru](http://chat.mail.ru), [www.divan.ru](http://www.divan.ru), and [www.games.ru/chat](http://www.games.ru/chat). You may even want to open your own Russian e-mail account to exchange messages with your new friend; good places to do so are [Mail.ru](http://Mail.ru) and [Rambler.ru](http://Rambler.ru).



If you want to type in Russian, but don't have a Russian keyboard, you can either put stickers with Russian letters on your regular English keyboard, or use an online Russian keyboard, such as the one at [http://www.yandex.ru/keyboard\\_qwerty.html](http://www.yandex.ru/keyboard_qwerty.html).

## Teach English to a Russian Immigrant

Because learning is a mutual experience, teaching English to a Russian speaker may be a great way to advance your Russian. If you don't know anybody from the local Russian community, you can post an ad in a Russian store or restaurant. Writing that ad can be your first Russian exercise!

After you find a Russian establishment, you can just ask people who work there about other Russian restaurants and stores. Make sure to explain that you're looking for them to practice your language skills. Russians will be flattered by your interest in their culture and will happily share the information with you. You may even make some friends right there.

## *Visit a Jewish Community Center*

A number of Jewish immigrants came to America throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century; many of them came from the former Soviet Union, where Russian was their native language. For many of them — especially the older generations — the Russian language is a part of their cultural heritage, and some events at a Jewish community center may be held in Russian.

You can find a Jewish community center through the Internet or in the phone book. Pay a visit there; you'll find out whether you can attend any Russian-language events. If you're willing to donate your time, offer to volunteer. Elderly immigrants may use some help from someone who speaks English, and it will be a great opportunity for you to practice your Russian.

## *Travel to Russia*

Nothing beats traveling to the country of your interest. Whether you're going to Russia for a year of teaching English to Moscow high school students, a week of sightseeing, or a walk through the streets of St. Petersburg while your cruise ship is waiting in the port, no place makes practicing Russian easier than, well, Russia. See Chapter 11 for details on planning a trip.

## *Marry a Russian*

If you're really set on the idea of speaking Russian like a native, you gotta do what you gotta do. Marry (or at least date) a Russian, and convince him or her to teach you the language. Of course, we're being a little tongue-in-cheek. We don't advocate that you go out and find yourself a Russian spouse just to improve your language skills. But if you do decide to date or marry a Russian, you should know that you have a great opportunity to dramatically improve your Russian. So take advantage of it! Watch out, though: Russians assimilate quickly, and you may end up spending much more time teaching English than being taught Russian. Then you'll have to resort to the secret weapon: Learning Russian from your mother-in-law!