

Getting Wet the Russian Way

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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Andrei Makhonin / Vedomosti

Мокрый: wet ☒☒

This is not one of Moscow's really wet summers — ☒the ones when your umbrella never really dries out and you live in☒your wellies — but we've had a good dose of spectacular☒thunderstorms and record-breaking downpours. That means that you☒probably got caught in the rain — and you didn't just get☒wet, you got drenched.

Because you are human, you will want to describe☒your wet misfortune as expressively as you can to your significant☒other. Here, Russian is weak on verbs, but rich in adverbial phrases.

The basic "I got drenched" verb pair is☒промокать / промокнуть (to become thoroughly wet).☒You use the first part of the pair (imperfective) when you're☒talking about the process. Он стал промокать (He began☒to get really wet.) Промокнуть (perfective) is the one you☒use when you're already sopping wet. Начался дождь,☒ветер, мы все промокли (The

rain began, the wind☒blew up, and we all got soaked.)

Now, that's not too satisfying, is it? You're☒not going to get tea and sympathy from “я промок.” Add an☒adverbial phrase, like *насквозь* (all the way through): *Дождь☒хлынул, и я промокла насквозь* (The clouds☒opened and I was drenched through and through). Or *до нитки*☒ (to every last thread): *Очень скоро мы промокли☒до нитки* (Very soon our clothes were sopping wet.) Or even☒deeper, *до костей* (down to your bones), although English☒doesn't let you go that far: *Он попал в грозу и☒промок до костей* (He got caught in a storm and was☒soaked to the skin.)

In Russian, your eyes can also get wet: *У отца☒промокли глаза, но лишь на мгновение*☒ (My father's eyes filled with tears, but for just an instant.) Or☒you can wet something intentionally: *Она промокала своё☒лицо влажной губкой* (She moistened her face with a☒damp sponge.)

The other way of getting wet in Russian is from☒the inside out: *потеть* (to sweat). You can use the same verb☒for getting soaked: *Было жарко, низкорослые☒болотные деревца тени давали немного,☒гимнастёрки промокли от пота* (It was hot,☒the low swampy trees didn't give much shade, and the soldiers'☒shirts were drenched with sweat.)

In English, when you are wet and bedraggled, you☒look like a drowned rat. In Russian, you are *мокрый, как☒мышь* (wet as a mouse). No one seems to have a good explanation☒for the origins of the wet mouse simile, unless you believe that mice☒sweat a lot while running on their wheel. In any case, the expression☒means being drenched in sweat either due to illness or hard work. *У☒неё держалась температура, и она лежала☒мокрая, как мышь* (She had a fever that wouldn't break☒and lay in bed, soaked with sweat.) *Он колот дрова,☒пришёл мокрый, как мышь* (He cut firewood and came☒home drenched in sweat.)

Sweating is often a metaphor for working hard: *Они☒заставляли президентскую команду☒попотеть* (They really made the president's team sweat and☒toil.) *Работать до седьмого пота* (work until☒the seventh sweat) is an odd expression in which the number seven☒really just means “a lot”: *Одни спину гнут, работают☒до седьмого пота, а другие, выходит,☒живут за их счёт* (Some do back-breaking labor, work☒until they are covered in sweat, while others, it turns out, live off☒them.)

Ain't that the truth. Wet rodents of the world —☒unite!

Michele☒A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of☒“The Russian Word's Worth,” a collection of her columns.

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