

Cutting to the Chase

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May 22, 2014



В обрез: just barely enough

Want to visit the barber? Need to ready your pooch for a dog show? Did badly on a math test? Or want to let your uncouth neighbor know that you do not want to socialize? No problem. Just reach for the verb *резать* (to cut) and its prefixed derivatives.

The basic imperfective *резать* is a verb you probably use every day in the kitchen, where you might complain: *Нож не режет!* (The knife is dull, literally "doesn't cut"). If you are a doctor, you probably use it in the hospital, where it is a slightly slangy way of saying "to operate": *Его завтра режут* (He is going under the knife tomorrow).

But you might use it in other circumstances to describe something that stings, cuts or burns. For example, *резать* is used to describe any sound that you find unpleasant, like an irritating voice: *Его исполнение песни режет слух* (His rendition of the song grates on me). *резать* can also be used with the cold: *Ветер резал лицо* (the wind stung my face). Or heat: *Солнце*

режет глаза (the sun is glaring right in my eyes). Or a dark nightclub in a city without anti--smoking laws: В этом клубе хорошая музыка, но дым так режет глаза, что не могу там долго находиться (That club has good music, but the smoke stings my eyes so much that I cannot stay there for long).

When you add the prefix под-, you get a verb that means to cut a bit off, to trim. Use подрезать at the barber's so that you do not walk out with a buzz cut. Хочу, чтобы вы только подрезали волосы чуть-чуть — буквально один сантиметр! (I want you to just trim my hair a tiny bit — literally one centimeter!).

This verb can be used with wings to give the figurative meaning of holding someone back from success or fulfillment: Он хороший певец, но ему всё время подрезают крылья и не дают раскрыться (He is a good singer, but they are clipping his wings and not letting him develop his talent).

But clipping can occur down on earth, too: Вот этот гад резко повернул направо и чуть не подрезал меня (That creep made a sharp right turn and almost clipped me).

If you add the prefix об- you get a verb that means to trim around or all over. Обрезать волосы is to cut your hair all over — to get a major haircut. Обрезать ногти or когти is to cut your nails — or claws: До выставки надо помыть собаку и аккуратно обрезать ей когти (Before the show you have to wash your dog and carefully trim her nails).

But if something is в обрез, it means you are short of it. This expression is usually used with the two things there is never enough of — money and time. У меня денег в обрез (I am down to my last dime). Времени в обрез — сеанс начинается через минут пять (We are cutting it close — the showing begins in about five minutes.)

Срезать is used for cutting things completely, like срезать цветы (to cut the flowers). It can be used figuratively in high society: Генерала срезала баронесса (The baroness snubbed the general). Or it can be used slangily in school: Срезали его по математике (They flunked him in math).

A good cutting response to being flunked or snubbed? Орать как резаный (to scream bloody murder, literally "like someone cut").

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/05/22/cutting-to-the-chase-a35703>