
Getting Ready for Ab-Initio Russian at Robinson

In your first year as an 'ab initio' (aka Option A) student of Russian, you will be working hard to master elementary Russian grammar, syntax, and vocabulary in order to translate basic texts and to speak Russian with a reasonable degree of confidence and accuracy. And you will be reading a variety of short nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts *in the Russian original*, including short works by Pushkin, Turgenev, and even Lenin. In addition to reading, you will also be looking — at icons and at portraits of serfs and tsars.

Think of your summer prep as two related projects:

1) To hit the ground running come October, be sure to take time to complete the following **minimal preparatory language study**:

- Work through **at least the first six lessons** of the *ab initio* textbook, *Colloquial Russian* by Susan E. Kay and Svetlana Le Fleming (Routledge, **4th edition**). The following links will take you to *Quizlet*, which contains exercises to help you learn vocabulary from the first six units.
 - [Chapter 1a](#)
 - [Chapter 1b](#)
 - [Chapter 2](#)
 - [Chapter 3](#)
 - [Chapter 4](#)
 - [Chapter 5](#)
 - [Chapter 6](#)
- **Practice how to write in Russian.** The following sites have instructions on how to form Russian letters (the last three contain worksheets for practicing cursive writing):
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCdHAMN1kPA>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkQdwwaylAI>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZP8SDSHIk9g>
 - <http://www.russianforeveryone.com/RufeA/Lessons/Introduction/Alphabet/Alphabet.htm>
 - <http://masterrussian.com/video/writing/writing-russian-cursive-letters.htm>
 - <http://blog.lingualift.com/russian-cursive-writing-practice-sheet/>
 - <https://ilrussian.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/script-practice-sheets.pdf>
 - <http://docslide.us/documents/russian-cursive-handwriting-practice-sheets-propisi-.html>

Please note that you will be asked to do **an online exercise prior to coming to Cambridge**. (Information will be sent out by the Slavonic Section in late August.) Even though this is an *ab initio* Russian course, students arrive with different levels of basic Russian. The aim of this exercise is to assess how much grammar and vocabulary you know and to allocate you

to the right group. The exercise will be based on the material covered in the first few chapters of the textbook (as outlined above).

2) To prepare yourself for [SLA3: Introduction to Russian Culture](#), please read the following before the start of the Michaelmas term:

1. An overview of Russian history from the ninth to at least the nineteenth centuries (and preferably into the twentieth century). Two good, basic (short) introductions are:
 - Geoffrey Hosking, *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2012)
 - Stephen Lovell, *The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2008)
2. Some background on Russian literature:
 - Caryl Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* (Cambridge, 2008). This book may be a bit overwhelming before you have begun the course, but you would do well to look at Chapters 3 and 4 before you arrive, as they provide useful background for the material you will be tackling in the first term.
3. **ALL** of Mikhail Lermontov, *Geroi nashego vremeni* [*A Hero of Our Time*] IN RUSSIAN. Please use the Bristol Classical Press edition, or a similar edition that is accented, glossed and annotated.
4. **As many as possible** of the following (in English):
 - Alexander Pushkin, *Mednyi vsadnik* [*The Bronze Horseman*, Bristol Classical Press edition recommended]
 - Ivan Turgenev, *Svidanie* [*The Encounter*] and *Kas'ian s krasivoi mechi* [*Kas'ian from the Beautiful Lands*] from *Zapiski okhotnika / A Huntsman's Sketches*
 - Nikolai Gogol, *Shinel'* [*The Overcoat*, Bristol Classical Press edition recommended]
 - Anna Akhmatova, *Rekviem* (*Requiem*)

All of the texts may be found in their entirety online. A quick Google search should lead you to the relevant links.

5. You could also read:

- Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, eds., *National Identity in Russian Culture* (Cambridge, 2004): Introduction and selected chapters (choose any that interest you and focus on those by Hubertus Jahn and Simon Franklin).
- Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (2006): although this book is dense, it is an excellent history of East Slavic lands and an important reminder that the landmass that we think of as 'Russia', the 'Russian Empire', and the 'Soviet Union' is complex and contested.

More of this information can be found on the [website of the Slavonic Studies Section](#). Please feel free to contact [Dr Rory Finnin](#), Robinson's Director of Studies for Russian, with any questions.

