

**Первый круг**  
**Russian Full Circle**  
A First-Year Russian Textbook

**Donna Oliver**  
Beloit College

**with Edie Furniss**  
The Pennsylvania State University

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# Preface

*Первый Круг: Russian Full Circle* offers a concise but thorough introduction to Russian grammar, foundational vocabulary, and communicative strategies in ten lessons with loose thematic orientations. The first seven lessons present all case endings in singular and plural, for all parts of speech, as well as verb conjugations and verbal aspect. More complex grammar structures and concepts (verb imperatives, verbs of position, the comparative degree, conditional clauses, participles and gerunds for reading purposes) are introduced in the last three lessons.

Unlike some other first-year textbooks, *Первый Круг* offers students a “big-picture” case delivery—that is, it eschews the approach of breaking down the delivery of grammatical cases into smaller pieces in favor of a straightforward, cohesive presentation of all case forms and most case functions in single chapters rather than broken up and interspersed throughout the textbook (with the exception of animate masculine and animate plural accusative endings, which are covered in the chapter on the genitive). Though some might see this approach as more traditional, we believe that there are clear benefits to presenting grammatical cases in this way, especially for adult learners. By getting the grammar “out on the table,” *Первый Круг* puts more pieces of the picture of any particular grammatical point into play at once, at least as items to consider and practice, if not master. In this respect, the goal of *Первый круг* is to make students “grammar empowered” by giving them a clear framework on which to build in their further study. We believe that avoiding the artificial fracturing of cases into pieces gives students the tools to communicate earlier on in more robust ways.

With respect to communicative competence, *Первый Круг* takes what might be described as an “inward” to “outward” approach, starting in the shared space of the classroom and then expanding outward: from identifying and describing the things that surround them, students move on to communicating about themselves, their families, their interests, their studies, their appearance, and so on. Building the capacity to talk about oneself and to ask for and understand similar information from others is the foundation of basic communication. Additionally, *Первый Круг* equips students with the conversational expressions needed for basic pragmatic competence in a variety of situations. These expressions are integrated into “mini-dialogues” informed by research using data from the Russian National Corpus ([www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru)), ensuring that students are being presented with idiomatic, authentic models of language use.

Each lesson follows the same organizational structure:

- I. Vocabulary lists come at the beginning of each chapter and are arranged according to parts of speech.
- II. A section called “Notes about new vocabulary” follows the vocabulary lists; this section offers explanations of nuances in meaning, provides irregular forms, and covers minor grammatical points.

- III. The main grammar sections follow.
- IV. A section on Russian culture follows the grammar explanations, consisting of proverbs, tongue twisters, songs, poems, jokes, and examples of Soviet propaganda posters.
- V. The “conversational practice” section aims to advance students’ communicative competency through “mini-dialogues,” short speech patterns, and conversation starters.
- VI. Each chapter ends with a set of homework exercises.

Beginning in Lesson 2, the homework exercises include letters from a Russian pen pal named Zhenya, to which students are asked to respond. We recognize that texts of this sort inevitably reflect a certain artificiality, both in their concept and in the relative linguistic simplicity they require; for that reason, the texts do not take themselves seriously, and we invite students to respond accordingly, exercising their creativity with a healthy dose of irreverence. Zhenya’s letters do contain some new vocabulary and phrases, and students on occasion will need to use a dictionary to understand all the passages.

The Web site for *Первый Круг* ([yalebooks.com/russianfullcircle](http://yalebooks.com/russianfullcircle)) contains an assortment of supplemental materials that can be used in the classroom, explored on one’s own time, or as part of an assignment. The Web site also contains audio recordings of vocabulary lists, the mini-dialogues, and other materials found in the lessons. Additionally, the Web site serves as a gateway to external sites that students can utilize to explore on their own both classic and contemporary Russian culture through music, literature, painting, film, television, and other media.

The title’s metaphor of the “first circle,” we should be clear, is not to suggest that students studying Russian are destined to find themselves in Dante’s limbo or—worse yet—in Solzhenitsyn’s *В круге первом!* Rather, it conveys our belief that the first year of studying Russian should constitute the completion of a full circle, the first ring of a cyclical, expanding curriculum. Our many years of using previous versions of this textbook convince us that *Первый Круг: Russian Full Circle* successfully equips students in one year of classroom study with the essential skills they need to navigate the world of the Russian language; in addition—and perhaps more important in the context of a first-year textbook—it sets them up to build on their language base thanks to the firm grounding in grammar and vocabulary that it supplies.