Korean particles 조사

1 · josa · little tags that say what each word is doing

A particle sticks to the end of a word, with no space, and says what that word is doing in the sentence. The verb always comes last, so the particles are how you tell who did what to whom.

One sentence, four particles

저**는**	친구**랑**	카페**에서**	커피**를**	마셨어요.
jeo**neun**	chingu**rang**	kape**eseo**	keopi**reul**	masyeosseoyo.
topic: as for me	with a friend	where it happens: at a café	object: coffee	drank

I drank coffee with a friend at a café. 는 marks the topic, 랑 with, 에서 where it happens, 를 the object.

Most come in two shapes

Look at the last block of the word. If it has a bottom letter (받침, batchim), use the first shape. If it ends in a vowel, use the second. 책 (book) ends in ㄱ, 차 (car, tea) ends in a vowel.

after a consonant	after a vowel	said	what it marks	책 book	차 car
은	는	**eun / neun**	topic: as for...	책**은** chaeg**eun**	차**는** cha**neun**
이	가	**i / ga**	subject	책**이** chaeg**i**	차**가** cha**ga**
을	를	**eul / reul**	object	책**을** chaeg**eul**	차**를** cha**reul**
과	와	**gwa / wa**	and, with (written)	책**과** chaek**gwa**	차**와** cha**wa**
이랑	랑	**irang / rang**	and, with (casual)	책**이랑** chaeg**irang**	차**랑** cha**rang**
으로	로	**euro / ro**	by, toward	집**으로** jib**euro**	차**로** cha**ro**

The ㄹ rule: words ending in ㄹ take 로, not 으로: 서울로 seoullo, to Seoul. And notice 과 and 와 run the other way round: 와 follows the vowel.

The rest have one shape for every word

에	에서	에게	한테	께	도	만
e	**eseo**	**ege**	**hante**	**kke**	**do**	**man**
at, to, time	where it happens	to a person	to a person, spoken	to, with respect	also	only

의	하고	부터	까지	보다	처럼
ui	**hago**	**buteo**	**kkaji**	**boda**	**cheoreom**
of, 's	and, with	from	until	than	like

Say it smoothly: in speech, the bottom letter slides onto the particle. 책을 is said chae-geul, 집에 is said ji-be. The romanisation in this guide shows it the way you hear it.

Glued on: write 친구가, never 친구 가. In subtitles, look at the end of each word for these tags and you'll see the shape of the sentence.

Topic, subject, object 은/는 · 이/가 · 을/를

2 · the three you hear in every line

은 / 는 eun / neun

A spotlight. "As for X..." and the rest of the sentence talks about X.
Marks the topic: what you're talking about. It can also set X against something else.

저**는** 학생이에요.
jeo**neun** haksaengieyo. - I'm a student.

고양이**는** 귀여워요.
goyangi**neun** gwiyeowoyo. - Cats are cute.

커피**는** 좋아해요.
keopi**neun** joahaeyo. - Coffee, I like. (Tea, maybe not.)

이 / 가 i / ga

A finger pointing. "Who? THIS one!" Whatever wears 이 or 가 is the news.
Marks the subject, usually the new information. Question words take it: 누가 (who), 뭐가 (what).

누**가** 왔어요?
nu**ga** wasseoyo? - Who came?

비**가** 와요.
bi**ga** wayo. - It's raining. (Rain is coming.)

시간**이** 있어요?
sigan**i** isseoyo? - Do you have time?

을 / 를 eul / reul

A dartboard. The verb's dart lands on whatever wears 을 or 를.
Marks the thing the verb acts on.

사과**를** 먹어요.
sagwa**reul** meogeoyo. - I eat an apple.

영화**를** 봐요.
yeonghwa**reul** bwayo. - I watch a movie.

한국어**를** 공부해요.
hangugeo**reul** gongbuhaeyo. - I study Korean.

은/는 or 이/가? The hardest pair, side by side

Same words, different news

저**는** 민수예요.
jeo**neun** minsuyeyo. - I'm Minsu. (Introducing yourself.)

제**가** 민수예요.
je**ga** minsuyeyo. - I'M Minsu. (I'm the one you're looking for.)

The news comes after 은/는, and right on 이/가. With 는 the point is the name. With 가 the point is who.

Answering who

누**가** 했어?
nu**ga** haesseo? - Who did it?

내**가** 했어.
nae**ga** haesseo. - I did.

나**는** 안 했어.
na**neun** an haesseo. - I didn't. (Maybe someone else did.)

A who question gets 이/가 back. Switch to 은/는 and you add a contrast: me, not the others.

Where English has an object

시간**이** 없어요.
sigan**i** eopseoyo. - I don't have time. (Time doesn't exist.)

김치**가** 좋아요.
gimchi**ga** joayo. - I like kimchi. (Kimchi is good.)

김치**를** 좋아해요.
gimchi**reul** joahaeyo. - I like kimchi.

있어요, 없어요 and 좋아요 describe, so they take 이/가. 좋아해요 is an action, so it takes 을/를. Same meaning, different particle.

Short forms you'll hear in every drama

나는	너는	이거는	나를	뭐를
난	넌	이건	날	뭘
nan	**neon**	**igeon**	**nal**	**mwol**
I (topic)	you (topic)	this (topic)	me (object)	what (object)

These ones have to change

나 + 가	저 + 가	너 + 가	누구 + 가
내가	제가	네가	누가
naega	**jega**	**nega**	**nuga**
I	I (polite)	you, often said 니가 niga	who

Tip: in a subtitle, find 을 or 를 and look just before it. That's what the verb acts on. Find 이 or 가 and you've found who's doing it.

Place, time and people 에 · 에서 · 한테 · 로

3 · where, when, to whom, how

에
e

A pin on the map or the clock.
Where you're going, where something is, and when.

집**에** 가요.
jib**e** gayo. - I'm going home.

학교**에** 있어요.
hakgyo**e** isseoyo. - I'm at school.

세 시**에** 만나요.
se si**e** mannayo. - Let's meet at three.

No 에 after 오늘, 내일, 어제 or 지금: 내일 만나요, see you tomorrow.

에서
eseo

A workbench: the place where you do the job.
Where an action happens. After a place it can also mean from.

카페**에서** 공부해요.
kape**eseo** gongbuhaeyo. - I study at a café.

집**에서** 쉬어요.
jib**eseo** swieoyo. - I'm resting at home.

어디**에서** 왔어요?
eodi**eseo** wasseoyo? - Where are you from?

After a vowel, speech shortens it to 서: 여기서 (here), 어디서 (where).

에게 한테
ege / hante

A hand passing something over.
To a person or an animal. 에게 is for writing and careful speech, 한테 for everyday talk. 에 is for places, not people.

친구**에게** 편지를 썼어요.
chingu**ege** pyeonjireul sseosseoyo. - I wrote a letter to a friend.

엄마**한테** 전화했어요.
eomma**hante** jeonhwahaesseoyo. - I called Mom.

친구**한테서** 들었어요.
chingu**hanteseo** deureosseoyo. - I heard it from a friend.

Add 서 for from a person: 한테서, 에게서.

께
kke

The same hand, with a bow.
The respectful 에게, for people you look up to: grandparents, teachers, customers.

할머니**께** 드렸어요.
halmeoni**kke** deuryeosseoyo. - I gave it to Grandma.

선생님**께** 말씀드렸어요.
seonsaengnim**kke** malsseumdeuryeosseoyo. - I told my teacher.

Its partner 께서 is the respectful 이/가: 할아버지께서 오셨어요, Grandpa has come.

으로 로
euro / ro

An arrow, or a tool in your hand.
By what means, or toward where. 으로 after a consonant, 로 after a vowel or ㄹ.

버스**로** 가요.
beoseu**ro** gayo. - I go by bus.

지하철**로** 와요.
jihacheol**lo** wayo. - I come by subway.

젓가락**으로** 먹어요.
jeotgarag**euro** meogeoyo. - I eat with chopsticks.

오른쪽**으로** 가세요.
oreunjjog**euro** gaseyo. - Go to the right.

The ㄹ rule: 서울로 (to Seoul), 연필로 (with a pencil). Never 서울으로.

에 or 에서?

집**에** 있어요.
jib**e** isseoyo. - I'm at home.

집**에서** 먹어요.
jib**eseo** meogeoyo. - I eat at home.

학교**에** 가요.
hakgyo**e** gayo. - I go to school.

학교**에서** 공부해요.
hakgyo**eseo** gongbuhaeyo. - I study at school.

에 is where something IS, or where you GO. 있어요, 없어요 and 가요 take 에. When something HAPPENS at a place, it takes 에서.

Everyday particles 도 · 만 · 의 · 보다

도 do

Also, too. It takes the place of 은/는, 이/가 or 을/를.

A hand shooting up: "Me too!"

나**도** 가요.

na**do** gayo. - I'm going too.

커피**도** 마셔요.

keopi**do** masyeoyo. - I drink coffee too. (Never 커피를도.)

만 man

Only, just.

A velvet rope: only this one gets in.

물**만** 마셔요.

mul**man** masyeoyo. - I only drink water.

하나**만** 주세요.

hana**man** juseyo. - Just one, please.

의 ui

Of. Written 의, but usually said 에 (e).

A paper clip holding two nouns. Works like English 's.

친구**의** 책

chingu**ui** chaek - a friend's book

한국**의** 수도

hangug**ui** sudo - the capital of Korea

부터 / 까지 buteo / kkaji

From and until. For places, from is usually 에서.

A starting gun and a finish line.

아홉 시**부터** 다섯 시**까지** 일해요.

ahop si**buteo** daseot si**kkaji** ilhaeyo. - I work from nine to five.

여기**에서** 학교**까지**

yeogi**eseo** hakgyo**kkaji** - from here to school

보다 boda

Than. Often with 더 (more).

A seesaw: the word wearing 보다 is the one you measure against.

오늘이 어제**보다** 더워요.

oneuri eje**boda** deowoyo. - Today is hotter than yesterday.

생각**보다** 쉬워요.

saenggak**boda** swiwoyo. - It's easier than I thought.

처럼 cheoreom

Like, as.

A mirror: just like this.

아이**처럼** 웃어요.

ai**cheoreom** useoyo. - She laughs like a child.

영화**처럼** 살고 싶어.

yeonghwa**cheoreom** salgo sipeo. - I want to live like in a movie.

And, with: from formal to casual

와 / 과 wa / gwa	written books, news, songs, speeches. 와 after a vowel, 과 after a consonant.	빵**과** 우유 ppang**gwa** uyu - bread and milk	친구**와** 함께 chingu**wa** hamkke - together with a friend
하고 hago	everyday everyday speech, after any word.	빵**하고** 우유 ppang**hago** uyu - bread and milk	친구**하고** 같이 갔어요. chingu**hago** gachi gasseoyo. - I went with a friend.
이랑 / 랑 irang / rang	casual friends and family. 이랑 after a consonant, 랑 after a vowel.	빵**이랑** 우유 ppang**irang** uyu - bread and milk	너**랑** 나 neo**rang** na - you and me

With I and you, 의 merges: 내 (my, casual), 제 (my, polite), 네 (your). And it's often left out: 우리 엄마, my mom.

They stack: 한국에서도 (in Korea too), 너한테만 (only to you), 친구하고는 (with my friend, at least). The extra one goes on the end.

Casual speech drops them. Friends in K-dramas leave out 은/는, 이/가, 을/를 and even 에 all the time, and you work it out from context. Keep them when you're polite. 도, 만 and 부터 carry meaning, so they stay.

밥 먹었어?

bap meogeosseo? - Have you eaten? (을 is gone)

너 어디 가?

neo eodi ga? - Where are you going? (no 는, no 에)

나 배고파.

na baegopa. - I'm hungry. (no 는)

Practice 연습

5 · ten lines straight from K-dramas · cover the right side

How: cover the right side with a strip of paper. Read the line out loud, say what it means and what the pink particle is doing, then slide the strip down to check.

1	나**는** 괜찮아. na**neun** gwaenchana.	**I'm fine.** 는: topic, after a vowel
2	누**가** 왔어? nu**ga** wasseo?	**Who came?** 가: subject. 누구 + 가 = 누가
3	밥**을** 먹었어? bab**eul** meogeosseo?	**Have you eaten? (Also just: how are you?)** 을: object, after a consonant
4	집**에** 가자. jib**e** gaja.	**Let's go home.** 에: where you're going
5	여기**서** 뭐 해? yeogi**seo** mwo hae?	**What are you doing here?** 서: short for 에서, where it happens
6	너**만** 믿어. neo**man** mideo.	**You're the only one I trust.** 만: only
7	나**도** 몰라. na**do** molla.	**I don't know either.** 도: also, too
8	오빠**한테** 말해. oppa**hante** malhae.	**Tell oppa.** 한테: to a person, spoken
9	내일**부터** 다이어트야. naeil**buteo** daieoteuya.	**The diet starts tomorrow.** 부터: from, starting
10	너**보다** 내**가** 더 잘해. neo**boda** nae**ga** deo jalhae.	**I'm better at it than you.** 보다: than. 내가 = 나 + 가

Your turn: pick the right shape

1	책 + 을 / 를 book	책을 chaegeul	2	학교 + 은 / 는 school	학교는 hakgyoneun
3	선생님 + 이 / 가 teacher	선생님이 seonsaengnimi	4	사과 + 을 / 를 apple	사과를 sagwareul
5	집 + 으로 / 로 home	집으로 jibeuro	6	지하철 + 으로 / 로 subway	지하철로 jihacheollo
7	친구 + 과 / 와 friend	친구와 chinguwa	8	가방 + 이 / 가 bag	가방이 gabangi
9	커피 + 이랑 / 랑 coffee	커피랑 keopirang	10	한국 + 은 / 는 Korea	한국은 hangugeun

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in Korean subtitles to see what it means. Then look at its tail: the particle tells you what it's doing.