

How to pronounce Russian soft consonants

The softening of consonants in Russian occurs due to the peculiarities of the Russian way of articulation. In Russian articulation the sounds are essentially formed at the front of the speech apparatus (whereas in English, for example, the formation of the sounds occurs mainly at the back of the mouth – in the larynx and throat). So, to learn to pronounce Russian soft consonants you should first relax your throat and move the efforts of sound making to the front of your mouth “turning on” the Russian way of articulation. Let’s do it with the help of a few exercises:

Exercise 1

Put the tip of your tongue between your teeth and hold it there. Do not change the position of the tongue but articulate well with your lips and pronounce clearly the following syllables:

ма – мо – му – мэ – мы

The difference between soft and hard consonants is that when you pronounce a consonant soft, you raise the middle of your tongue to your palate and move the tongue slightly forward to your lower teeth. To achieve this, let’s do a couple more exercises.

Exercise 2

Try to pronounce the syllable «та» and at the same time press the tip of your tongue to your lower teeth with your finger, the back of a pen, or a small stick. You will definitely come out with the soft counterpart «тя» [т’а].

та [та] → press the tip of the tongue to your lower teeth → тя [т’а]

The same way try to get the soft «ать» out of the hard «ат», and then - the soft «ть» [т’] out of the hard «т».

ат [ат] → press the tip of the tongue to your lower teeth → ать [ат’]

т [т] → press the tip of the tongue to your lower teeth → ть [т’]

Following the same instructions, work on other soft consonants in the following order: дь [д’], нь [н’], фь [ф’], вь [в’], пь [п’], бь [б’], мь [м’], сь [с’], зь [з’], рь [р’], ль [л’].

Exercise 3

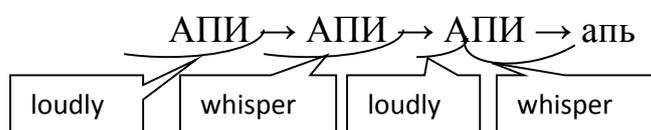
Drag the vowel «и» [и-и-и-и] and then the syllable «пи» [п'и-и-и-и].

И [и-и-и-и-и] → пи [п'и-и-и-и]

Then start to whisper the long [п'и-и-и-и] gradually making the [и] shorter. You will get a clear soft «пъ» [п'].

Whisper: пи [п'и-и-и-и] → [п'и-и-и] → [п'и-и] → [п'и] → [п']

Then go to saying «апи». Say the whole word loudly first, then whisper it, and then say loudly «А» and whisper «пи». Drag the «А» and shorten the «пи». You will finally get «апъ» [ап'].



Work the same way on [м'], [ф'], [в'].