

The Serbian Instrumental Case: Endings and Usage

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

Table 1: The instrumental 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				
Instrumental	prozor- om	sel- om	žen- om	ljubav- i (or- ju)*
PLURAL	'windows'	'villages'	"women"	'loves'
Instrumental	prozor- ima	sel- ima	žen- ama	ljubav- ima

*With Class III singular nouns, the **-i** ending generally occurs when the noun is modified: *sa jednom ljubavi* 'with one love', while the **-ju** ending occurs with unmodified nouns: *sa ljubavi* 'with love' (see **Table 8** below for declination of this Class of nouns).

Please note that the instrumental case endings **in plural**, are the same as the plural [dative](#) and [locative case endings](#). So, you can memorize the endings for one case and you'll automatically know the ending for two more cases!

When to use the instrumental case in sentences?

As the name suggests, the instrumental case is used to show an instrument or means with which an action denoted by the verb is performed. The following verbs take the instrumental case as their objects.

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

Transitive verbs	'se' verbs
'častiti' 'treat'	baviti se 'pursue, deal, work'
drmati 'shake'	hvaliti se 'brag'
mahati 'wave, flutter'	koristiti se 'use'
kolutati 'roll'	odlikovati se 'distinguish'
lutati 'wander'	oduševiti se 'to impress, delight'
'nuditi' 'offer'	pokriti se 'cover oneself'
raspolagati 'despose'	poslužiti se 'help oneself'
rukovati 'handle'	
snabdeti 'provide, equip'	
škripati 'grind, squeak'	
upravljati 'manage'	
vladati 'use, conduct'	

Table 3: Some examples of instrumental nouns as objects of verbs

	Serbian	English
1.	Marija je častila Zorana pićem .	Marija treated Zoran to a <u>drink</u> .
2.	Jovan je mahao rukom .	John waved (with) his <u>hand</u> .
3.	On je kolutao očima .	He rolled (his <u>eyes</u>).
4.	Zorica škripi zubima noću.	Zorica grinds her teeth at <u>night</u> .
5.	Direktor upravlja dobro preduzećem .	The director manages his <u>company</u> well.
6.	Ona dobro vlada engleskim .	She uses her <u>English</u> well.
7.	Danko se hvali svojim kolima .	Danko brags about his <u>car</u> .
8.	Ona se poslužila kolačima .	She helped herself to the <u>cakes</u> .
9.	Marko se pokrio ćebetom .	Marko covered himself with a <u>blanket</u> .

The instrumental case also appears with many other (not necessarily transitive) verbs to express the idea 'by means of' (examples 1-4). Also, the instrumental case occurs in certain time expressions (examples 5-6).

Table 4: Some examples of instrumental nouns with other verbs

	Serbian	English
1.	Oni su putovali avionom .	They traveled by <u>plane</u> .
2.	Ona je došla vozom .	She came by <u>train</u> .
3.	Marija šeta glavnom ulicom .	Maria is strolling down the <u>main street</u> .
4.	Milan je ubijen nožem .	Milan was killed by a <u>knife</u> .
5.	Marija hoda satima .	Maria walks for <u>hours</u> .
6.	Ona je čekala Jovana danima .	She spent days waiting for <u>Jovan</u> .

The instrumental case is also used as an object of some prepositions

- The most frequent preposition that requires instrumental case is **s(a)** 'with'. The basic meaning is 'with, accompanying.' Note that the format **s(a)** is a shorthand for two possibilities: **sa** or **s**.

The full form **sa** is used when the word that follows begins with a similar sounding consonant: **s, š, z, ž, č, dž** (e.g., sa Suzanom 'with Susan', sa Zvonkom 'with Zvonko', sa životom 'with life').

The short form **s** is used in all other contexts, including when the word that follows begins with a vowel (e.g., s Anom 'with Anna'), although sometimes people use the full **sa** form here as well.

Note that the preposition '**sa**' also occurs with the genitive case, but has quite different meaning then.

Table 5: Some examples of the instrumental case as the object of preposition *sa*

	Serbian	English
1.	Ona se posvađala s profesorom.	She quarreled <u>with her professor.</u>
2.	Ona se ne slaže s tom politikom.	She doesn't agree <u>with those politics.</u>
3.	Director je razgovarao s radnicima.	The director talked <u>with the workers.</u>
4.	Ona je putovala sa drugaricom.	She traveled <u>with her girlfriend.</u>
5.	On nije zadovoljan s novim kolima.**	He is not satisfied <u>with his new car.</u>
6.	On nije zadovoljan s tobom.**	He is not satisfied <u>with you.</u>
7.	On nije zadovoljan svojim uspehom.**	He is not satisfied <u>with his success.</u>

Note that in examples 5-7, the adjective **zadovoljan can take the instrumental noun with (ex. 5, 6) or without (ex. 7) the preposition **s(a)**. There is a tendency not to use the preposition **s(a)** when the noun denotes an abstract object, as in example 7 above. Also, there is a tendency to use the preposition **s(a)** when the instrumental noun denotes a human being, as in example 6. This is just a tendency, not a strict rule.

- Another preposition that requires the instrumental case is the preposition **za** 'behind, at, after, during'. With this preposition, the instrumental carries various meanings: a) a place that is **behind** or around something (examples 1-2); b) to show that the object in instrumental case is in front of the subject of the sentence (example 3); c) time duration (example 4).
Note that the preposition **za** also occurs with the [accusative](#) and [genitive](#) cases, but has different meaning then.

Table 6: Some examples of the instrumental noun as the object of preposition *za*

	Serbian	English
4.	Devojčica stoji za uglom.	The girl is standing <u>behind the corner.</u>
5.	Cela porodica sedi za stolom.	The whole family is sitting <u>at the table.</u>
6.	Dečak trči za loptom.	The boy is running <u>after the ball.</u>
7.	Za ručkom niko ne govori.	<u>During lunch,</u> nobody talks.

- The following prepositions also take the instrumental case: **među** 'among', **nad** 'above, over', **pod** 'under', **pred** 'in front of'. When used with these prepositions, the instrumental case indicates the **location of the action or state expressed by the verb**. Some examples are shown in Table 6 below.

Note that these prepositions also occur with the [accusative case](#), but have different meaning then (**show a destination or goal of the movement or action expressed by a verb**)

For a more comprehensive list of prepositions, see the file [Serbian prepositions and their cases](#).

Table 7: Some examples of the instrumental noun as the object of prepositions

	Serbian	English
1.		
2.	Devojčica sedi među dečacima.	The girl is sitting <u>among the boys.</u>
3.	Kiša se sručila nad gradom.	The rain poured <u>over the city.</u>
4.	Mirko spava pod drvetom.	Mirko is sleeping <u>under the tree.</u>
5.	Dragan čekao pred kućom.	Dragan waited <u>in front of the house.</u>

To ask questions about the instrumental case, we use the following **interrogative pronouns in the instrumental case**.

Sa kime 'with whom' **Sa čime** 'with what'

Note that the preposition **sa** sometimes is not necessary, depending on the verb. The vowel 'e' in 'kime' and 'čime' is also optional.

Table 8: Some examples of questions that ask about the instrumental object

Serbian	English
Question: Sa kime si šetala? Answer: Šetala sam s Marijom .	<u>With whom</u> did you walk? I walked <u>with Maria</u> .
Question: Čime si putovala? Answer: Putovala sam vozom .	<u>With what</u> did you travel (=How did you travel)? I traveled <u>by train</u> .
Question: Sa čime si zadovoljan? Answer: Zadovoljan sam s novom kućom .	<u>With what</u> are you satisfied? I'm satisfied <u>with the new house</u> .

The instrumental ending **-i** and **-ju** for Class III nouns

As mentioned in a footnote for Table 1, Class III singular nouns have two endings: **-i** or **-ju**. The **-i** ending generally occurs when the noun is modified, as in: *sa jednom ljubavi* 'with one love', while **-ju** ending occurs with unmodified nouns, as in: *sa ljubavi* 'with love'. The table below shows the **-ju** ending for various nouns belonging to Class III. Note that the sound **-j** (pronounced 'y') undergoes some phonological changes due to a general phonological rule of [consonant 'softening' or palatalization](#). Don't panic! It'll make sense with practice.

Table 9: The instrumental, singular ending '-ju' for Class III nouns

1.	glad + ju = gladju 'hanger'	5.	kćer + ju = kćerju 'daughter'
2.	jesen + ju = jesenju 'autumn' (here.	6.	pomoć + ju = pomoću 'help' žeđ + ju = žeđu 'thirst'
3.	ljubav + ju = ljubavju 'love' krv + ju = krvju 'blood'	7.	sol + ju = solju 'salt'
4.	bolest + ju = bolešću 'illness' mladost + ju = mladošću 'youth'	8.	stvar + ju = stvarju 'thing'

Explanations of sound changes (for details see [Phonological rules](#))

In 1. **d + j = đ** by a general rule of palatalization or consonant softening.

In 2. nothing happens in writing, but in pronunciation, the sound **nj** is a single sound, pronounced as **n** in the Spanish word **pinata**.

In 3. we have this rule: **v+j=vlj**.

In 4. we have two phonological rules: **t+j = ć** to get: **bolesću**. Then, we have a phonological rule of **place assimilation**, where **s** before the palatal sound **ć**, becomes a palatal sound **š**. Or to put it in terms of a mathematical formula: **s+ć = šć**. Don't panic! These are general phonological rules that happen across the entire language, and you'll eventually learn them by practicing.

In 6. we have two deletion rules: **ć+j=ć** and **đ+j=đ**.

In 7. nothing happens in writing, but in pronunciation, the sound **lj** is a single palatal sound, pronounced **lj**.

In 8, nothing happens.

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

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

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

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Zorica (female name) | 4. dani 'days' | 7. voz 'train' |
| 2. sport 'sport', godina 'year' | 5. majka 'mother' | 8. prodavnica 'store' |
| 3. muzika 'music' | 6. računar 'computer' | 9. krevet 'bed' |
| | | 10. zmaj 'kite' |

1. Razgovaram <u>sa</u> _____	I'm talking to <u>Zorica</u> .
2. Milan se bavi _____	Milan has been doing <u>sports for years</u> .
3. Marija se ne bavi _____	Marija is not doing <u>music</u> .
4. Ona je čekala _____	She was waiting for <u>days</u> .
5. Idem sa _____ na pijacu.	I'm going with my <u>mother</u> to the market.
6. Danko sedi za _____	Danko is sitting at the <u>computer</u> .
7. Milan putuje _____ do mora.	Milan is traveling by <u>train</u> to the seacoast.
8. Zorica čeka Milana pred _____	Zorica is waiting for Milan in front of the <u>store</u> .
9. Marija se krije pod _____	Marija is hiding under the <u>bed</u> .
10. Devojčica trči za _____	The girls is running after <u>the kite</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 instrumental 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'm walking with Jovan .
2.	They are traveling by boat .
3.	Zorica cut the meat with a knife .
4.	She is managing the company .
5.	Sanja is doing skiing .
6.	They waited in front of the post-office .
7.	Mary is standing in front of the doorway .
8.	He is sleeping under the bush .