

Learn Korean Ep. 2: Conjugating the ~요 form

In this lesson we'll learn how to conjugate the "~요 form." I don't normally like to pick favorites, but this verb is probably the **most important verb form** to learn in Korean; that's because the concepts we'll talk about in this lesson will carry over into other grammar forms later on. If you haven't learned much Korean yet, trust me on this – it's important to learn the 요 form before moving on. 그럼, 시작할까요? ("Well then, shall we start?")

How to conjugate the ~요 form

1. Remove the 다

2. Add 아/어/etc

3. Add 요

First, take the verb that you want to conjugate, and remove the 다 at the end.

Congratulations – you have now created what we call the **verb stem**. You'll see me talk about verb stems quite often, and they're an important piece for making other grammar forms as well.

Next, look at the last **vowel** in the final syllable of that verb stem. If it's either ㅏ or ㅑ, then you'll be adding 아; if it's anything else, you'll be adding 어. Simple, isn't it? *Umm, we'll get back to this.*

Finally, add 요 to the end to be polite. You don't need to add a 요 if you're speaking with close friends who are the same age as you or younger, small children, and animals. For all other situations, add the 요.

Let's practice with a few examples:

Take the verb "먹다," "to eat."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 먹
2. The last vowel is ㅏ, which means we add 어 ⇒ 먹어
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 먹어요

Let's try with "좋다," "to be good."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 좋
2. The last vowel is ㅏ, which means we add 아 ⇒ 좋아
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 좋아요

That's the basic rule for conjugating the ~요 form, but there are several exceptions to this rule. The exceptions are good though in the long run – they make the finished product a bit easier to say. Let's take a look at the first exception.

Exception 1: Ends in a vowel with no consonants

After removing the 다, anytime the verb stem ends in a vowel with no consonants (meaning there are no consonants on the bottom of the last syllable) the 아 or 어 ending will combine into the verb, instead of attaching to it. Let me show you what I mean.

Take the verb "가다," "to go."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 가
가 ends in a vowel (it has no consonants on the bottom)
2. The last vowel is ㅏ, so we add 아 ⇒ 가아
But because 가 ends in a vowel (Step 1), we simply combine the 아 ⇒ 가
(Here, it appears that the additional 아 goes away, but it's actually being combined)
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 가요

Take the verb "오다," "to come."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 오
오 ends in a vowel (it has no consonants at the bottom)
2. The last vowel is ㅏ, so we add 아 ⇒ 오아
But because 오 ends in a vowel (Step 1), we simply combine the 아 ⇒ 와
(Here, you can see clearly that it's actually combining)
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 와요

Take the verb "주다," "to give."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 주

주 ends in a vowel (it has no consonants at the bottom)

2. The last vowel is ㅓ, so we add ㅓ ⇒ 주ㅓ

But because 주 ends in a vowel (Step 1), we simply combine the ㅓ ⇒ ㅗ
(Here it is also easy to see that it's combining together)

3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ ㅗ요

This rule makes these types of verbs easier to say – who wants to say “가아요” anyway?

Exception 2: Ends in ㅣ

When the verb stem ends in a ㅣ, such as in 시, or 치, to name a couple, it combines similarly to Exception 1. Since ㅣ is not ㅏ or ㅑ, normally you would add ㅓ to the end. However, to make it easier to say, this ㅓ will combine together (becoming ㅚ). Here are some examples:

Take the verb “마시다,” “to drink.”

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 마시
(시 ends in ㅣ)
2. The last vowel is ㅣ, so we add ㅓ ⇒ 마시ㅓ
Because 마시 ends in ㅣ (Step 1), we combine the ㅓ ⇒ 마셔
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 마셔요

Take the verb “가르치다,” “to teach.”

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 가르치
(치 ends in ㅣ)
2. The last vowel is ㅣ, so we add ㅓ ⇒ 가르치ㅓ
Because 가르치 ends in ㅣ (Step 1), we combine the ㅓ ⇒ 가르쳐
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 가르쳐요

Exception 3: Ends in —

When the verb stem ends with the — vowel, in order to know whether to add 아 or 어 you need to look back one more space (the 2nd to last syllable) to see what **that** syllable's last

vowel is. Then, remove the — and conjugate appropriately. It may sound confusing to read it, but after you see it, it's not that hard.

Take the verb "바쁘다," "to be busy."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 바쁘
(쁘 ends in —)
Because the verb stem ends in —, look back one more space (바)
2. The 2nd to last syllable (바) ends in ㅏ, so we will be adding 아 ⇒ 바쁘 + 아
But first, remove the — ⇒ 바ㅍ
Then add the 아 ⇒ 바빠
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 바빠요

Take the verb "예쁘다," "to be pretty."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 예쁘
(쁘 ends in —)
Because the verb stem ends in —, look back one more space (예)
2. The 2nd to last syllable (예) doesn't end in ㅏ or ㅑ, so we'll add 어 ⇒ 예쁘 + 어
But first, remove the — ⇒ 예ㅍ
Then add the 어 ⇒ 예빠
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 예빠요

"But what if the verb only has 2 syllables? There is no '2nd to last syllable' to look at!"

In this case, it's actually easier. Because there is no 2nd to last syllable, you don't need to do any extra steps to find it. Simply remove the — as before, and add a 어 (because — is not ㅏ or ㅑ).

Take the verb "쓰다," "to use" or "to write."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 쓰
(쓰 ends in —)
Normally you'd look back one more space, but this is all there is.
2. The last vowel is — (which isn't ㅏ or ㅑ), so we always add 어 ⇒ 쓰 + 어
But first, remove the — ⇒ 쓰
Then add the 어 ⇒ 써
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 써요

Exception 3: Ends in ㄹ

This rule is a companion to Exception 2. Although ㄹ technically also ends in —, this is a special case. If you find the verb stem ends in ㄹ, there's one more thing you have to do in order to conjugate it. After removing the —, if you see a ㄹ left alone, the ㄹ makes a copy of itself and moves to the bottom of the 2nd to last syllable. It sounds strange, but don't worry! There are only a few of these verbs, and you'll hear and use them **so often** that you'll probably never worry about how to conjugate them when speaking Korean.

Take the verb "모르다," "to not know."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 모르
(모르 ends in ㄹ, and ㄹ also ends in —, so many of the rules are similar)
Because the verb stem ends in —, look back one more space (모)
2. The 2nd to last syllable (모) ends in ㅏ, so we will be adding 아 ⇒ 모르 + 아
But first, remove the — ⇒ 모ㄹ
There is a ㄹ by itself, so make a friend for it to play with at the bottom of the 2nd to last syllable ⇒ 몰ㄹ
Then add the 아 ⇒ 몰라
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 몰라요

Take the verb "부르다," "to call" (as in "to call someone's name").

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 부르
(부르 ends in ㄹ, and ㄹ also ends in —, so many of the rules are similar again)
Because the verb stem ends in —, look back one more space (부)
2. The 2nd to last syllable (부) ends in ㅜ (which isn't ㅏ or ㅑ), so we will be adding 어 before we're finished ⇒ 부르 + 어
But first, remove the — ⇒ 부ㄹ
There is a ㄹ by itself, so make a copy and put it at the bottom of the 2nd to last syllable ⇒ 불ㄹ
Then add the 어 ⇒ 불러
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 불러요

Exception 4: Ends in ㅁ (Descriptive Verbs)

When you're conjugating a **descriptive verb** (a descriptive verb is basically an adjective in English) – not an action verb (such as "to go," "to eat," etc) – and the verb stem ends in a ㅁ, there's an extra step. Remove the ㅁ, and add a 우; then add 어 (since 우 does not end in ㄴ or ㄷ). Also add a 요 at the end like normal in order to sound polite. **You can imagine that we are trading the ㅁ for a 우.** Just remember that this rule only applies to descriptive verbs – *if you're describing something with it, it's a descriptive verb.*

Take the verb "부럽다," "to be jealous."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 부럽
(부럽 ends in ㅁ)
2. Since there's a ㅁ here, we will be trading it away for a 우, and 우 is not ㄴ or ㄷ so we will be conjugating this by adding 어 ⇒ 부럽 + 어
Remove the ㅁ ⇒ 부러
Add a 우 ⇒ 부러우
Now add on the 어 ⇒ 부러우어
But wait! 부러우 ends in a vowel with no consonants on the bottom, so we should combine the ending here ⇒ 부러워
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 부러워요

Take the verb "맵다," "to be spicy."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 맵
(맵 ends in ㅁ)
2. Since there's a ㅁ here, we will be trading it away for a 우, and 우 is not ㄴ or ㄷ so we will be conjugating this by adding 어 ⇒ 맵 + 어
Remove the ㅁ ⇒ 매패
Add a 우 ⇒ 매패우
Now add on the 어 ⇒ 매패우어
매패우 ends in a vowel with no consonants on the bottom, so we should combine the ending here too ⇒ 매패워
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 매패워요

Remember that this only applies to descriptive verbs, and not to action verbs. For example, take the verb "씹다," "to chew." "To chew" is an action verb, so when conjugating it, here is all that you have to do:

Take the verb "씹다," "to chew."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 씹
2. The last vowel is ㅣ (not ㅏ or ㅑ), which means we add 어 ⇒ 씹어
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 씹어요

Exception 5: 하다

"하다" is one of the most commonly used verbs in the Korean language, and has a special way of conjugating. Fortunately for us, it's easy. "하다" simply becomes "해," to which you can add 요 onto. **All verbs that end with 하다 also conjugate this way**, such as "똑똑하다," "to be smart," or "공부하다," "to study."

Take the verb "하다."

1. Remove the 다 ⇒ 하
2. This is a special verb, so it does not add 아 – it just becomes 해*
3. Add a 요 to the end ⇒ 해요

*Sometimes you might see "하여" used instead of "해," and this is common in older written materials – you won't need to use it yourself, but just be able to recognize what it is.

Exception 5: 이다 and 아니다

As "이다," "to be," is also one of the most commonly used verbs in the Korean language, it too has a special way of conjugating. It's simple, but it has a couple of rules to it. "이다" becomes "이에요" when used after a consonant, or "예요" when used after a vowel. However, you cannot simply remove the 요 here to make it casual; if you want to say it without the 요 (for casual speech), it becomes "이야" when used after a consonant, or "야" when used after a vowel.

“아니다” is a bit simpler to conjugate. It becomes “아니예요,” whether it comes after a consonant or a vowel. To make it casual, it becomes “아니야,” also whether it comes after a consonant or a vowel.

“이다,” “to be”

Polite:

- Consonant + 이에요
- Vowel + 예요

Casual:

- Consonant + 이야
- Vowel + 아

“아니다,” “to not be”

Polite:

- 아니예요

Casual:

- 아니야

Exception 6: ???

Just kidding, there's no Exception 6. But there are some other irregular verbs that have their own way of conjugating – for these, you'll simply learn them on a case by case basis, and there are not a lot of them.

One example of a common irregular is the verb “걷다,” “to walk.” If this verb wasn't irregular, it would conjugate as “걸어요,” but for many verbs that end in ㄷ (such as 걷다), the ㄷ changes into an ㅁ. Therefore, this verb actually becomes “걸어요.” However, the verb “믿다,” “to believe,” just conjugates as “믿어요.”

I know that this lesson was a lot to process, so I highly recommend reading it over again. Also, practice conjugating a few verbs on your own. The best way to get fast at these is to practice them. And although it seems like there are a lot of rules, over time you'll develop a

sense that will let you feel how verbs should conjugate based on how they sound. Until then, these are the rules you'll need to train that sense.

And that's it! These are all of the rules for conjugating verbs to the ~요 form. I hope this lesson was helpful as well. Your feedback is more than appreciated.

