

The With, By, From, Per, About Preposition

The Word's Worth

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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Девочка с персиками **Valentin Serov**

С цветами: with flowers

The great thing about writing or speaking a foreign language as an adult is that you have many opportunities over the course of the day to behave like a seven-year-old. Recently I translated our newspaper's book permission language into Russian and asked a Russian colleague to check it. Всё хорошо (It's all fine) was the reply. Cut to me doing the "Yes!" fist pump.

Ah, but I jumped the gun. Soon I got a follow-up message: Упс! (Oops! — yes, really, Russians say Упс!) There was a small correction. Cut to me, pouting and kicking the desk.

My only consolation was that the mistake was easy to make — it's a case where English and Russian grammar are almost but not quite the same. Printed with permission is not печатается с разрешением (с + instrumental case) but печатается с разрешения (с + genitive case).

This seems like a good opportunity to crack open my favorite old grammar book for a little refresher course in the preposition с.

But first, before we get to the good stuff, a small preface: when do you use с and when do you use со? Here the rule is quite simple: you use со before any word that begins with the letters в, л, р, м, с, з, ш, and ж followed by a consonant, and always with the letter щ. So, you say с советником (with an advisor), but со вторника (from Tuesday); со льдом (with ice); со ртом (with one's mouth); со славой (with honor); со звездой (with a star); со шлаком (with dross); со жратвой (with grub), and always: со щами (with shchi). If you can't remember, try pronouncing it — if it's either hard to say or hard to hear the с, then pop in the о.

Now then, back to those pesky prepositions.

The problem for us non-native speakers of Russian is that prepositions have many meanings and are used with different cases. That's just not going to change, even we like to dream about a world in which each preposition has just one meaning and is used with just one case.

Размечтался (Dream on, buddy!)

In reality, the preposition с is used with three cases — instrumental, genitive and accusative — and has more meanings than any one little letter ought to have.

The instrumental usage is the easiest, although not without some curious moments. It is used to mean with something/someone or in possession of something. Мы с мужем пошли с друзьями в кино (My husband and I — literally “we with my husband” — went to the movies with friends.) Or it can be used to mean fighting with/against someone or something. And before you squawk, we have the same usage in English: I fought with my conscience (Я боролся со своей совестью). Множество книг написано о том, как бороться со злом (Many books have been written about how to fight against evil).

The next usage is easy to remember because you hear it and use it a lot — congratulations. In Russian you congratulate someone with something: С днём рождения! (Happy birthday!) Поздравляю вас с новым назначением! (Congratulations on your new job!)

С + instrumental is also used to express the manner in which something is done. Я читала книгу с большим интересом! (The book was really interesting, literally “I read the book with great interest”).

And then there are two less used and less intuitive instrumental usages. You might try to remember the first as the “simultaneously with something” usage: Он встаёт с восходом солнца (He gets up at dawn, literally “with the rise of the sun”). And the second differs from English usage and, therefore, is harder to remember. С + instrumental is also used to describe the contents of something. So, you would say У моей соседки целая полка, где стоят банки с вареньем (My neighbor has a whole shelf with jars of jam). You can say банки варенья, but

that seems to describe the jars — “jam jars” rather than “jars filled with jam.”

Ain't language fun?

Next up: accusative case. There are just two instances when you use *с* + the accusative, and they are related. The first is to describe approximate size. How big was that spider? *С кулак!* (The size of my fist!) *Град с куриное яйцо выпал в Москве!* (Hail the size of chicken eggs fell in Moscow.) *Он пробил в стене отверстие размером с голову* (He punched a hole the size of a head in the wall).

The other instance is not very common, but good to know – you can use *с* + accusative to describe an approximate time period. *Он жил на даче с месяц* (He lived at the dacha for about a month.) Today, however, you are more likely to hear and use *около месяца* (about a month).

And finally, *с* + genitive case, where I falter. The problem is that I can't find one uniting concept to remember it all by.

The only thing I can think of is the notion of “from.” When speaking about places — everything from a table to a planet — if you use *в* to express going to, you use *из* to express coming from; if you use *на* for going to, you use *с* for going from. *В-ИЗ, НА-С*. Simple — well, as long as you get the first “going to” preposition right. And since *Я положила книгу на стол* (I put the book on the table), then: *Книга упала со стола* (The book fell off the table.)

С + genitive is also used to express “from” in time expressions, answering the question *с какого времени?* (Since when?) *Магазин работает с десяти.* (The store is open from 10 a.m.) *Уроки начнутся с осени* (Classes will start up in the fall).

And you can express translation “from” a language with *с* + genitive: *Я перевела эту книгу с русского на английский* (I translated the book from Russian into English.) Or from one unit of time to another: like *с минуты на минуту* (at any moment, from one minute to the next), *со дня на день* (any day now, from one day to another).

This is a stretch, but actions done figuratively “out of” — that is, “from” — some emotion, also use *с* + genitive. *Он рыдал с горя.* (He wept out of sorrow.) *Моя мама говорила со злости* (My mother spoke out of anger). *Ни с того, ни с сего он уехал* (He just up and left for no reason, literally “not out of this or that”).

And then there's my downfall. *С* + genitive is used to express doing something with a permission, approval or consent. *С разрешения* (with permission); *с позволения* (with consent); *с согласия* (with agreement); *с одобрения* (with approval). *С разрешения Ленина его племянник уехал* (His nephew had permission from Lenin to leave).

You might try to cement this usage by memorizing a nice, sometimes snarky set phrase: *с позволения сказать* (if one might say, so-called, would-be). *В этом, с позволения сказать, фильме показывают реалии* (In this film, if you could call it that, they show reality).

So that's it: the preposition *с* in all its forms, incarnations, meanings, and idioms.

Now that I've done my homework, can I go out to play now?

То есть, выпить можно? (I mean, can I have a drink?)

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