

Maintaining Your Russian Language Gains Over the Summer and Beyond
Timothy Sergay, Russian program, LLC, UAlbany

I can't claim to have studied the psychology of long-term learning gains (a huge topic), but I can share my experience as a language learner: the more steadily and repetitively I study and then *practice* my language gains, the longer I retain them. Conversely, knowledge that I crammed desperately the night before an exam or a similar short-term performance—and thereafter neglected—dissipates very quickly, like the plot of a dream. This is why I advise students from the very first day of classes to work *steadily* at their language skills, rather than cramming intensely for periodic assessments and coasting at low or no effort between them. If you take no particular interest in Russian over the summer, you will certainly find that three months is more than enough time to forget a shockingly high proportion of everything you've learned in your Russian class(es) to date. It is in your interest as a learner to develop a set of *nonclassroom* language learning and maintenance routines that works for you. Eventually, if you study the language to the point of effective, rewarding communication, activities like interacting and corresponding in Russian with Russian-speakers and monitoring Russian media will keep your Russian strong. Using the language at that point simply becomes part of your life, and you don't have to be quite so deliberate about setting time and energy aside to practice it. Until then, however, **deliberate practice is precisely what you need to do: you need to make a point of “doing your Russian.”**

What I would suggest is doing what I hoped you would have time to do outside of routine classroom assignments during the semester: explore and use various links to Russian language resources. Here are the very most crucial ones, in my own opinion, which I have checked and updated as of early May 2016:

Explore and learn from the new, free, web-based elementary Russian textbook «Между нами»: <http://mezhdunami.org/>.

Explore **Russian Lessons.Net**: <http://www.russianlessons.net/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7012>. In Forums, you can correspond with native speakers interested in assisting foreign learners.

The **HelloTalk mobile app program** for interaction with native speakers.

Explore and learn from Curtis Ford's Youtube tutorials on Russian grammar, orthography, phonetics, usage problems, and much more:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcqqadbwW8gPcUW3h2I1BGJg>

Explore Russian radio: <http://www.moskva.fm/stations>.

Listen and view authentic Russian audio and video: As I stressed in class, I strongly recommend *installing the TuneIn app* (<http://tunein.com/>) on your computers and smartphones and using its search feature to locate dozens and dozens of Russian-related audio sites (just search “Russian”). **Slower and simplified Russian newscasts** can be heard here: <http://www.nclrc.org/webcasts/russian/index.html>. Try the related exercises: they are similar to the exercises created for the video segments in *GOLOSA*. If you find that the audio does not open immediately upon clicking the “Listen” button for each news segment, check the version and configuration of your Windows Media Player and browsers here:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~slavic/golosa/troubleshoot.htm#audio>. I must stress especially for students who have just completed ARUS102 that even these “simplified” Russian news broadcasts are going to be extremely challenging. Make sure to study the relevant vocabulary for each story first, and be persistent. I repeat the advice offered by the creators of this resource:

***Suggestions for listening.** Listening to a flow-of-speech can be a daunting and frustrating task. Learning to live with the frustration is part of the learning curve. So we advise that you try these steps in this order:*

Read all the exercises first! They will help you to understand everything you can.

Don't listen word for word. Try to get the gist. On the other hand, pay close attention to names and numbers.

Use your background knowledge and common sense. If you are listening to a report on a natural disaster in Brazil, chances are it won't have to do with snow.

While the scripts for the broadcasts are available, use them only as a last resort. (Source: <http://www.nclrc.org/webcasts/russian/index.html>.)

The best way to add both television and film content to your media monitoring regimen in Russian is to create an account at etvnet.com. This site has an incredibly deep archive of film and TV offerings, is legal, and is very inexpensive. Read in English about all the viewing and account options that etvnet offers here: <http://etvnet.com/en/>. A recent etv service is called Moviedom (<http://etvnet.com/russian-moviedom/>): it is designed expressly for learners of Russian. Once you create your free etvnet account, you can watch classic Russian films in the Moviedom section for free. To avoid problems directing video streams to the right plugin, I always recommend clicking on «Смотреть во встроенном плеере» (“View with built-in media player”). You can view etvnet very well right on your smartphones using the mobile version: just navigate to the site on your phone and click on the huge link that reads, unsurprisingly, МОБИЛЬНАЯ ВЕРСИЯ. The site includes simple instructions for viewing etvnet content on large TVs using Apple TV or other devices. **Mosfilm Studios has also made a large number of its films freely streamable on the Web.** Create a free Mosfilm account and watch all the films you want (you pay only for downloads): <http://www.cinema.mosfilm.ru/>. Even simpler, **go to the official Mosfilm Channel on Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmn1CUPvYZtHMXsFGrepkcQ>. For guidance to the Mosfilm archives in English, see <http://366weirdmovies.com/your-guide-to-mosfilm-in-english-on-youtube/>. This source points out which films have English subtitles available.

Media monitoring is wonderful, but it’s essentially noninteractive, and you won’t be exerting your language resources to *say* things in your nonnative tongue. Exploit every chance you get to **speak and write the language with Russian-speaking friends.** Needless to add, if you can travel to Russia or spend time in a Russian-speaking émigré setting, by all means do so, and use your Russian there, faulty as it is. If you don’t practice your Russian interactively, it won’t get any better. You can exchange English language lessons for Russian lessons with native Russian speakers through **language exchange sites**, often for free. Review the current crop of language exchange sites here: <https://lingua.ly/blog/best-language-exchange-sites/>, and explore your possibilities. You could also create a profile for continuing learning of Russian at **duoLingo:** <https://www.duolingo.com/course/ru/en/Learn-Russian-Online>. As I mentioned at the top, **Russian Lessons.Net** has an interactive component; see <http://www.russianlessons.net/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7012>. In Forums, you can correspond with

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native speakers interested in assisting foreign learners. Also, the **Hellotalk** mobile app program for interaction with native speakers includes Russian. Explore at <https://www.hellotalk.com/#lang=en>.

You may be thinking, “all that’s fine, but I only really study something and learn it when I’m in a classroom situation: I need to be in a course.” In that case, you need to **investigate summer schools and study-abroad programs**, if not for this year, then for next year or beyond college. I append a list of programs that I recommend. You can discover more for yourself by googling around. But more importantly, you need to rethink your approach. As I’ve mentioned in class, of the thousands, yes, thousands of hours of effort required to gain real fluency in a foreign language, only a fraction occur in a classroom, in the presence of a classroom instructor like me. Most of your effort will be nonclassroom, real-world effort: either private effort (between you and language-learning resources of one form or another, print or electronic), or informal interactions with speakers of your “target” language. **Develop your own language-learning routine, and make sure it includes both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing)**. Find ways to substitute Russian for English in everyday “receptive” situations: Why not set your GPS device to prompt you in Russian as you drive? It’s not hard, and then every time you use it you will be reinforcing your Russian verbs of vehicular motion and expressions for turning left, right, and around. If you listen to workout music, why not listen to *Russian* workout music? Use the TuneIn app on your smartphone and listen to Nashe Radio for great Russian rock programming at high bitrates. Sounds great. If you listen to a news station, try listening to Radio Liberty (Свобода) or Echo of Moscow (Эхо Москвы). If you read a news story on the Internet in English, try googling for Russian coverage of the same event, and learn lots of the relevant vocabulary. **In short: be active. Just as in sports and music, the more you practice, the more your skills improve.**

Last, let me say that there’s no such thing as simply “maintaining” what you’ve learned until you are in your next classroom situation: “maintenance of language gains” is just a convenient term. The fact is that you have to go on developing and acquiring new vocabulary and new constructions. You’ll never find Russian speakers or Russian source materials whose language is limited to exactly what you happen to have acquired so far. **To maintain whatever Russian language gains you have achieved thus far, you must make further gains.** I wish you luck and enjoyment in this continuous work. If you care about Russian, you will find it not only frustrating, but also gratifying, and increasingly so. I wish you not luck, but perseverance, upon which success will follow.

Useful Links

Invest in the ABBYY Lingvo Dictionary and quit fooling around with print dictionaries.

If you want to get anywhere in Russian, you need fast, efficient, easy-to-use dictionary support. Stop flipping through printed pages and learn to use electronic dictionaries on your computer and your smartphone or tablet. Explore ABBYY’s line of incredibly versatile and useful dictionary software here: http://www.abbyy.com/lingvo_dictionary/.

Use MultiTran to access specialized Russian dictionaries

This web resource can compensate for your lack of a library of various specialized dictionaries at home: <http://www.multitran.ru/c/m.exe?&l1=1&l2=2>

Review conjugations and declensions online (Wikipedia)

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You don't need your own copy of a reference grammar like Wade just to review conjugation and declension tables. Start with Wikipedia, here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_grammar

Get to know "Echo of Moscow" radio

At this site, click on various live audio streams titled "слушать" to hear the live feed of "Echo of Moscow" radio (live broadcasts in Russian are known as прямой эфир). You may find that one server is filled to capacity; try another one from this same page. Or you can download (скачать) audio files (звукотые файлы) of past broadcasts. Keep the time difference in mind: EST is 8 hours behind Moscow time: <http://www.echo.msk.ru/sound.html>

Explore the US government's "Radio Liberty" Russian service

Your tax dollars at work. A superb site for cultivated and intelligent commentary on current events, Russian culture, and also world culture from a Russian perspective. Click on one of the audio plugins at the top of this page, RealPlayer or Windows Media, and the live feed should start to play in a new window. Naturally, you must have the free RealPlayer or the latest version of Windows Media. Svoboda.org also has sound archives of past shows. Shop around: <http://www.svobodanews.ru/>

Work on Vocabulary with Russian Word of the Day":

<http://shininghappypeople.net/rwotd/blog4.php>

Get a Feel for Contemporary Russian Music at Radio 101

Radio 101 is the web service that remains of one of Russian radio's best post-Soviet radio stations. Visit this site, which offers English-language navigation of the service's various channels of Russian musical genres. You can even choose the quality (expressed in bit rates) of your music feed. Listen to different genres. Try to disregard the ads offering to acquaint you with stunning Russian and Ukrainian girls. (These ads, along with off-color tabloid news links about sensational discoveries in weight loss and sexual potency, are all over the Russian Internet; there's no avoiding them.) Listen to the music: http://101.ru/?an=port_allchannels. Click on stations like «Россия Топ 50», «Russian Dance», «Русский рок», or go right to the "Golden Collection" and try various Russian groups: http://101.ru/?an=port_groupchannels&group=12.

Use U. Denver's online Russian drills & grammar review site

The University of Denver has been developing a very nice basic review of Russian grammar with interactive drills (quizzes). Unfortunately, it seems to be between iterations. Look for a new version to go live here in the near future, under "DU RUSSIAN RESOURCES": <http://www.du.edu/ahss/langlit/programs/russian/student-resources.html>

Get tutoring from your digital "Russian Language Mentor"!

This humorous and linguistically sophisticated site offers interactive grammar drills that provide immediate feedback to your answers. It is useful for a comprehensive self-administered review of all your declension and conjugation paradigms. Explore and enjoy it: <http://russianmentor.net/>

Recommended summer Russian language programs in the United States or abroad

Recommended summer Russian language programs: explore these links if you are considering intensive and immersive Russian language instruction over the summer. You will find all the information you need on applying for both admission and financial aid.

Middlebury College's Kathryn Wasserman Davis School of Russian.

<http://www.middlebury.edu/ls/russian>. Admissions are rolling, but financial aid is first-come, first-served. You are best advised to apply for both admission and financial aid by October 1 for the following summer session. Financial aid is both need-based and merit-based. The deadline for merit-based aid, called a Davis Fellowship, comes in January.

Indiana University, Bloomington, Summer Language Workshop in Russian:

<http://indiana.edu/~swseel/languages/details/russian>.

University of Pittsburgh, Summer Language Institute: <http://sli.slavic.pitt.edu/>

Bryn Mawr College, Russian Language Institute: <http://www.brynmawr.edu/russian/rli.htm>

Arizona State University, Critical Languages Institute (includes study abroad segment in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan or St. Petersburg, Russia): <https://melikian.asu.edu/cli>.

University of Wisconsin–Madison Summer Russian Courses:

http://slavic.lss.wisc.edu/new_web/?q=node/278. Non-UW-Madison students would have to apply for "special student" status in order to register and receive credit.

Consider SUNY's own study abroad options: <http://www.albany.edu/studyabroad/programs.php>

Here is a very interesting summer study abroad program in Riga, Latvia, offered by Hunter College: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/educationabroad/programs/short-term-programs/summer-2017-programs/latvia#cost>.

I am especially enthusiastic about recommending summer study abroad options for Russian involving the **Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSES)**, <http://customedu.mses.ru>, and the **Baltic Center for Educational and Academic Development**, in Riga, Latvia, <http://baltcenter.com>. These two interrelated programs, both the Moscow-based one and the Riga-based one, offer opportunities for homestay accommodations and internships, as well as English-language instruction in "topics" courses alongside classroom-based Russian-language training appropriate for your level. You can choose either Moscow or Riga or even combine the two locations, studying four weeks in Riga, then four weeks in Moscow or vice-versa. Please visit the indicated sites. For further guidance, by all means write Vice Rector and Director of International Projects for the MSES Alexander Abashkin at abashkin@universitas.ru or Abashkin@gmail.com. Please give these two programs serious consideration: they offer everything you need to get your elementary or intermediate Russian-language and cultural training onto a genuinely preprofessional track. The Riga program is parallel to the one noted just above offered through Hunter College. Vice Rector Abashkin coordinates these programs with both Hunter College and UAlbany, as well as numerous other American institutions.