

Mrs. Glass ... went over to the medicine cabinet. It was stationed above the washbowl, against the wall. She opened its mirror-faced door and surveyed the congested shelves with the eye — or, rather, the masterly squint — of a dedicated medicine-cabinet gardener. Before her, in overly luxuriant rows, was a host, so to speak, of golden pharmaceuticals, plus a few technically less indigenous whatnots. The shelves bore iodine, Mercurochrome, vitamin capsules, dental floss, aspirin, Anacin, Bufferin, Argyrol, Musterole, Ex-Lax, Milk of Magnesia, Sal Hepatica, Aspergum, two Gillette razors, one Schick Injector razor, two tubes of shaving cream, a bent and somewhat torn snapshot of a fat black-and-white cat asleep on a porch railing, three combs, two hairbrushes, a bottle of Wildroot hair ointment, a bottle of Fitch Dandruff Remover, a small, unlabeled box of glycerin suppositories, Vicks Nose Drops, Vicks Vapo Rub, six bars of castile soap, the stubs of three tickets to a 1946 musical comedy (“Call Me Mister”), a tube of depilatory cream, a box of Kleenex, two sea-shells, an assortment of used-looking emery boards, two jars of cleansing cream, three pairs of scissors, a nail file, an unclouded blue marble (known to marble-shooters, at least in the twenties, as a “purey”), a cream for contracting enlarged pores, a pair of tweezers, the strapless chassis of a girl’s or woman’s gold wristwatch, a box of bicarbonate of soda, a girl’s boarding-school class ring with a chipped onyx stone, a bottle of Stopette — and, inconceivably or no, quite a good deal more.

—from *Franny and Zooey*, J. D. Salinger

PRELIMINARIES 1—The mission of this book

Open a Russian-English dictionary and you will find the meanings of every kind of word. Many dictionaries will even list translations for prefixes. But you won't find meanings for cases in your trusty dictionary. If you are lucky, you might have a reference grammar with an entry for each case, but chances are these entries will look rather like the contents of Mrs. Glass' medicine cabinet, and be just as appealing. Take the dative case, for example. Your reference grammar might tell you that the dative is used in the following contexts: for the indirect object; with the prepositions *к* 'toward' and *по* 'along'; with certain verbs such as *отвечать* 'answer', *аплодировать* 'applaud', *платить* 'pay', *подражать* 'imitate', *помогать* 'help', *принадлежать* 'belong to', *верить* 'believe', *мстить* 'avenge', *угождать* 'please', *завидовать* 'envy'; in impersonal expressions of age and comfort such as *мне двадцать лет/холодно* [*me-DAT twenty-NOM years-GEN/cold*] 'I am twenty years old/cold'. There's no obvious pattern in such an explanation, and it doesn't prepare you to predict what other words might be associated with the dative, or to interpret a sentence like *Она наступила ему на портфель* [*She-NOM stepped him-DAT on briefcase-ACC*] 'She stepped on *his* briefcase'. The incoherent assortments of case usage offered up in this fashion are incomplete and suggest no logical motive. There is also no logical motive for the student to try to learn them, since they don't make sense. The only choice seems to be to memorize lists of case uses, and this proves to be a formidable if not impossible task, since it is exceedingly difficult to assimilate information if it looks to you like just so much nonsense.

The goal of this text and accompanying exercises is to show you that there are patterns to case usage that make sense and can be learned fairly easily. This book can be used by students at any level of study, from beginner through advanced. Ideally a student could read through the basic text in the first year of study and then work through the examples and exercises in the second or third year. The margin notes and extensive indexing make it possible to access and use the text in any order, and for a variety of purposes, from general orientation to troubleshooting specific case meanings.

The meanings of the grammatical cases are probably the biggest obstacle faced by English-speaking students trying to learn Russian. Even advanced learners will often run into sentences they can't interpret. Students often know plenty of vocabulary and how to find unfamiliar words in the dictionary, and maybe they can even figure out what cases all the nouns, pronouns, and adjectives are in, but if they cannot figure out what the cases mean, the meaning of the sentence remains a mystery.

The meaning of a sentence is a product of two interdependent forces: the words it contains, and the relationships those words have to each other. In English these relationships are usually expressed by means of word order and prepositions, but in Russian this job is done by case. The words are fairly self-contained and concrete, since they can exist by themselves, outside of any sentence. The relationships that hold between words are relatively abstract and largely dependent upon context. The relationships themselves can be likened to a bare conceptual structure that is fleshed out by the actual words chosen. You can compare this to the concept *sandwich*, which indicates a set of relationships between bread, spreads, and fillings. By itself, *sandwich* is abstract, and if somebody asked you to

Traditional explanations of Russian cases usually look like lists of random items.

This text explains the coherent patterns of case meanings and can be used at any level of study.

Learning the meanings of Russian cases is an obstacle to students.

Russian cases show the relationship between words in a sentence.

Understanding Russian cases is like understanding how a game structures play.

“make a sandwich,” you would probably ask for more information. If instead the request sounded something like “give me an open-faced turkey sandwich on rye with lettuce, tomato, and mustard, hold the mayo,” you would find that more satisfactory, because you would know both the relationship (sandwich) and the specific items in that relationship (one slice of rye, mustard [not mayonnaise] for spread, filling of turkey, lettuce, and tomato).

Our culture has some abstract relationships that can't be expressed in a single word, or even in a common expression. Take for example the various types of games that involve two teams of people, each of which tries to control the movement of a round object into a space belonging to another team. Variations in the type of object, parts of body or implements used to move it, playing environments, rules, etc. yield specific games such as basketball, football, soccer, volleyball, field hockey, ice hockey, lacrosse, rugby, water-polo, tennis, and ping-pong. The abstract relationship that holds between all the players, objects, playing environments, and rules is so familiar that it is transparent to us. We don't even think about it, and we apply it effortlessly even when we encounter a new game we haven't seen before. Now, imagine that there are some people who live in a radically different culture, where there are no such sports. If you led them onto a lacrosse field and handed them some sticks and a ball, they would be utterly clueless. Without any extra help, it's extremely unlikely that these people would start playing anything remotely like lacrosse. The sticks might seem handy for gathering apples from some nearby trees, and maybe the ball could serve as the head of a child's doll or ritual effigy. Goodness knows what they would make of the goals.

Nobody ever explained to you the principle relationship behind lacrosse or all the other games that work the same way. They didn't have to. You saw plenty of examples all around you and internalized the principle without even thinking about it. In order to gain the kind of understanding you have for such games, newcomers who have never been exposed to such an idea will need an explanation, not just of the principle itself, but of how it functions in various actual games. The situation of a student learning Russian is very similar to the culture-shock of these outsiders. Until you get acculturated to the games Russians play with their cases, it is impossible for you to interpret and manipulate Russian sentences the way that Russians do. The objective is to make you into effective players of the case game. There are challenges to face, as in any game, but they are part of the sport, and the rewards of really mastering the language far outweigh the difficulties.

If a Russian asked you to explain the meaning of the English preposition *for*, you might be surprised and frustrated by the difficulty of this task. Even if you couldn't give your Russian friend a satisfactory answer, that wouldn't mean that *for* doesn't mean anything or that there are lots of different *fors* that are not related to each other in any systematic way. Intuitively you sense that *for* does mean something and that all uses of *for* relate to that meaning. The same goes for Russians and cases: they may not be able to tell you why all those different verbs take the dative case, but they have an intuitive sense that the dative case does mean something and the contexts in which the dative appears has to do with that meaning.

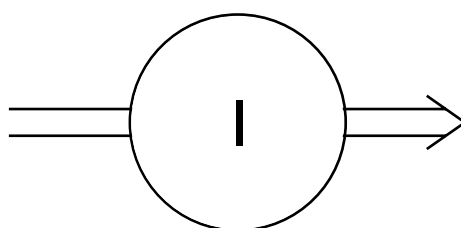
Every case has a coherent meaning.

PRELIMINARIES 2—How information is presented in this book

This book will present to you the basic meaning of each case, and it will also show you all the specific uses and how they relate to the basic meaning. To help you focus on the cases and their meanings, all examples are presented with both a word-by-word gloss and a smooth translation. The cases will be marked with abbreviated tags in the word-by-word gloss: NOM for nominative, INST for instrumental, ACC for accusative, DAT for dative, GEN for genitive, and LOC for locative (also known in some textbooks as “prepositional”). Each case will further be associated with two labels, one of which is a word and the other a diagram. For example, the instrumental will look like this:

The notation and presentation of case in this book.

INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS



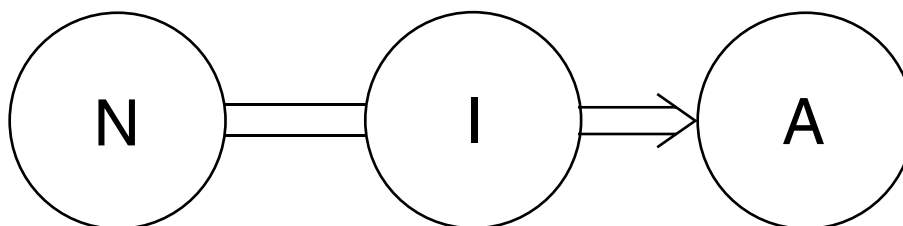
A force (arrow) passes through INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS (circle labeled I)

Both the word and the diagram are meant to suggest the basic meaning of the case, to give you a handle to grip your memory to. They are not definitions, nor do they imply that Russians have such labels or think in pictograms or anything of that sort. They are merely reference points for the process of working through the meanings. Both the word and the diagram focus only on the meaning of the case itself, which is usually embedded in a sentence that uses several cases. For example, a sentence like the following could be represented by a larger diagram in which INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS would be only a component:

Режисёр протёр очки *платкóм*.

[Director-NOM wiped glasses-ACC handkerchief-INST.]

The director wiped his glasses *with a handkerchief*.

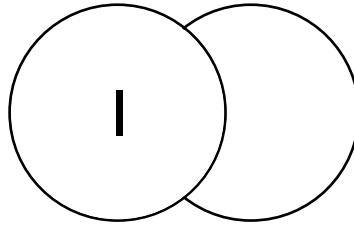


A force from a NOMINATIVE: A NAME (circle labeled N)
passes through an INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS (circle labeled I) and
arrives at an ACCUSATIVE: A DESTINATION (circle labeled A)

However, such diagrams would quickly become clumsy and distracting. We will focus on only one case at a time instead of diagramming entire sentences this way.

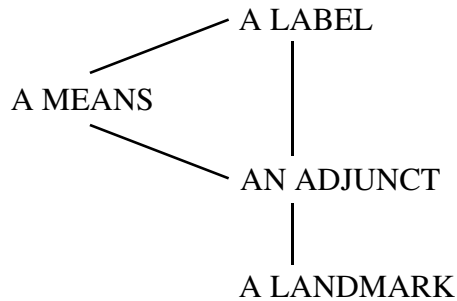
Most cases have submeanings related to the basic meaning:

INSTRUMENTAL: A LABEL



INSTRUMENTAL: A LABEL
(circle labeled I) is juxtaposed
with another item (other circle)

When there are submeanings, they will be arranged in a network to show how they are related like this:



INSTRUMENTAL Network

The object of this text is not to teach you the case endings for nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and numerals. Working through these materials will certainly reinforce your knowledge of what these paradigms look like, but there are many other books and materials for achieving that goal. Drilling the endings would distract you from concentrating on the meanings. However, if you want to review the case endings at any time, there are tables in the appendix giving complete declensions for your reference, and shortened tables specific to each given case are at the beginning of each chapter.

In addition to basic meanings and submeanings, metaphor plays an important role in case meaning. Case meaning takes as its point of departure the relationships that hold between physical objects placed or moving in space. These relationships can be metaphorically transferred to other domains such as time or social interaction, just as we see in English:

on in space: I already have dinner *on* the table.

on in time: I have a doctor's appointment *on* Monday.

toward in space: The troops are advancing *toward* the border.

toward in social interaction: That director is favorably inclined *toward* English actresses.

This book focuses on case meaning, not endings; tables of endings appear in every chapter and in the appendix.

Spatial relations and metaphor motivate case meaning.

In these examples, time and social interaction are treated as if they were physical spaces. For the most part, Russians use these metaphors in ways very similar to those familiar from English, though some uses might surprise you. Throughout the text mention is made of meanings that are extended to domains other than space. These metaphorical extensions, in conjunction with items specific to certain contexts, such as negation, numerals, certain verbs and prepositions, are responsible for the more specific meanings that you will find nested under the basic meanings and submeanings.

There are also relations that hold between the cases. It is not essential for you to memorize or appreciate these relations at this point, but since these relations motivate the order in which the cases are presented and to some extent the descriptions they are given, a brief overview is in order. This overview is purely for purposes of general orientation; the statements it makes are abstract and will probably make more sense to you after you have completed all the text and exercises.

	<i>no direction</i>	<i>direction</i>	<i>section</i>
<i>center</i>	NOMINATIVE: A NAME	ACCUSATIVE: A DESTINATION	GENITIVE: A SOURCE
<i>periphery</i>	INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS	DATIVE: A RECEIVER	LOCATIVE: A PLACE

The nominative basically names an item, and has no particular designation. The instrumental is relatively peripheral to the nominative, and names an item through which something happens; it is a mere conduit, envelope, or accompaniment for something else. Both the accusative and the dative signal direction; the accusative is the destination for some item or activity, and the dative, relatively more peripheral, is a receiver or experiencer of some item or activity, usually capable of producing some further action in response. The sectioning of a part from its source is expressed by the genitive; more abstractly such sectioning can involve background elements of the setting, expressed by the locative.

You will notice that the examples in both the text and exercises are very different from the examples you have seen in other textbooks. That is because these are not textbook examples; not a single one of them was cooked up for this book. Most of the examples in here have been taken from literature or periodicals printed in the past decade. Trying to learn Russian cases from traditional textbook examples is a little like trying to learn about the water cycle by studying the steam in your bathroom. It leads to the syndrome described at the beginning of this chapter, where you know all the words and endings, but still can't make sense of the sentence. Many people hit this plateau in their third year of study, but if you're a fast learner, you risk getting stuck there even sooner. Rather than being contrived and antiseptic, the examples in this book and exercises will expose you to the cases as they really are, raw and unadulterated. This means that the examples will be somewhat messier than the ones you are used to seeing. But hopefully this guided tour of case realia will help to make your transition from language study to language use a confident, seamless stride rather than a desperate leap into a void.

The relationships between cases.

The examples in this book are real, not concocted.