In this lesson we will introduce some of the Russian grammar that is associated with nouns. This is the second lesson in a row that will deal with a lot of the Russian grammar, but afterwards you will start to see a little less, as we concentrate more on Russian phrases and vocabulary in the following lessons.

This lesson will introduce two concepts: Gender of nouns, and cases. Specifically the accusative case.Other cases will be introduced through-out later lessons.

**Definitions**

*Noun* - A noun is a thing, name or place. Example: dog, cat, Moscow, cup, paper, pen.  
*Cases* - Cases are a grammatical way of determining what a noun does in a sentence. In English we do this by having a strict word-order. In Russian we use 6 cases.  
*Vowel* - Letters that can be said with an open vocal tract. The letters А, Я, Э, Е, У, Ю, О, Ё, Ы, И and Й. (A,E,I,O,U in English).  
*Consonant* - A letter that is not a vowel. (Except ь, ъ because they have no sound).

**Gender of nouns.**

In Russian, as with many other languages, each noun is assigned a gender. Russian has three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter (neutral). In the cases of words like “father” these relate to physical gender. In the case of other objects like “pen”, “cup”, “house”, there is no physical meaning attached to the gender. However you will still need to know the gender because it affects how words are formed. Luckily, unlike many languages, in Russian it is almost always possible to tell what the gender of a noun by its spelling. This is not true in some other languages where you just have to memorise them.

When you use a noun as the subject of a sentence, it will be in its dictionary form. In this form you can easily work out it’s gender. If the noun is in another part of the sentence the ending is changed to suit the case. From the dictionary form of a noun, here is how you can tell what the gender is:

1. Look at the last letter of the word:  
2. If it is a consonant, or “й”, the word is masculine.  
3. If it is “а” or “я” it is feminine.  
4. If it is “о” or “е” it is neuter.  
5. If it is a soft sign “ь” then it could be either masculine or feminine.

There are very few exceptions to these rules. But there are five notable exceptions, this occurs mainly because of physical gender.  
Папа - (Daddy, Papa) - Is Masculine  
Дядя - (Uncle) - Is Masculine  
Дедушка - (Grandfather) - Is Masculine  
Мужчина - (Man) - Is Masculine  
Кофе - (Coffee) - Is Masculine (however neuter is now acceptable)

Some examples:  
  
Masculine : паспорт (passport), документ (document), брат (brother), Хлеб (bread).  
Feminine : газета (newspaper), Россия (Russia), Дочь (daughter)  
Neuter : здание (building), радио (radio), письмо (letter)

**Cases in Russian**

Russian grammar uses the case system. The case system is also used in languages like Latin, Greek and German. In fact it was also used in Old English. In Russian there are six cases. To help you understand what cases are we will compare them to English...

In English the subject of the sentence must be first noun. For example...

‘Ivan gives flowers to Anna’. (Иван даёт цветы Анне)

In English it makes no sense to swap the position of the words ‘Ivan’ and ‘flowers’. The meaning of the sentence would be completely changed. In Russian it is possible to change the order of these words, and still keep the same meaning. You may wish to do this to emphasise something. Although it is common in Russian to use a similar word order to English. The Russian word’s position is not so important because it’s meaning in the sentence is indicated by it’s case. To indicate each case we change the ending of word. Lets look at the six cases (You don’t need to remember this yet):

Nominative case : The subject of the sentence. (“Ivan”)  
Accusative case: The object of the sentence. (“flowers”)  
Dative case: The indirect object of the sentence (“Anna”)  
Genitive case: Indicates ownership. (Eg. “Anna’s flowers”)  
Instrumental case: Indicates ‘with’ or ‘by means of’. (“Anna writes with a pencil”)  
Prepositional case: Used after certain propositions. (In, on, at, and about.)

For example the word Anna in the six different cases would be:  
Nominative case: Анна  
Accusative case: Анну  
Dative case: Анне (to Anna)  
Genitive case: Анны (Anna’s)  
Instrumental case: Анной (with Anna)  
Prepositional case: Анне (about Anna)

We will teach you how to form the cases over the next few lessons so don’t worry too much now. It is just important to understand that case effectively gives a word its meaning in the sentence.

Understanding the case system is often one of the biggest hurdles for people learning Russian, so we will take it slowly. Once the case system is understood the Russian language will really open up to you, and we can concentrate more on vocabulary. Our lessons are designed for English speakers so we will not assume much knowledge of grammar.

It’s important not to worry much about the fine details of grammar at first. You will learn it more naturally when you start using Russian. Remember that Russian children all learnt to speak Russian before they understood any grammar. Just try to get a good general overview of the grammar.

Interestingly, some remnants of the case system still exist in English, especially pronouns. For example we must use ‘me’ instead of ‘I’ when not the subject.

**The Nominative Case. (The subject of a sentence)**

The nominative case is used for the subject of a sentence. In the sentence “I love her”, the word “I” is the subject. The nominative case is the dictionary form for nouns, so there is nothing special to learn here.

The only time you need to change the ending is to form the plural. In English we make a plural by adding “s”. In Russian, in the nominative case, you make a plural by using the letters “и”, “ы”, “я” or “а”.

For masculine nouns:  
If the word ends in a consonant, add “ы”.  
Replace “й” with “и”  
Replace “ь” with “и”  
  
For feminine nouns:  
Replace “а” with “ы”  
Replace “я” with “и”  
Replace “ь” with “и”  
  
For neuter nouns:  
Replace “о” with “а”  
Replace “е” with “я”

Examples:  
**студент** becomes: **студенты** (student - students)  
**газета** becomes: **газеты** (newspaper - newspapers)  
**здание** becomes: **здания** (building - buildings)

**The Accusative Case. (The object of a sentence)**

To form simple sentences like “I want a dog”, you need to use the accusative case also. The accusative case is used for the object of a sentence, in this case the word “dog”. The only time we use the accusative case in English is with pronouns. We use “me” instead of “I” and “him” instead of “he”. Russian uses the case for all nouns.

Russian is very free about word order. For example, in Russian it may be possible to change the order of the words in a sentence, without changing the actual meaning. This doesn’t work in English because we rely on the subject always coming first. However, in Russian it still makes perfect sense because the object will still be in the accusative case. It is normal in Russian to use the same word ordering as English.

*Definition: An “animate” noun is something that is alive (person or animal, not plants). An “inanimate” noun is a non-living object.*

Here are the rules for forming the accusative case from the dictionary (nominative) form.

Masculine Nouns:  
1. If the noun in inanimate, there is no change.  
2. If noun is animate and ends in a consonant, add “а”.  
3. If noun is animate, replace “й”, with “я”.  
4. If noun is animate, replace “ь”, with “я”.  
  
Feminine Nouns:  
1. Replace “а” with “у”.  
2. Replace “я” with “ю”.  
  
Neuter Nouns:  
1. Inanimate nouns do not change (almost all neuter nouns are inanimate).

Examples:  
**спорт** remains: **спорт** (sport)  
**музыка** becomes: **музыку**(music)  
**Москва** becomes: **Москву**(Moscow)  
**газета** becomes: **газету**(newspaper)  
**здание** remains: **здание**(building)  
**Иван**becomes: **Ивана**(Ivan)

You will learn about the plurals of the accusative case in a later lesson.

**Conclusion**

Now you know all the theory to move onto lesson 7. In the next lesson we will focus on forming sentences, vocabulary building and take a rest from grammar. A summary of the grammar information you learnt in this lesson is always available in the grammar section of this site.