How Korean verbs work 동사

A Korean verb is a stem plus an ending. The dictionary form always ends in 다. Drop 다 and you have the stem. Then add an ending, and the ending says when, how polite, and what kind of sentence it is.

먹다	먹	먹어요
meokda	meok	meogeoyo
dictionary form: to eat	drop 다: the stem	add an ending: eat (polite)

The verb goes last, and nobody has to say I or you

저는 밥을 먹어요.
jeoneun babeul meogeoyo. - I eat rice. The verb comes last.

먹어요?
meogeoyo? - Are you eating? Same form, voice goes up.

지금 가요.
jigeum gayo. - I'm going now. Or she is. Context tells you who.

No I, no you: Korean leaves out whoever is obvious. 먹어요 can be I eat, you eat or they eat. A question is the same sentence with your voice going up.

Three speech levels you hear in every drama

합니다 hamnida — formal

News, work, speeches, announcements, the army. Polite and a little stiff.

감사합니다.
gamsahamnida. - Thank you.

열차가 곧 도착합니다.
yeolchaga got dochakamnida. - The train is arriving soon.

가다 (go) → 갑니다 gamnida

해요 haeyo — polite

Everyday talk with strangers, elders, shop staff and coworkers. The safe choice.

어디 가요?
eodi gayo? - Where are you going?

맛있어요.
masisseoyo. - It's delicious.

가다 (go) → 가요 gayo

해 · 반말 hae · banmal — casual

Friends, family, and people younger than you. Wait until they say it's fine.

어디 가?
eodi ga? - Where are you going?

밥 먹었어?
bap meogeosseo? - Have you eaten?

가다 (go) → 가 ga

Why it matters: the level shows who you're talking to. Switching to 반말 (banmal, casual talk) with someone is a big moment in a drama: it means you've become close. Polite speech is called 존댓말 (jondaenmal).

The respect marker -(으)시-

가세요.
gaseyo. - Please go. You go (with respect).

할머니가 오셨어요.
halmeoniga osyeosseoyo. - Grandma has come.

읽으세요.
ilgeuseyo. - Please read it.

Add 시 to lift up the person doing it. After a vowel it's 시, after a consonant 으시. 시 + 어요 becomes 세요, and 시 + 었어요 becomes 셨어요. You never use it about yourself. Even 안녕하세요 has it: 안녕하 + 시 + 어요.

The 해요 present 현재

Look at the last vowel of the stem. If it's ㅏ or ㅗ, add 아요. Anything else, add 어요. Every 하다 verb becomes 해요. That's the whole rule.

ㅏ or ㅗ	+ 아요		any other vowel	+ 어요		하다	→ 해요	
살다 live	살아요	sarayo	읽다 read	읽어요	ilgeoyo	공부하다 study	공부해요	gongbuhaeyo
받다 get	받아요	badayo	입다 wear	입어요	ibeoyo	일하다 work	일해요	ilhaeyo
앉다 sit	앉아요	anjayo	웃다 laugh	웃어요	useoyo	사랑하다 love	사랑해요	sanghaeyo

No bottom letter? The vowels squeeze together

가다 go 가 + 아요 **가요** **gayo** same vowels merge	오다 come 오 + 아요 **와요** **wayo** ㅗ + ㅏ = ㅘ	마시다 drink 마시 + 어요 **마셔요** **masyeoyo** ㅣ + ㅕ = ㅖ	되다 become, be OK 되 + 어요 **돼요** **dwaeyo** ㅚ + ㅕ = ㅙ	보다 see, watch 보 + 아요 **봐요** **bwayo** ㅗ + ㅏ = ㅘ	주다 give 주 + 어요 **줘요** **jwoyo** ㅜ + ㅕ = ㅝ

Ten verbs you'll hear every day, in all three levels

	해요 polite	해 casual	합니다 formal
가다 gada · go	가요 gayo	가 ga	갑니다 gamnida
오다 oda · come	와요 wayo	와 wa	옵니다 omnida
먹다 meokda · eat	먹어요 meogeoyo	먹어 meogeo	먹습니다 meokseumnida
마시다 masida · drink	마셔요 masyeoyo	마셔 masyeo	마십니다 masimnida
보다 boda · see, watch	봐요 bwayo	봐 bwa	봅니다 bomnida
하다 hada · do	해요 haeyo	해 hae	합니다 hamnida
있다 itda · be there, have	있어요 isseoyo	있어 isseo	있습니다 itseumnida
없다 eopda · not have	없어요 eopseoyo	없어 eopseo	없습니다 eopseumnida
알다 alda · know	알아요 arayo	알아 ara	압니다 amnida
좋다 jota · be good	좋아요 joayo	좋아 joa	좋습니다 joseumnida

Casual is easy: take the 해요 form and drop the 요. 먹어요 → 먹어, 가요 → 가.

Formal: after a vowel add ㅂ니다, after a consonant 습니다. Stems ending in ㄹ lose it: 알다 → 압니다. Questions end in 까: 갑니까?

One form, many times: the present covers I eat, I'm eating and often I'll eat soon. 내일 가요 means I'm going tomorrow.

Past, future and not 과거 · 미래

3 · gwageo · mirae · what happened, what's next

The past: 았 · 었 · 했

Take the 해요 form and put ㅆ under its last vowel block, then add 어요. Bright vowels give 았, the rest 었, and 하다 gives 했.

	past, polite	past, casual
가다 go	갔어요 gasseoyo	갔어 gasseo
오다 come	왔어요 wasseoyo	왔어 wasseo
먹다 eat	먹었어요 meogeosseoyo	먹었어 meogeosseo
마시다 drink	마셨어요 masyeosseoyo	마셨어 masyeosseo
보다 see	봤어요 bwasseoyo	봤어 bwasseo
하다 do	했어요 haesseoyo	했어 haesseo
있다 be there	있었어요 isseosseoyo	있었어 isseosseo
좋다 be good	좋았어요 joasseoyo	좋았어 joasseo

Formal past: 갔습니다, 했습니다 (haetseumnida). You'll hear 했습니다 on the news every night.

The future: -(으)ㄹ 거예요

After a vowel, tuck ㄹ under the stem. After a consonant, add 을. Stems that already end in ㄹ stay as they are. Then 거예요.

가다 — 갈 거예요
gal geoyeyo - I'll go.

하다 — 할 거예요
hal geoyeyo - I'll do it.

먹다 — 먹을 거예요
meogeul geoyeyo - I'll eat.

살다 — 살 거예요
sal geoyeyo - I'll live.

비가 올 거예요.
biga ol geoyeyo. - It'll probably rain. It's also a guess.

갈 거야.
gal geoya. - I'll go. (casual: 거야)

Saying no: 안, -지 않다 and 못

안 + verb an

not. The everyday way: put 안 right before the verb.

안 가요.
an gayo. - I'm not going.

안 먹어요.
an meogeoyo. - I don't eat it.

공부 안 해요.
gongbu an haeyo. - I don't study. (안 goes before 해요)

-지 않다 -ji anta

not. Longer and a bit more careful: news, writing, polite talk.

가지 않아요.
gaji anayo. - I'm not going.

먹지 않습니다.
meokji anseumnida. - I don't eat it. (formal)

못 mot

can't. It's not that you won't, you're not able to.

못 가요.
mot gayo. - I can't go.

못 먹어요.
mot meogeoyo. - I can't eat it.

못해요.
motaeyo. - I can't do it. I'm bad at it.

Don't! to tell someone not to do something, use -지 마: 하지 마 (haji ma), don't do it. Polite: 하지 마세요. You'll hear it in every argument scene.

안 or 못? 안 가요 means I'm not going, and that's my choice. 못 가요 means I can't go, something is stopping me. People say 못 가요 to turn down an invite gently.

Endings from dramas 어미

Same stem, new tail. Each of these goes on the stem, just like 어요. Learn to spot the tail and you'll know what kind of line it is before you know every word.

-고 싶다 -go sipda

want to

stem + 고 싶어요

가**고 싶어요**.
ga**go sipeoyo**. - I want to go.

보**고 싶어**.
bo**go sipeo**. - I miss you. (I want to see you.)

-(으)세요 -(eu)seyo

please, kindly

stem + 세요, or 으세요 after a consonant

앉**으세요**.
anj**euseyo**. - Please sit down.

안녕히 가**세요**.
annyeonghi ga**seyo**. - Goodbye. (to someone leaving)

-자 -ja

let's (casual)

stem + 자. Politely, just use 해요: 같이 가요.

가**자**!
ga**ja**! - Let's go!

먹**자**.
meok**ja**. - Let's eat.

-(으)ㄹ게요 -(eu)lgeyo

I'll (a promise to you)

stem + ㄹ게요, or 을게요 after a consonant. Casual: drop 요.

연락**할게요**.
yeollak**algeyo**. - I'll be in touch.

먹**을게**.
meog**eulge**. - I'll eat it.

-네요 -neyo

oh, I see, wow

stem + 네요. You've just noticed it.

맛있**네요**.
masin**neyo**. - Oh, this is good!

비가 오**네요**.
biga o**neyo**. - Oh, it's raining.

-죠 · -지 -jyo · -ji

right?

stem + 죠 (polite) or 지 (casual). You expect a yes.

맞**죠**?
mat**jyo**? - That's right, isn't it?

좋**지**?
jo**chi**? - It's good, right?

-잖아 -jana

you know, come on

stem + 잖아. Reminding someone of what they already know.

알**잖아**.
al**jana**. - You know (that).

내가 말했**잖아**.
naega malhaet**jana**. - I told you!

A few verbs bend

Their stem changes before 아요 or 어요. The dictionary form looks normal, so it's worth knowing these four.

듣다 listen	돕다 help	춥다 be cold	모르다 not know
들어요	**도와요**	**추워요**	**몰라요**
deureoyo	**dowayo**	**chuwoyo**	**mollayo**
ㄷ becomes ㄹ	ㅂ becomes 우, here 와	ㅂ becomes 우, usually 워	르 becomes ㄹ라

Polite or casual: most of these take 요 to be polite and drop it for friends: 보고 싶어요 or 보고 싶어, 알잖아요 or 알잖아. -자 is casual only.

Practice 연습

5 · yeonseup · 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 which level or ending the pink part is, then slide the strip down to check.

1	가**자**. ga**ja**.	**Let's go.** casual · -자, let's
2	먹**고 싶어**. meok**go sipeo**.	**I want to eat (it).** casual · -고 싶다, want to
3	괜찮**아요**. gwaenchan**ayo**.	**It's okay. I'm fine.** polite · 해요, 괜찮다 + 아요
4	몰**라**. mol**la**.	**I don't know.** casual · 모르다, a bending verb
5	사랑**해**. sarang**hae**.	**I love you.** casual · 하다 → 해
6	잠깐만**요**. jamkkanman**yo**.	**Just a moment.** polite · 요 makes any phrase polite
7	알겠**습니다**. alget**seumnida**.	**Understood.** formal · 합니다, heard at work and in the army
8	왜 그**래**? wae geu**rae**?	**What's wrong? Why are you acting like this?** casual · 그렇다 → 그래
9	하**지 마**. ha**ji ma**.	**Don't. Stop it.** casual · -지 마, don't
10	갈**게**. gal**ge**.	**I'll go. I'm off.** casual · -(으)ㄹ게, I'll

Your turn: make the 해요 form

1	살다 live	살아요 sarayo	2	읽다 read	읽어요 ilgeoyo
3	공부하다 study	공부해요 gongbuhaeyo	4	주다 give	줘요 jwoyo
5	배우다 learn	배워요 baewoyo	6	앉다 sit	앉아요 anjayo
7	기다리다 wait	기다려요 gidaryeoyo	8	만나다 meet	만나요 mannayo
9	마시다 drink	마셔요 masyeoyo	10	일하다 work	일해요 ilhaeyo

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in Korean subtitles to see what it means. Then look at the tail: it tells you how polite the line is and what kind of line it is.