

# Actually, This Is Exactly the Way to Say It

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*Как раз: just right, just now, exactly, actually*

Let's see what the digital mailman has just delivered in my weekly mailbag of reader's questions. Misha in Ukhta asks: "Is it true that Americans don't speak English?" It's definitely true in Brooklyn.

Susan writes from Dallas: "Can you help me understand my 15-year-old stepson from Moscow?" No, I don't speak teenager.

And here's one from "VVP": "What's your problem with stability?"

Ha ha. Very funny, guys.

Oh, here's a good one from a reader after my own heart: "Can you explain the meaning of как раз?" Yes!

But before we get to как раз, we should take a look at раз, a little word that packs a lot of

meaning.

First of all, it's first. That is, it is the word you use for "one" when counting. Раз, два, три (one, two, three).

Then раз is a kind of generic unit of something, rendered in English as "time." Сколько раз я тебе говорила! (How many times do I have to tell you!) В другой раз встретимся (We'll get together another time). На новой работе он зарабатывает в пять раз больше (He earns five times more at his new job).

In colloquial speech, раз is a bit of a chameleon. It can be used in place of если (if) or поскольку (since): Раз ты не придёшь, я лягу спать пораньше (If you're not coming over, I'll go to bed earlier). Раз это нужно, то мы сделаем (Since it's necessary, we'll do it).

Less commonly, раз can replace однажды (once): Раз я жил на даче до холодов (Once I stayed at the dacha until the cold weather set in). Or it can be used to describe a sudden and unusually unexpected action: Он подошёл и раз — схватил сумку и убежал (He walked up to me and wham! He grabbed my purse and ran).

With за, раз can describe a one-time event: За раз он поднял 50 килограммов (He lifted 50 kilograms in one try).

But if you move those little words around to раз за разом, it means "time after time": Он раз за разом поднимал гантели (He lifted the weights again and again).

В самый раз is an idiom that means "just right," most commonly in terms of fit: Сапоги были в самый раз (The boots fit me perfectly).

This brings us to the idiom как раз, which, among its many meanings, can be a synonym for в самый раз: Платье не мало, а как раз (The dress isn't too small — it's a perfect fit).

In time expressions, как раз can mean "exactly at the time (when)": Ты ушёл из кино как раз перед тем, как началось самое интересное (You left the movie just when it was getting interesting).

Or it can mean "at exactly this time." For example, when someone phones you, you might say: Я как раз о тебе думал! (I was just thinking about you!) Я как раз готовлю ужин (I'm in the middle of making dinner — that is, "just at this moment").

In nontime expressions, как раз can act as an intensifier that means "exactly": Это как раз то, что мне нужно (It's exactly what I need). Он как раз здесь живёт (He lives in this very house).

Sometimes we express this with "actually" in English. To answer "VVP," I'd say: Это как раз не стабильность, а стагнация! (It's actually not stability but stagnation!)

Как раз шучу (I'm just kidding).

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