4.3 Verbs

To do things, you need verbs. A verb is a word expressing an action or state, the kind of word which would fit in the gap in the sentence ‘She ——— in New York’, e.g. works, worked, was, lives, drives. In Russian dictionaries, verbs are listed in their infinitive form (this corresponds to ‘to drive’, ‘to be’ etc. in English). Russian infinitive forms normally end -ть (e.g. курить ‘to smoke’, знать ‘to know’).

4.4 Conjugation of Verbs in the Present Tense. Type 1: знать ‘to know’

The present tense describes actions taking place at the moment of speech (‘I work in Moscow’, ‘She is walking to school’). In Russian there is only one present tense, corresponding to both ‘I do’ and ‘I am doing’ in English.

The list of verb forms which go with the eight personal pronouns is known as the conjugation of the verb. The form to which the personal endings are attached is called the stem of the verb. Most (not all) знать-type verbs have a stem which is simply the infinitive form minus the -ть. So знать has the stem зна-. The endings are underlined.

Я знаю [zná-yoo] I know
ty знаешь [zná-yesh] you (familiar) know
он знает [zná-yet] he knows
она знает [zná-yet] she knows
онó знает [zná-yet] it knows
мы знаем [zná-yem] we know
вы знаете [zná-ye-tye] you (polite/plural) know

these three forms are always the same in the present tense of all verbs
они знают [zná-yoot] they know

Note: In colloquial (informal) Russian, the pronoun can be omitted, so that ‘I know’ can be simply Знáю. But remember that this is informal usage and rare in stylistically neutral Russian.

EXAMPLES

Мы знаем, где Вáня. We know where Vanya is.
Вы знаете меня? Do you know me?

The majority of Russian verbs have this type of conjugation, and we shall call it the знáть type or Type 1.

4.5 Type 2: говорить ‘to speak’

The standard example of the second type of present-tense conjugation is говорить ‘to speak’. The stem is говор-:

я говорí
ты говорíшь
он говорит
она говорит
он говорит
мы говорíм
вы говорíте
они говорíт

I speak/am speaking
you (familiar) speak
he speaks
she speaks
it speaks
we speak
you (polite/familiar) speak
they speak

Note the ending -ят of the они-form.

EXAMPLES

Я говорí по-ру́сски. I speak Russian.
Они говорíт по-французски. They speak French.
Вы говорíте по-английски? Do you speak English?
4.6 **Type 1B: èхать ‘to go (by transport)’, жить ‘to live’**

The third (and last) type is a variant of the знать type. These verbs have much the same endings as the знать type, but the problem is to predict the stem from the infinitive. Our first example is the verb èхать ‘to go (by transport), to ride’. The stem happens to be èд- (you just have to learn that, you couldn’t guess it) and the conjugation’ is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Present Tense</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular</th>
<th>3rd Person Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>я</td>
<td>я èду</td>
<td>оно èдет</td>
<td>it goes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ты</td>
<td>ты èдешь</td>
<td>мы èдем</td>
<td>we go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>он</td>
<td>он èдет</td>
<td>вы èдете</td>
<td>you (polite/plural) go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>она</td>
<td>она èдет</td>
<td>они èдут</td>
<td>they go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can see that the я and они forms have -y where the знать type has -ю but otherwise the endings are the same.

Here is another example, the verb жить ‘to live’ (despite its -ить ending, it is a èхать-type verb). The unguessable stem is жив- [zhiv] (2.7) and the conjugation is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Present Tense</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular</th>
<th>3rd Person Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>я</td>
<td>я живу</td>
<td>оно живёт</td>
<td>it lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ты</td>
<td>ты живёшь</td>
<td>мы живём</td>
<td>we live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>он</td>
<td>он живёт</td>
<td>вы живёте</td>
<td>you (polite/plural) live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>она</td>
<td>она живёт</td>
<td>они живут</td>
<td>they live</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLES**

- Он èдет домой. He’s going home.
- Я живу в Лондоне. I live in London.

The endings are the same as the endings of èхать except for the change of e to ë. This change is conditioned by the place of the stress: if the letter e in a verb ending is stressed, it always turns into ë (though remember that Russians don’t normally write the dots – see 1.2c).

Another useful example of the èхать type is the verb звать ‘to call’, whose stem is зов-. The first two forms are я зову, ты зовёшь, but the one to remember is они зовут ‘(they) call’, which turns up in the idiomatic question:

Как вас зовут? ‘How you (they) call?’ ( = What’s your name?).
**Lesson 4**

**Вас** is the accusative case of **вы** 'you'; the details of the accusative are in Lesson 6.

These three sets of similar endings in 4.4–4.6 give the present tense of nearly all Russian verbs. These endings don’t take long to learn; the main problem is remembering the stem (and the stress pattern) of verbs like **ехать**, **жить** and **зовать**. Although most verbs are like **знать** or **говорить**, there are many irregular infinitives like **жить**. In the vocabularies, we give the **я** and the **ты** form of each verb (since you can work out the other forms from these two).

**4.7 Verb Summary Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>знать (1)</th>
<th>говорить (2)</th>
<th>жить (1B)</th>
<th>ехать (1B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stem</td>
<td>зна-</td>
<td>говор-</td>
<td>жив-</td>
<td>ед-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>я</td>
<td>-ю</td>
<td>-ё</td>
<td>-ý</td>
<td>-у</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ты</td>
<td>-ешь</td>
<td>-йшь</td>
<td>-ёмь</td>
<td>-ешь</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>он/она/онé</td>
<td>-ет</td>
<td>-йт</td>
<td>-ёт</td>
<td>-ет</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>мы</td>
<td>-ем</td>
<td>-йм</td>
<td>-ём</td>
<td>-ем</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>вы</td>
<td>-ете</td>
<td>-йте</td>
<td>-ёте</td>
<td>-ете</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>онí</td>
<td>-ют</td>
<td>-йт</td>
<td>-ýт</td>
<td>-ут</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stress notes. (1) A few **знать**-type verbs are stressed on the end, so each **е** turns into **ё**. An example is **давать** 'to give' (12.4), which has the stem **да-**. The stressed endings are: **даё, даёшь, даёт, даём, даёте, дают**. (2) Many **говорить**-type verbs are stressed on the stem (see 4.9). but the spelling is not affected.

**4.8 Negation ('not')**

To make a verb negative ('I don’t know') simply put **не** 'not' in front of the verb:

**Я не знаю.** I don’t know.
**Он не понимает.** He doesn’t understand.