

# Flipped Russian

## Context

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Flipped Russian is a proposal to incorporate flipped and blended classroom components into first-year Russian. Using Canvas, online components will be created to cover "lecture" elements (e.g., grammatical, cultural, and linguistic explanations) as well as other classroom exercises that are pedagogically better handled online, and they will be removed from the classroom.

## Project

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In the non-blended classroom, students hear lecture elements and explanations typically only once and are expected to understand them immediately. Good students may try to take notes, which can be challenging even for them when incorporating parts of the brand-new target language. Flipping these components to Canvas allows students to listen and review as often as they need or want to. Following up each of these components with online assessments (e.g., short quizzes or comprehension exercises) to test for comprehension gives students immediate feedback about their understanding and gives instructors insights into each student's progress, which can be further followed up on by the instructor online or in person. This learner-centered model is more informative to both the students and the instructor.

By moving the lecture and language drill elements online, much more time becomes available in the classroom for meaningful, communicative activities and exercises in Russian. At the first-year level, these are activities such as creating their own stories, interviewing one another, or discussing topics of interest. Such tasks require a lot of class time in terms of students working through these activities, but also because the instructor's input is often required. With a class of even just 12 students, an average of 20 to 30 minutes is needed in even the most organized classrooms. It's not enough: We, and the students, need more time and more of these exercises where the student is actually negotiating the language's meaning and using the language.

Over the years, I consistently, though not in large numbers, have had students explain that they can't take or continue to take Russian because it's too complicated for them to fit the four weekly class meetings into their busy schedule. They will often ask whether we'll accept them continuing with the course by missing one or two classes per week, promising to work independently and keeping up with the assignments and materials. For Flipped Russian, I propose to maintain our four contact hours per week, but now one of those contact hours will be online for the students, with instructor feedback and, at times, consultation. I am hopeful that such a schedule will allow more students to take Russian and also help to retain more students.

## Objectives & Outcomes

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Flipped Russian is scheduled to be mostly finished at the end of Summer 2016. Here are the learning objectives with early indicators or project outcomes:

1. Allow students to work at their own pace on course materials, thereby making the learning of Russian pedagogically sounder.
2. Give students immediate feedback on their online learning progress and instructors immediate insights into each individual student's learning progress or lack thereof through online assessments.
3. Allow more time for in-class creative, open-ended, and communicative activities and learning in Russian.
4. Create more flexibility in scheduling for students, which I hope will allow more students to take Russian, thereby increasing enrollments, and also lead to a stronger retention of students into second-year Russian and beyond.

Objective 4 is certainly ambitious, but not impossible. Professor Fernando Rubio had this result in his own hybrid Spanish first-year classes at the University of Utah.

We already have some early outcomes of sorts. In January, I discovered a colleague of mine, Irina Dubinina at Brandeis, is working on almost the same project for her first-year Russian program. Now we are collaborating on our projects, which will greatly benefit the outcomes.

I am also now more convinced than ever that the video components of Flipped Russian must include the instructor and not just capture a PowerPoint or tablet (we plan to use Northwestern's lightboard). Conversely, I still wrestle with the notion that what I'm going to produce online will in essence try to replicate what I typically do in the classroom (the videos will be me teaching, writing on a chalkboard, showing a PowerPoint, etc.), and I wonder why we are still seeming to just re-create what we know as the real in a digital environment. I think that in working on this project I was expecting that the digital component would need to be very different.

## Results

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I am optimistic that we'll reach the goals that I initially set out; however, I do think that students will not always be responsible about reviewing the online materials. As faculty, we are experiencing more and more requests from students to have access to lectures and other relevant materials online in order to be able to review them. On Blackboard I was able to track usage statistics and was often very disappointed by how few students accessed those materials compared to the number of requests. In thinking more about this project, I'm aware that having more materials online doesn't guarantee that students will actually use them unless we perhaps incentivize this through online required assignments and/or assessments.

## Lessons Learned

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For many reasons, I would have asked for more time to work on the project. I also wish that I could have had more opportunity to work with Canvas before using it first to work on this project. It's been a steep learning curve at times that delayed getting the actual content of this project done. I wish that I also could have convinced more colleagues to collaborate on the project.