

Learn Korean Ep. 109: How to Use ~던

There are many grammar forms that use the **던** ending, and this lesson won't attempt to cover all of them. This lesson will talk about the most commonly used ~**던** endings, how to conjugate them, and what they mean.

Since ~**던** can be used in so many ways, this lesson is most appropriate only for intermediate (or advanced) Korean learners – it is not a topic that most beginners will be able to use immediately.

Descriptive Verb Stem + **던**

One of the most common places to find **던** being used is after a descriptive verb stem.

Normally, when changing a descriptive verb to an adjective (to describe a noun), you'd attach **은** or **ㄴ** after the verb stem, with some exceptions. For a refresher on how to do this, check out episode 70 of this series. Here's an example using the verb **작다** ["to be small"].

작은 집
a small house

But what if we wanted to say not that the house **is** small, but that the house **was** small (past tense). For example, how could we say, "a house that was small?" Of course we could just rearrange the sentence and say, **집이 작았어요** ["The house was small."], but doing this doesn't let us describe the house more. If we could say "a house that was small," then we could also say "*I bought* a house that was small *and expanded it*," or even say "The house that was small *is now gone*." We'll need to use **던** to make the adjective into the **past tense**.

Past Tense Verb Stem + **던**

To make a past tense adjective from a descriptive verb, take its past tense stem (this will always end with **ㅁ** at the bottom of the last syllable) and attach **던**. For **작다**, that would be **작았다** → **작았**.

작았던 집
a house that was small

Now we can say what we want, but to be fair speaking this way in Korean isn't always the most natural way (or in English, for that matter). Make sure that if you're using a past tense adjective like this that it's being used in an appropriate situation. Saying "There is a house that was small" could sound very awkward, but saying "I bought a house that was small" sounds natural in both English and Korean.

Past Tense Adjective + 것 같다

Once we've conjugated a past tense adjective with **던**, we can use it together with the **것 같다** form ["think"] to say that we think something **was** a certain way – we're no longer limited to thinking about things in the present tense. Using **던** with the **것 같다** form is extremely common, and natural. Here's an example:

김밥이 **맛있는** 것 같아요.

I think the kimbap **is** delicious.

김밥이 **맛있었던** 것 같아요.

I think the kimbap **was** delicious.

Here are some more examples:

작년이 더 **추웠던** 것 같아요.

I think last year **was** colder.

시험이 아주 **어려웠던** 것 같아요.

I think the test **was** very difficult.

미국 **사람이었던** 것 같아요.

I think they **were** American.

Although not an exception to the rules, **이다** ["to be"] becomes **이었던** after a consonant and **였던** after a vowel.

이미 했던 것 같아요.
I think I already did it.

Adjectives can also be made from action verbs. For a refresher on this concept, review episode 91 of this series. Actives made this way can have one more important use – in addition to being usable with **것 같다** – and we'll talk about that use next.

Action Verb Stem + **던**

Take an action verb stem and attach **던**. This gives the verb the meaning of “had done” or “used to do.” In addition, this action verb stem can even be in the past tense; but whether it's in the past tense or present tense, the meaning is mostly similar (with one small exception we'll talk about). Here's an example of a regular present tense adjective, a present tense adjective using **던**, and a past tense adjective using **던**.

제가 좋아**하는** 음식을 먹었어요.
I ate food that I **like**.

제가 좋아**했던** 음식을 먹었어요.
제가 좋아**하던** 음식을 먹었어요.
I ate food that I **had liked**.
I ate food that I **used to like**.

Here are some more examples:

제가 원**했던** 거예요.
It's what I had wanted.
It's what I used to want.

이게 일요일마다 입**었던** 셔츠예요?
Is this the shirt you had worn every Sunday?
Is this the shirt you used to wear every Sunday?

제가 옛날에 살던 집이 이제 없어요.
The house that I had lived in is now gone.
The house that I used to live in is now gone.

제가 다니던 학교예요.
It's the school I had attended.
It's the school I used to attend.

Past Tense Action Verb Stem + 던? Present Tense Action Verb Stem + 던?

While both of these forms mean "had done" or "used to," they're slightly unique.

Using a present tense action verb stem with **던** means that you used to do something, but also that you may or may not still be doing that. To clarify, this doesn't mean it **is** something you're still doing, but it **could** be.

Using a past tense action verb stem with **던** means that you used to do something, but that you are **no longer** doing it.

Here's an example of each tense.

제가 **다니던** 학교예요.
It's the school I used to attend (and it's possible that I might still attend it).

제가 **다녔던** 학교예요.
It's the school I used to attend (but I no longer go there).

When you don't specifically want or need to make this distinction, use either tense with **던**.

Advanced Notes 던데(요) and 다던데(요)

Here are two more common forms that use **던**.

던데(요) can be added to the end of a sentence (specifically, to the end of a **present tense verb stem** at the end of a sentence) to add the meaning of "expecting to hear a reply to your statement." In this way, using ~던데(요) at the end of a sentence is like asking a question, but without raising the intonation at the end of your sentence or using a question mark.

그 드라마를 보고 있어요.

I'm watching that drama.

그 드라마를 보고 있던데요.

I'm watching that drama (and what do you think of that?).

매운 김치를 좋아해요.

He likes spicy kimchi.

매운 김치를 좋아하던데요.

He likes spicy kimchi (but do you think differently?).

When used together with the Plain Form in **quotations**, 던데(요) becomes 다던데(요).

매운 김치를 좋아한다고 해요.

He says he likes spicy kimchi.

매운 김치를 좋아한다던데요.

He says he likes spicy kimchi (and what do you think of that?).

Conclusion

If you have any questions, feel free to send me a message through my web site or on YouTube. Good luck in your studies!

