

Stand Corrected

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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Стоять: to stand

Lying on my couch with my dog sitting by my side, time seems to stand still as I continue to contemplate Russian stance verbs — *стоять* (to stand), *сидеть* (to sit) and *лежать* (to lie).

The good news is that some things stand and lie just like their English counterparts. That is, if you lean a painting against a wall, you could say in Russian: *Картина стоит у стены* (the painting is next to the wall). But if you lay the painting down on a table, you could say: *Картина лежит на столе* (the painting is lying on the table). Books placed flat on a desk *лежат* (lie), while books placed upright on a shelf *стоят* (stand).

But, of course, there's bad news.

Some categories of objects always "stand" in Russian. At the top of the list are containers. If an object is designed to hold something, it stands. So *ваза* (a vase), *тарелка* (plate), *шкатулка* (box), *миска* (bowl) and *таз* (basin) *стоят на столе* ("stand" on the table). It

doesn't matter if the plate is flat or the jewelry box is longer than it is high. If they are positioned to carry out their containing duties — стоят (they stand).

Perhaps because туфли (shoes), ботинки (low boots) and сапоги (high boots) hold feet, they also stand. Где ботинки? Они стоят в коридоре. (Where are your boots? They're in the hallway.)

Think of стоять as the default verb for these objects. When they are ready for action — standing upright, ready to hold something — они стоят (they stand). But if they are not ready for action — if they are lying on their side, upside down, broken or piled up willy-nilly — они лежат (they lie). Тарелка лежит на столе would mean that the plate is somehow oddly placed on the table.

In a mini focus group of native speakers, they interpreted тарелка лежит as lying upside down, broken, or all jumbled after a party. Сапоги лежат на полу would mean: The boots are tipped over and lying on the floor.

In boxes, things always seem to lie: Мои чёрные туфли лежат в коробке в гардеробе (My black shoes are in a box in the closet).

But objects on display usually stand. Статуэтка мышки стоит на буфете (The mouse figurine is standing on the sideboard).

In the animal kingdom, creatures can be divided into three categories. When small scurrying creatures with legs you barely see are immobile, they "sit." Large creatures with visible legs "stand." ❏ Лошадь стоит в поле. (A horse is standing in the field.) Рядом стоит корова (A cow is standing next to it). Dog and cats are in-between: They can stand, sit and lie — preferably on command, of course.

When time, weather conditions or water stop moving, they "stand" in Russian. This is easy for English speakers to remember, since when time isn't running out, it's standing still, and if the water doesn't run down your drain, you have a problem with standing water. В Москве стоит морозная погода (Moscow is having very cold weather). В подвале постоянно стоит вода (There's always standing water in my basement). Слёзы стояли у неё в глазах (Tears were in her eyes). Кажется, что время стоит на месте (It seems like time is standing still).

Or, in contrast, as you get older: Время бежит (Time is speeding by)!

Michele A. Berdy, a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, is author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (Glas), a collection of her columns.

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