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Book Review: *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate*

Iryna Kaplun
Johns Hopkins University

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Kudyma, Anna S. (2022). *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. Includes bibliographical references and index. 560 pages.

Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate is a remarkable textbook for second- and third-year Russian language courses. It is primarily designed for learners who are already familiar with basic Russian morphology and phonetics and have a beginner's-level vocabulary; it will help learners achieve intermediate proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. One notable feature of the book is the companion website, accessible without registration, which can be imported into your university's Canvas system.

Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate has 17 chapters that discuss the Intermediate-level topics and relevant language functions needed for ACTFL oral-proficiency interviews. The chapters cover various pertinent themes, such as friends and friendship, family, dating and marriage, food and cooking, holidays, university and education, hobbies and sports, traveling, health and illness, and TV and the internet.

The textbook "provides the following instructional materials, which are aligned with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012) and the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements":

- Pronunciation and intonation review and practice
- Vocabulary development and word formation
- A set of Novice high- and Intermediate-level scenarios
- Various Intermediate-level readings (magazine articles, infographics, blogs, forums, social media posts, emails, classifieds, commercials, recipes, menus, PSAs, weather forecasts, TV guides, biographies, short excerpts from Russian poetry, etc.), with assignments that help learners develop efficient reading skills
- A set of listening assignments using authentic video clips (video blogs, advertisements, news reports, etc.) posted on the accompanying textbook website
- Various intermediate-level writing activities (blog posts and comments, Tweets, Facebook posts, WhatsApp messages, emails, advertisements, report writing, etc.) that focus on developing both interpersonal and academic writing

- Cultural references that help build students' intercultural competence
- Topics for class oral presentations
- Guidelines for individual and group projects
- Grammatical explanations and authentic activities that integrate form, meaning, and content (p. ix)

Every chapter of *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate* includes one to four connected topics, activities to improve pronunciation and intonation, a set of communicative situations, readings and video links, writing tasks, suggestions for projects/interviews, and several grammatical topics corresponding to the chapter's themes.

The chapters also offer activities connected with three modes of communication (interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational) and encourage students to speak and write in paragraphs. The textbook's vocabulary is based on the *Russian Federation Lexical Minimums* and on word frequencies provided by dictionaries and the *Russian National Corpus*. Upon completion of the textbook students are expected to have an active vocabulary of 2,000 words. Many words used in *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate* reflect topics relevant to present-day learners, including vocabulary related to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and video-blogs, online chats and messengers, and so on.

Grammatical topics in *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate* correspond to the needs of communication at the Intermediate level. The book reviews and expands on basic Russian grammar features, allowing students to go over the most difficult points and apply them to a broader range of communicative tasks. Some of the grammar topics included in the volume are case usage, verbal aspect, verbs of motion with and without prefixes, sentences with *который* and with *чтобы*, usage of *себя* and *свой*, verbs of position and placing, and various conjunctions used for complex sentences. Typical second-year grammatical features like participles and verbal adverbs are also introduced in the textbook, with the expectation that they will be used productively in the next level of proficiency. The book's explanations and visual presentations of grammar are very clear and easy to follow; each grammatical feature is no more than two or three pages and is filled with tables and examples and brief activities to practice it. One of the main features of this textbook is that grammar is contextualized through texts and listening as well as productive speaking

and writing activities that help students make connections between form, meaning, and content.

Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate does not have a separate homework book; however, the companion website has a wide variety of exercises that are interactive, engaging, and diverse in structure, including flashcards, self-correcting vocabulary and grammar quizzes, fill-in-the-blank exercises, self-correcting quizzes for identifying features of words, video activities for speaking, and listening exercises and pronunciation practice, among others. Any of these exercises can serve as homework assignments. Course instructors can request access to the “Teacher’s Corner” of the companion site by following the link on the main page on the website.

Various aspects of Russian culture are presented in *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate*. Students read short texts about Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Chekhov, Stravinsky, Mussorgsky, and Tchaikovsky; get acquainted with poems by Simonov, Oshanin, and Okudzhava; learn about Tomsk State University; make virtual trips to Kiev and Vladimir; learn how to make Ukrainian borscht; and familiarize themselves with some of the most popular Russian TV shows, such as «Что? Где? Когда?», «КВН», and even «Модный приговор». In addition, many chapters in the textbook have a special cultural note explaining different Russian traditions, for example, education and grading systems, weddings, apartment living, and *спальные районы*. Moreover, the companion website offers numerous supplementary materials and activities, including shorter authentic videos, such as «Ералаш», and longer options, like «По семейным обстоятельствам».

Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate gives the instructor the freedom to use any parts of the chapters in the order that best fits their course goals. Some of the assignments are connected to one another, for example, some activities are based on information introduced in a text or video. Other activities can be completed in any sequence. Characters and names do not travel into each new chapter; the instructor can skip some assignments and students still be able to complete tasks on subsequent pages or chapters. Some textbook activities, such as writing short essays, preparing presentations, creating videos, and conducting interviews, can be given as homework. The abundance of topics and exercises does not seem overwhelming, and the instructor can cover chapters as quickly or as slowly as they need to.

On the whole, *Russian: From Novice High to Intermediate* is an excellent textbook that can be used in various academic years and is sufficient as the primary course textbook. It meets the needs of both experienced and novice instructors and provides diverse, engaging activities that encourage students to actively participate and develop their ability to communicate as literate and culturally aware users of the Russian language at the Intermediate level of proficiency.

Iryna Kaplun

Johns Hopkins University

References

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Russian National Corpus. <https://ruscorpora.ru>

Minakova-Boblest, Elena. 2020. *Modern Russian Grammar in Use: A Systematic Reference and Practice Book*. Moscow/Munich: Asbuka. 309 pages.

Elena Minakova-Boblest's *Modern Russian Grammar in Use* is a much-needed comprehensive reference grammar and workbook for students of Russian, which can be used in the classroom and by students who study the language on their own (the answer key is a welcome addition for the latter). The book is a good supplement to virtually any contemporary textbook and can also serve as a standalone reference and exercise book for beginning- or intermediate-level language students.

The book starts with an "introductory course" that presents the basic structures of the Russian language. The lexical items used in the examples and the exercises in that section are of high frequency, which makes it possible to use this section at very early stages of language instruction. The "main course" includes sections such as "the noun" (mostly dealing with case forms and usage broken down into six cases), "the adjective," "the adverb," "the verb" (conjugation, imperative and subjunctive moods, verbal aspect, and verbs of motion), "the participle," "the verbal adverb," "the numeral" (including sections on giving the