

Learn Korean Ep. 17: Plain Form

The “plain form” is used quite often in Korean, but not in all situations. **It should never be used in polite conversations by itself.**

When to use the plain form

Writing:

- News articles
- Essays
- Example sentences (in textbooks)

Speech:

- Talking to oneself
- Casual statements to friends

Grammar Forms:

- ❖ (frequently used in grammar forms)

Newspapers and essays are written using the plain form since they’re **not specifically directed toward someone** – you won’t see a newspaper article or an essay written in another form besides plain form, unless it was written specifically to be read in front of an audience. Example sentences (including my own) are also often written in the plain form.

Plain form is used when talking to oneself; in English, we may say things like “Oh, I forgot!” to ourselves. In Korean, it is the same. As long as the statement isn’t directed at the person you are speaking to (meaning, as long as you’re not ending your sentences with plain form), you can use plain form in any situation for speaking to yourself.

Plain form is also used when making a casual statement to a friend. By *statement*, I mean something that that would be similar to an *announcement* (I’ll give examples in this lesson).

Plain form cannot be used for making questions.

Plain form is used in many grammar forms, such as for quoting people (see Episode 19).

How to make the plain form

Here are the rules for conjugating the plain form:

Past Tense: (see Episode 15)

- ❖ verb stem + (아/어/etc) + **ㅆ다**

Present Tense:

- ❖ Action Verbs:
 - verb stem + (ㄴ/는) + **다**
- ❖ Descriptive Verbs:
 - *(no change)*

Future Tense: (see Episode 16)

- ❖ verb stem + **겠**다
- ❖ verb stem + (ㄹ/을) + **것이다** (“것이다” can also be just “거다”)

If you've already learned the past and future tenses, the only new one here is present tense. For Action Verbs, take the verb stem and add “ㄴ” if it ends in a vowel, or “는” if it ends in a consonant; then add “다.” For Descriptive Verbs, just leave them as they are (*Descriptive Verbs are already in plain form in the present tense*)

Example Sentences

Here are examples of the plain form using each of these three tenses:

철수는 병원에 **간다**.

“Cheolsoo goes to the hospital.”

“병원” means “hospital.”

나는 과자를 **먹는다**.

“I eat snacks.”

“과자” means “a snack” or “snacks.”

Since plain form isn't used in polite situations, just use “나” when referring to yourself (instead of “저”).

GO! Billy Korean

엄마는 우리와 함께 **논다**.

"Mom plays together with us."

If the verb stem ends in "ㄹ" (here, "놀다"), just remove the "ㄹ" before conjugating it.

내가 **실수했다**.

"I made a mistake."

"실수하다" means "to make a mistake."

내일 친구와 한국말을 **공부할 거다**.

"Tomorrow I'll study Korean with a friend."

오늘은 진짜 **춥다**.

"Today is really cold."

한국어 시험이 아주 **어려웠다**.

"The Korean test was very difficult."

밥을 안 먹으면 **배가 고플 거다**.

"If you do not eat, you will be hungry."

안 오면 내가 이걸 다 **먹는다!**

"If you don't come I'm eating all of this!"

"이걸" is a short and informal form of "이것을."

I mentioned that the plain form can be used to make a casual statement to a friend; you wouldn't say this sentence to someone older than you or in a polite conversation, but it is fine to use it to friends, almost **as if you're announcing it to someone**.

엘비스는 건물을 **나갔다**.

"Elvis left the building."

Negative Plain Form

To make negative sentences with the plain form, first change the verb to a negative form, then apply the same rules as above. Simple, right!

Let me show you what it would look like (using “~지 않다”). **You can ignore this list below if you already understand the same rules above.**

Past Tense:

- ❖ verb stem + **지 않았다**

Present Tense:

- ❖ Action Verbs:
 - verb stem + **지 않는다**
- ❖ Descriptive Verbs:
 - verb stem + **지 않다**

Future Tense:

- ❖ verb stem + **지 않겠다**
- ❖ verb stem + **지 않을 것이다** (“것이다” can also be just “거다”)

Note that you can also make sentences negative other ways, such as using “안” (see Episode 7 to learn about how to make negative sentences).

어제는 별로 **피곤하지 않았다**.

“Yesterday I wasn't particularly tired.”

“별로” means “particularly” and is used in negative sentences.

나는 술을 **안 마신다**.

“I don't drink alcohol.”

“마시다” means “to drink (something),” and “술” means alcohol.

그 사람은 **도와주지 않을 거다**.

“That person will not help.”

“도와주다” means “to help (someone).”

Two Small Exceptions

The verbs “있다” and “없다” are exceptions. Although they are normally classified as Action Verbs in other grammar forms (see Episode 13), here they act like Descriptive Verbs – their plain forms are simply “있다” and “없다.”

Conclusion

Now that you know the plain form, you’re going to notice it a lot all around you. Try reading a news article – even if you can’t understand all of it, you’ll see the plain form everywhere. Surprise your Korean friends by talking to yourself in Korean; just don’t talk to yourself too much or they’ll think you’re crazy! Good luck in your studies!

