

Grammar 11—Asking Questions

There are two kinds of questions. Some questions seek missing information such as “Which road leads to Hartford?” Others ask for confirmation of what is already believed such as “Is this the road to Hartford?” Both kinds of questions are modified versions of the statements used to answer them:

Who has the pencil? John has the pencil.
Is this the road to Hartford? This is the road to Hartford.

To make questions we need to do two things: 1) somehow indicate that the sentence is a question, not a statement, and 2) mark the word or idea which is in doubt.

By Using a Question Word to Represent Missing Information

Both goals can be accomplished by replacing a noun or adverb with a question word such as “who”, “what”, or “when” to replace the information sought. Here are some common Russian question words:

кто	who
что	what
где	where
когда	when
почему	why



The question word should be pronounced with extra emphasis. Some examples:

<u>Who</u> painted the house?	<u>John</u> painted the house.
<u>Кто</u> покрасил дом?	<u>Иван</u> покрасил дом.
<u>Who</u> has the pencil?	<u>John</u> has the pencil.
У <u>кого</u> карандаш?	Карандаш у <u>Ивана</u> .

Notice that the question word must be declined into the proper case. Also notice that in the second example the word order in the answer has been changed to put the new information at the end.

By Using Question Intonation

If we think we know the answer to our own question, we can use the exact wording of the statement changing only the intonation:

<u>John</u> painted the house?	Yes, John painted the house.
<u>Иван</u> покрасил дом?	Да, Иван покрасил дом.
<u>John</u> has the pencil?	Yes, John has the pencil.
У <u>Ивана</u> карандаш?	Да, карандаш у Ивана.

In these examples the part in doubt is underlined. It should be pronounced with a rising inflection.

By Using a Marker Word to Indicate the Point of Doubt

In writing instead of inflection the word “ли” is sometimes inserted immediately after the part in doubt:

У Ивана ли карандаш? Да, карандаш у Ивана.

In speech may use “ли” (along with the proper inflection) when more emphasis or formality is required.

Polite Wording

The most respectful way to make a request is to ask whether the person will not do the thing desired:

Не подёт ли вы с мной в магазин?
Will you not go to the store with me?