

# Research: Seven Russia-related skills you need



If looking for a job monitoring and analyzing current events and developments in Russia, there are several practical skills that are likely to be necessary for the work and sought after by employers. They may even come up in an interview situation or a written test when preparing for related jobs. These are all easy to pick up, and can be learned in the context of coursework, papers, and other academic activities; or can be learned fairly easily independently. Here are seven examples of the kinds of things that you may want to demonstrate to your future employers.

## 1 Make friends with Rosstat

Rosstat is the Russian national statistical website. It is available in English and Russian, but the Russian version is significantly more rich in data and up to date. The website is a bit of a maze and finding information can be quite tough and time-consuming. Once you have learned its tricks, and know where different types of data sit, however, it can be immensely powerful. Russia's statistical service does have lots and lots of data, including monthly data on individual regions, as well as incredibly specific demographic and economic data (for an emerging market). For anyone looking to collect up to date and comprehensive data points on Russia's economy, being comfortable using the Rosstat website is a must.

<sup>1</sup> [www.amazon.com/Wheel-Fortune-Battle-Power-Russia/dp/0674066472](http://www.amazon.com/Wheel-Fortune-Battle-Power-Russia/dp/0674066472)

## **2** Know your way around the ministries' websites

You're likely to need official data or be able to find original legal documents or announcements as you monitor Russia on a daily basis. Ministry websites (in addition to kremlin.ru) are valuable sources for this kind of information, but you need to first learn the types of information each of them collects and which ones are user-friendly. Every ministry is different – some have fantastic up to date websites, while others seem stuck in 1990s version of the Internet. Being able to find relevant information on them, however, can give you both valuable first-hand information (much better than just relying on what is reported second- and third-hand in the media) and allow you to dig out some surprisingly interesting data and information from them. Two must-visit websites for economic data also include the Ministry of Finance (where you will find the budget) and the Central Bank's website (has great information on the situation in the banking system, as well as its own economic data).

## **3** Be able to read the budget

Speaking of the budget, knowing where to find it, how it is made and revised, and being able to understand specific line items in it and draw conclusions about where funding is going to go, is hugely valuable. The Russian budget can be an intimidating beast, and the process of drafting, circulating it for discussion, and the finalizing it itself is something worth understanding fairly well. However, if you are able to demonstrate that you can navigate it and understand at least the headlines on your own, you'll certainly find that to be a useful skill set to highlight to future employers. They might need this to analyze policy priorities, find areas of funding and business opportunities, or draw conclusions about the fiscal situation that the government is finding itself into. While it's possible to use secondary sources for this information, they usually pick and choose the things that are useful to them, or do very high-level breakdowns. Being able to conduct your own analysis with a much greater level of specificity is a fairly rare skill. It also demonstrates to future employers your mastery of very specific economic and government terminology in Russian.

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## **4** — **Know where the best economics research is done and cross-check it**

If you are trying to analyze the Russian economy, it's best to work with local and original sources as much as possible. The reason is that they go into significantly more detail that is a lot more revealing and illuminating than what you might read in the English-language press or even in reputable Russian publications like *Vedomosti*. Look for the top economics universities in the country as well as several think tanks who publish regular, detailed, sophisticated analysis of various aspects of Russia's economy. Some even create their own surveys and data, that can give you a useful countercheck to what Rosstat is reporting. These include the Higher School of Economics and the Gaidar Institute, as well as banks such as Sberbank and others.

## **5** — **Demonstrate some understanding of regional differences**

Russia has lots of regions (83 depending on how you count them) so knowing all of them is a fairly complex task and knowledge that can take years to build. However, some are more important than others (and we don't just mean Moscow) and there are general types of regional economic structures that can be helpful in understanding how and why their dynamics can vary. For example, you will find some regions completely dominated by hydrocarbons (Sakhalin), others that are heavy on manufacturing (Sverdlovsk), some that are relatively well-diversified (Voronezh), others that are heavy on agriculture (Volgograd) and yet others that are highly dependent on state subsidies (Dagestan).

Being familiar with some of the basic structures of how regions are run, how funding is distributed between them and the federal center, and how regional economies may behave in general can help you add more nuance to your analysis, especially if it is combined with some personal experience living or traveling outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg. As Russians like to say, Moscow is not Russia.

<sup>1</sup> [www.amazon.com/Wheel-Fortune-Battle-Power-Russia/dp/0674066472](http://www.amazon.com/Wheel-Fortune-Battle-Power-Russia/dp/0674066472)

Understanding the specific dynamics of regional politics, including differences in power and influence between regional governors, city managers, regional legislatures, or the setups of autonomous republics can also give you valuable insight into regional-level politics in Russia and how these interact with the federal center. There is virtually no English-language coverage of such issues for individual regions, so being able to study a region (they all have websites), read its local papers, understand its governance, economy, and local issues, can be quite valuable. Ideally, you also have some local experience there or contacts you can reach out to, but either way it takes you a step further ahead of those who can only analyze and understand Russia as a single federal entity and don't see the complex dynamics and differences subnationally.

## **6** — **Have a good grasp of Russia's media landscape**

Chances are when you analyze Russia, you'll be using local news sources to follow stories and understand news in more detail. English-language coverage of Russia is woefully inadequate and guarantees you'll only be skimming the surface of what's happening in the country and most likely missing on some very important stories that just don't get covered outside of Russia.

You have to know your way around the Russian media, however. Just like in many other places, you'll come across all sorts of biases in different publications and you need to be able to use those sources while navigating their blind spots. If you are watching Russia's economy and business, your go-to sources need to be Vedomosti and Kommersant, and for more frequent coverage, RBC. Beyond that, it's a fairly open landscape of online publications and newspapers, both national and very local. All are important in giving you a complete picture of what the national conversation is like and what different agendas look like, even, and especially if you disagree with them.

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Russian television has a bad reputation in the West, but the reality is that the vast majority of Russians (especially older generations) get their news and entertainment from there, so you can't ignore it. Instead, study it as a valuable source of insight into the views of the government, the narrative it is sending to the population, and as an expression at least to an extent of popular interest and views. Russian television may be influenced in its coverage of politically sensitive topics, but otherwise, it is a wholly capitalist institution looking to attract viewers with interesting, engaging content that reflects the zeitgeist and popular preferences. All of these you can get insight into by watching various channels, from Rossia to Channel One to TNT.

Finally, there is the internet or Runet. It's a massive space, but to the extent, you can understand what the most popular sites are, what their user demographics look like, and where you can find popular forums and chat rooms to get a sense of online chatter, you'll gain extra nuance in your understanding of social conversations within Russia.

## **7** **Develop a basic understanding of the oil and gas industry**

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To understand key economic dynamics in Russia, as well as the way the Russian state generates revenue, you need to have at least a basic understanding of the Russian oil and gas industry, both in its local characteristics and the basics of how the industry works globally. This is critical because it is a key source of economic growth, public spending, and political power. To be able to understand the vulnerabilities and priorities of the Russian state, as well as some of its decision-making around things like taxes, you need to understand how these are caused by the structure of that industry. Some basic research can help you with that; to get a more comprehensive background, you may want to start with this book<sup>1</sup>, which gives fantastic background.

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Founded in 2010, Crossroads Eurasia aims to get students to discover Russia for themselves — by working, living, and relaxing with locals. For students aspiring to integrate the Russian language or regional expertise into their careers, the program is a natural stepping stone into sought-after internships, jobs, fellowships, and graduate study.

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