

The Serbian Genitive Case: Endings and Usage

The genitive case endings for the three possible classes of nouns are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The genitive case of Serbian nouns

	Class I (masculine: ending in a consonant in nominative) 'window'	Class I (neuter: ending in -o or -e in nominative) 'village'	Class II (feminine: ending in -a in nominative) 'woman'	Class III (feminine: ending in a consonant in nominative) 'love'
SINGULAR				
Genitive	prozor- a Jovan- a (John's)	sel- a	žen- e	ljubav- i
PLURAL	'windows'	'villages'	'women'	'loves'
Genitive	prozor- a	sel- a	žen- a	ljubav- i

Notes on phonology and pronunciation of genitives

- The genitive case and the [accusative case for the masculine animate nouns](#) (ex. Jovan, dečak 'boy', pas 'dog') have the same ending: **-a**.
- Class I and Class III nouns have the same endings in singular and plural: **-a** for Class I nouns and **-i** for Class III nouns. Easy? Yes, but...
- The respective genitive endings **-a** and **-i** are pronounced long, as well as the vowel that precedes it. This can dramatically change the pronunciation.
- Also, if a plural noun in the nominative (default) case ends in a consonant cluster for any declension class, a long **-a** may (but not always!) be inserted in the **stem** before the **-a** ending. For example:

nominative plural: student**ti** 'students' devo**jke** 'girls'
genitive plural: studen**ata** 'of students' devo**jaka** 'of girls'

- **Some Class II nouns that end in a consonant cluster** get the **-i** ending in genitive plural instead of the regular **-a** ending. Here is an example:

nominative plural: bor**be** 'fights' prime**dba** 'remarks'
genitive plural: bor**bi** 'of fights' prime**dbi** 'of remarks'

- And **some Class II and Class III nouns end the genitive plural in **-u** or **-iju**, respectively**. These types of nouns generally denote something that comes in **pairs** or **denote body parts**. Some examples:

	Class II nouns	Class III nouns
nominative plural:	ruke 'hands' noge 'legs'	oči 'eyes' uši 'ears' kosti 'bones' prsti 'fingers'
genitive plural:	ruk u 'of hands' nog u 'of legs'	oč iju 'of eyes' uš iju 'of ears' kost iju 'of bones' prst iju 'of fingers'

When to use the genitive case in sentences?

The genitive case is used with many 'se' or reflexive verbs that denote some psychological state. For example: fear (plašiti se), happiness (radovati se), remembrance

(sećati se), **bodily** or **psychological satisfaction** (najesti se 'eat until full', napiti se 'booze, get drunk', naigrati se 'play, dance enough'). Here is a list of the most frequently used 'se' verbs.

Table 2: A list of se verbs that take an object in genitive case

bojati se 'fear, afraid'	napiti se 'binge, booze, get drunk'
čuvati se 'beware, keep out'	prihvatiti se 'to take a part, accept readily'
dočepati se 'seize, grasp'	plašiti se 'fear, afraid'
kloniti se 'avoid'	osloboditi se 'free, get rid'
lišiti se 'deprive, get rid'	sećati se 'remember'*
najesti se 'overeat'	setiti se 'remember'*
prejesti se 'eat until full'	stideti se 'ashame'

* The only difference between the two verbs that both mean 'to remember' is that **sećati se** is an [imperfective verb](#) and **setiti se** is a [perfective verb](#).

Table 3: Some examples of genitive nouns as objects of se verbs

	Serbian	English
1.	Marija se plaši grmljavine .	Marija is afraid of <u>thundering</u> .
2.	Čuvaj se psa .	Beware of the <u>dog</u> .
3.	On se lišio svog nasledstva .	He rid himself of <u>his inheritance</u> .
4.	Zorica se najela voća .	Zorica ate (enough) <u>fruit</u> .
5.	Dete se napilo mleka .	The child drank a lot of <u>milk</u> .
6.	Jovan se prihvatio tog posla .	Jovan accepted <u>that job</u> .
7.	Danko se oslobodio tereta .	Danko freed himself of the <u>burden</u> .
8.	Ona se sećala svog detinjstva .	She remembered <u>her childhood</u> .
9.	Marko se stideo svog oca .	Marko was ashamed of <u>his father</u> .

The most common usage of genitive case is to denote possession (like the English prepositions 'of' and 's').

Table 4: Some examples of genitive nouns denoting possession

	Serbian	English
1.	Ovo je slika moje majke .	This is a picture <u>of my mother</u> .
2.	Slike Beograda su lepe.	The pictures <u>of Belgrade</u> are pretty.
3.	Imam puno knjiga .	I have lots <u>of books</u> .
4.	Imam pet sestara .	I have five <u>sisters</u> .
5.	Imam novca .	I have <u>money</u> .
6.	Nemam novca .	I don't have <u>money</u> .
7.	On nema milosti .	He has no <u>mercy</u> .
8.	Nema šećera .	There is no <u>sugar</u> .

Examples 1 and 2 illustrate that the genitive case occurs as the object of a noun, just as in English (e.g., 'a student's book'). In addition to the genitive, in Serbian we use the [possessive adjective](#) to denote possession: Majčina slika 'mother's picture'. As you can see, the possessive **majčina** corresponds to the Saxon genitive in English, 'mother's'.

Examples 3 and 4 show that the genitive case occurs after [quantity words](#), such as: **puno** 'a lot' and **pet** 'five'.

Examples 5-8 show that the genitive case occurs with the verb **imati** 'to have'. Such genitives nouns are indefinite or unspecified.

The genitive case is also used as an object of [many prepositions](#)

- The following prepositions require only the genitive case: **blizu** 'near', **duž** 'alongside', **iznad** 'above', **ispod** 'below', **ispred** 'in front of', **iza** 'behind', **između** 'between', **kod** 'at', **mimo**, 'past by', **nasred** 'in the middle of', **oko** 'around', **pored** 'beside, by', **pokraj** 'by, beside, next to', **preko** 'across, via', **put** 'toward'. **These genitives denote a place, destination or time.** Some examples in Table 4 illustrate this. Note that the genitive noun with the preposition **kod** means 'at somebody's place'.
- With the prepositions **od** 'from' and **do** 'until, to', the genitive denotes the initial and final point of location or time, respectively (examples 10 and 11).
- With the preposition **u** 'in, at', the **genitive denotes possession.** This usage is used in poetry, not so much in everyday language (example 17 below).
- With the prepositions **iz** 'from' and **sa** 'from, off, at', the **genitive denotes a separation, detachment, or origination** (examples 18 and 19). Note that the preposition **sa** also takes the instrumental case, but the instrumental case denotes the act of accompanying someone or something, or a means of doing something.

Table 5: Some examples of the genitive case as the object of prepositions

	Serbian	English
1.	Moja knjiga je blizu stolice.	My book is near <u>the chair.</u>
2.	Deca su se igrala duž ulice.	The children played along <u>the street.</u>
3.	Šerpa je iznad sudopere.	The pot is above <u>the sink.</u>
4.	Mačka je ispod stola.	The cat is under <u>the table.</u>
5.	Marija sedi između mame i tate.	Marija is sitting between <u>(her) mother and father.</u>
6.	Nalazim se kod frizira.	I am (located) at <u>the hairdresser's.</u>
7.	Idem kod Marije.	I am going to <u>Marija's (house).</u>
8.	Mirko je prošao mimo naše kuće.	Mirko passed by <u>our house.</u>
9.	Vuk je bacio ranac nasred sobe.	Vuk threw the backpack in the middle of <u>the room.</u>
10.	Jelena je putovala od Niša do Beograda.	Jelena traveled from Niš to <u>Belgrade.</u>
11.	Čekali smo je od jutra do mraka.	We've waited for her from the morning till <u>dark.</u>
12.	Deca skakuću oko drveta.	The children are jumping around <u>the tree.</u>
13.	To se desilo oko Nove godine.	This happened around <u>the New Year.</u>
14.	On stoji pored puta.	He stands by <u>the road.</u>
15.	Dečak je brzo prešao preko ulice.	The boy quickly walked across <u>the street.</u>
16.	Krenuli su put Beograda.	They headed toward <u>Belgrade.</u>
17.	Marija je jedinica u majke.	Maria is the only daughter of (her) <u>mother.</u>
18.	Zorica je izvadila sliku iz fioke.	Zorica pulled a picture <u>from the drawer.</u>
19.	Jovan je uzeo knjigu sa police.	Jovan took the book <u>from the shelf.</u>

To ask questions about the genitive case, we use the following **interrogative pronouns in the genitive case**: **Koga** 'Of whom, whose' **Čega** 'of what'

Table 6: Some examples of questions that ask about the genitive object

Serbian	English
Question: Koga se plašiš? Answer: Plašim se pijanih vozača .	<u>Whom</u> do you fear? I fear drunk drivers.
Question: Čiju si sliku videla? Answer: Videla sam sliku ovog profesora .	<u>Whose</u> picture did you see? I saw a picture of <u>this professor</u> .
Question: Čega se stidiš? Answer: Stidim se svojih laži .	<u>What</u> are you ashamed <u>of</u> ? I am ashamed of <u>my lies</u> .
Question: Oko čega se deca igraju? Answer: Deca se igraju oko drveta .	<u>Around what</u> are the children playing? The children are playing <u>around the tree</u> .
Question: Blizu koga stoji Milan? Answer: Milan stoji blizu Jelene ?	<u>Near whom</u> is Milan standing? Milan is standing near <u>Jelena</u> .

And now some exercises! If you get stuck or are not sure you got it right, please [email](#) me for help.

Exercise 1 – Fill out the genitive case forms in sentences below

Using the nouns below (given in nominative, or dictionary form), please insert the appropriate genitive forms in the following sentences. For convenience, I have indicated which noun goes with which sentence.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. zemljotres 'earthquake' | 4. mrak 'darkness' | 7. zgrada 'building' |
| 2. drug 'male friend, comrade' | 5. dvorište 'courtyard' | 8. televizor 'tv' |
| 3. obaveza 'duty' | 6. orman 'wardrobe, dresser' | 9. ponoć 'midnight' |

1. Bojim se _____.	I'm afraid of <u>earthquakes</u> .
2. Milan se setio _____.	Milan remembered (his) <u>friend</u> .
3. Marija se oslobodila _____.	Marija is free from any <u>duties</u> .
4. Devojčica se plaši _____.	The girl is afraid of <u>darkness</u> .
5. Deca se igraju oko _____.	The children are playing around <u>the playground</u> .
6. Danko je izbacio staru odeću iz _____.	Danko threw away old clothes from <u>the dresser</u> .
7. Lopta je pala iza _____.	The ball fell behind <u>the building</u> .
8. Zorica stalno sedi pored _____.	Zorica always sits by <u>the television</u> .
9. Marija se vratila oko _____.	Marija returned around <u>midnight</u> .

Exercise 2 – Translate the following sentences

For this exercise you need to know both the [present tense](#) and [past tense](#). **The boldface nouns require the genitive case.** If you don't have a bi-directional Serbian-English-Serbian dictionary, you may go to the website: <http://www.krstarica.com/dictionary/> to get the words you need for this exercise. Note that for nouns, a dictionary will only give you the nominative case forms.

1.	Today, I remembered Marija .
2.	Branko got rid of an old telephone .
3.	Beware of snakes .
4.	She was traveling from Paris to Texas .
5.	She lives near the airport .
6.	She dropped her umbrella in the middle of the road .
7.	Whom did Maria fear?
8.	What was Zorica afraid of?