

Grammar 16—Который

Suppose you wanted to talk about someone, but either you do not know his name, or it would mean nothing to your listeners. In such a case you might say something about him which would help them to understand who he is. For example:

I am looking for the man who stole my car.

The underlined portion explains the word “man”. If we were to delete that part, the meaning of “man” would be less clear, but the sentence would still be grammatically complete:

I am looking for the man.

And the underlined portion is a complete sentence too:

Who stole my car. (In other words, “He stole my car.”)

Because in the combined sentence “who” comes right after “man” it is understood that they refer to the same person. We can use this same construction in Russian, only instead of the Russian word for “who” we use the special pronoun “который”:

Я ищу человека который украл мою машину.

The pronoun “который” always refers to the same thing as the noun which comes before it. Though *который* is a pronoun, it is declined as if it were an adjective.

| Case | Masculine | Neuter | Feminine | Plural |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Nominative | ко <u>то</u> рый | ко <u>то</u> рое | ко <u>то</u> рая | ко <u>то</u> рые |
| Accusative | ко <u>то</u> рый | ко <u>то</u> рое | ко <u>то</u> рую | ко <u>то</u> рые |
| Animate Acc. | ко <u>то</u> рого | ко <u>то</u> рого | ко <u>то</u> рую | ко <u>то</u> рых |
| Genitive | ко <u>то</u> рого | ко <u>то</u> рого | ко <u>то</u> рой | ко <u>то</u> рых |
| Prepositional | ко <u>то</u> ром | ко <u>то</u> ром | ко <u>то</u> рой | ко <u>то</u> рых |
| Dative | ко <u>то</u> рому | ко <u>то</u> рому | ко <u>то</u> рой | ко <u>то</u> рым |
| Instrumental | ко <u>то</u> рым | ко <u>то</u> рым | ко <u>то</u> рой/ко <u>то</u> рою | ко <u>то</u> рыми |

How to Use Который Correctly

Here are the steps for building a correct and understandable sentence using *который*.

1) Note the gender and number (but not the case) of the noun which requires explanation:

Я ищу человека.

I am looking for the man.

In this case the gender is masculine and the number is singular.

2) Find the noun in the second sentence which refers to the same person or thing and move it to the front if it is not there already:

Я сфотографировал его вчера. becomes Его я сфотографировал вчера.

I photographed him yesterday. Him I photographed yesterday.

3) Replace the noun at the front with the proper form of “который”. Use the gender and number which you noted in step one, but use the case of the word it replaces. Here that case is animate accusative:

Его я сфотографировал вчера. becomes Которого я сфотографировал вчера.

Him I photographed yesterday. Whom I photographed yesterday.

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4) Insert (or in this case simply append) the explanatory sentence:

Я ищу человека, которого я сфотографировал вчера.

I am looking for the man whom I photographed yesterday.

Examples

In these examples the explanatory part is underlined.

Я вижу книгу, которая упала.

Я помогу человеку, который упал.

Упал человек, которому вы помогли.

Выброси коробку, в которой болты пришли.

Отправляй письма, которые лежат на столе.

Найдите даму, с которой Вы пришли.

Я не понимаю людей, которые не любят борщ.

Нужен нам человек, который помог бы нам.

Дождь, который выпал вчера замёрз.

I see the book which fell.

I will help the person who fell.

The man fell whom you helped.

Throw away the box in which the bolts came.

Send the letters which lie on the table.

Find the lady with whom you came.

I don't understand people who don't like borsch.

We need a man who would help us.

The rain which fell yesterday froze.

Other Uses

Который can sometimes also be used as a question word, but that is beyond the scope of this article.