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## Review: *Russian in Plain English: A Very Basic Russian Starter for Complete Beginners*

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the discussion section. Finally, there are several places where the level of vocabulary in a particular exercise does not match the learner level. This incongruity is especially true for exercises labeled as level two. Learners at this level will undoubtedly need a dictionary to complete even some of the fill-in-the-blank exercises. With all of this in mind, many of the exercises are very well done, especially at the more advanced levels. Instructors of Russian could even make use of them in the classroom as supplemental drill-type exercises.

Ultimately, this book is more approachable for learners of Russian than some of the other reference grammars on the market. Its innovative approach and the attempt to cater to learners at multiple levels is commendable. Learners with enough experience to start at level two, instead of those just beginning their Russian language adventures, will benefit more from the additional grammatical explanations and summative exercises. The same can be said for learners at level three. The book would be more effective as a supplement to more traditional learning materials and methods and should be used as such.

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**Parker, Natalia V. 2020. *Russian in Plain English: A Very Basic Russian Starter for Complete Beginners*. New York: Routledge. 300 pages.**

Natalia Parker's *Russian in Plain English: A Very Basic Russian Starter for Complete Beginners* is designed for beginning students and independent learners who are not familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet. The textbook's primary aim is to help students develop skills in reading aloud in Russian with correct pronunciation. The textbook is divided into ten units. Each unit centers on particular letters and sounds rather than on a specific theme. Every unit includes an objective (with the title "What's the Plan"), information on Russian letters and the sounds they denote, reading exercises, speaking activities that can be used individually or in groups, some basic grammar material, and cultural information. In addition, after every unit, there is a review chapter ("Something Old, Something New") with questions, exercises, and group activities aimed to consolidate students' learning.

*Russian in Plain English* deserves high praise for its innovative, learner-friendly, and creative pedagogy. It has a light, conversational writing style in the form of a lecture, which the author delivers with a strong and authentic voice. She explains the material, shares problems her students encounter, and advises on overcoming each problem. While reading the textbook, the learner can hear her love for Russia, its people, and its language. In addition, the book has an abundance of interesting cultural information, and the author often shares personal stories about her family and her native town, Tula. All these features make the textbook very engaging.

In the preface for teachers, the author claims that the textbook is based on research in language acquisition and information processing. Indeed, the textbook presents the material gradually so that students can absorb it without being overwhelmed. The material is offered in small pieces, which are easier for students to process. The author broke up the Russian alphabet into four manageable groups: Group I (The Easy), Group II (The Tricky), Group III (Funny Shapes), Group IV (The Strangers). At the beginning of the book, she presents letters that are comparatively easy for English speakers. In the last two units, she introduces more difficult letters and words. Moreover, the distribution of complex material is balanced, and there is no unit that students will find too challenging. This balance of material is important because Russian language courses have a considerable early dropout rate, when students encounter the Russian alphabet and find it too difficult to learn compared to the Latin alphabets of other languages.

Furthermore, the textbook describes the basic grammatical structures that enable learners to communicate in Russian without using such grammatical categories as cases, conjugations, and so forth. For example, the author substituted theoretical information about the prepositional case with a simple rule: if learners want to express the idea that something or somebody is in a particular place, they need to use the preposition *B* and to add *E* to the end of the name of the place. Several exercises in which students use the prepositional case with various places that require the prepositional *B* and the ending *E* reinforce this rule.

The only shortcoming of the textbook may be the lack of audio recordings and assignments. Instead of listening exercises, the author suggests using free listening resources on the internet and checking

pronunciation of Russian words using free online programs. I agree with the author that students can check their pronunciation with free online programs and imitate difficult sounds from the internet. However, audio material is more than just listening and imitating. The textbook would benefit from listening comprehension and dictation exercises.

In "Preface for Teachers," the author does not specify the audience. Instead, she states that the textbook has a flexible format and enough material for twenty lessons. The book can be used as a required textbook, or instructors can "pick and mix" some material from it. Indeed, the book contains explanations, exercises, and activities that instructors can use at the beginning of university-level courses to help students learn the alphabet and master reading in Russian. However, using the entire textbook in a North American university seems problematic because of the shortage of contact hours and the fast pace of Russian programs. For example, some programs have as few as forty-two contact hours per term. Given the limited time, it appears this book will not produce similar proficiency outcomes compared to other books after twenty lessons. However, the textbook would be a great addition for supplemental or noncredit Russian language classes that focus on reading and conversation skills.

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**Blank, Ksana. 2021. "The Nose": A Stylistic and Critical Companion to Nikolai Gogol's Story. Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press. 238 pages.**

Ksana Blank's companion to Gogol's "The Nose" is an excellent new resource for students of Russian language and literature. The book consists of two sections: the first, a series of annotations to the story's text, and the second, several short essays on a wide range of related topics. Finally, readers are provided with a carefully selected bibliography of secondary sources, which will be particularly valuable for those new to Gogol research and criticism.

Blank's book truly shines in its first section. The annotations to the text are remarkably thorough and identify allusions, irony, and colloquialisms that the casual reader may miss and the second-language