



# The Russian Case System

Six cases, what each one is for, and the endings you will meet most often.

A case shows a word's role in the sentence. English uses word order and prepositions for this; Russian changes the ending. Learn the ending together with the job it does – either one alone makes the system feel arbitrary.

## The six cases at a glance

| Case                 | Asks          | Core job                                     | Example                                     |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Nominative</b>    | кто? что?     | The subject – the naming form                | Книга на столе. – The book is on the table. |
| <b>Accusative</b>    | кого? что?    | Direct object, and destination after в/на    | Я читаю книгу. – I am reading a book.       |
| <b>Genitive</b>      | кого? чего?   | Possession, absence, quantity, origin        | Нет книги. – There is no book.              |
| <b>Dative</b>        | кому? чему?   | Recipient, the person experiencing something | Я помогаю брату. – I help my brother.       |
| <b>Instrumental</b>  | кем? чем?     | By what means, and with whom                 | Я пишу ручкой. – I write with a pen.        |
| <b>Prepositional</b> | о ком? о чём? | Topic, and static location                   | Я в школе. – I am at school.                |

## Typical singular endings

| Case         | Masc. consonant / -й, -ь           | Neuter -о / -е | Fem. -а / -я | Fem. -ь      |
|--------------|------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Nom.</b>  | – / -й, -ь                         | -о / -е        | -а / -я      | -ь           |
| <b>Acc.</b>  | Nom. if inanimate, Gen. if animate | same as Nom.   | -у / -ю      | same as Nom. |
| <b>Gen.</b>  | -а / -я                            | -а / -я        | -ы / -и      | -и           |
| <b>Dat.</b>  | -у / -ю                            | -у / -ю        | -е           | -и           |
| <b>Inst.</b> | -ом / -ем                          | -ом / -ем      | -ой / -ей    | -ью          |
| <b>Prep.</b> | -е                                 | -е             | -е           | -и           |

### The single most useful habit

Learn a verb with its question word and case, not on its own: **помогать кому?** + dative. Она интересуется историей – **интересоваться чем?** + instrumental. The question word is a compact label for the whole pattern.

## One noun of each type, all six cases

| Case  | стол (m.) | музей (m.) | окно (n.) | книга (f.) | дверь (f.) |
|-------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Nom.  | стол      | музей      | окно      | книга      | дверь      |
| Acc.  | стол      | музей      | окно      | книгу      | дверь      |
| Gen.  | стола     | музея      | окна      | книги      | двери      |
| Dat.  | столу     | музею      | окну      | книге      | двери      |
| Inst. | столом    | музеем     | окном     | книгой     | дверью     |
| Prep. | столе     | музее      | окне      | книге      | двери      |

## Typical plural endings

| Case  | Common endings                       | Worth knowing                                  |
|-------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Nom.  | -ы / -и, neuter often -а / -я        | many lexical irregularities                    |
| Acc.  | Nom. if inanimate, Gen. if animate   | applies across all genders                     |
| Gen.  | -ов / -ев / -ей, or no ending at all | the least predictable form — learn it per word |
| Dat.  | -ам / -ям                            | usually regular                                |
| Inst. | -ами / -ями                          | usually regular                                |
| Prep. | -ах / -ях                            | usually regular                                |

## Prepositions by the case they take

| Case          | High-frequency prepositions                                       |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accusative    | в, на (destination); через, про, за, под                          |
| Genitive      | без, для, до, из, от, с, у, около, после, кроме, вокруг, напротив |
| Dative        | к, по, благодаря, вопреки, навстречу                              |
| Instrumental  | с, за, под, над, перед, между                                     |
| Prepositional | о / об / обо, в, на, при                                          |

Some prepositions appear twice because the case changes the relationship: *с работы* (from work — genitive) versus *с другом* (with a friend — instrumental).

## Contrast pairs worth memorising

| Pattern A           | Pattern B           | What changes                           |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Я в школе.          | Я иду в школу.      | location (prep.) vs destination (acc.) |
| У меня есть вопрос. | У меня нет вопроса. | existence vs absence (gen.)            |
| Я читал книгу.      | Я прочитал книгу.   | process vs completed whole             |

### Do not expect one ending to mean one thing

стола can be genitive singular (нет стола — there is no table) or part of a quantity (два стола — two tables). Endings are signals that work alongside prepositions, animacy and word order — not standalone translations.