

Usage 5—Translating the Word “Ask”

Three different senses of “to ask” are expressed by three different Russian verbs:

Verb	Meaning	English Example	Russian Translation of Example
задать	To present	Ask the question.	Задай вопрос.
спросить	To question someone	Ask him what time it is.	Спроси его сколько сейчас времени.
попросить	To request a service	Ask him to give us a lift.	Попроси чтобы он нас подвёз.

Note the distinction between a request for a service (попросить) and a request for information only (спросить).

It is a common error of learners to say “спросить вопрос” in the mistaken belief that this means “to ask a question”. It actually means “to question a question” which is absurd and confusing. Instead you should say “задать вопрос” (to pose a question).