

## Learn Korean Ep. 21: How to speak polite Korean

Unless your purpose for learning Korean is to communicate only with friends at school, or maybe with a boyfriend or girlfriend, knowing how to speak polite Korean will be necessary and beneficial to everyone. In this lesson I'll first go over the situations where it's **okay** to speak casually in Korean – by “casually” I mean using slang, removing the “요” at the end of verb conjugation, etc. Then I'll go over ways to speak politely.

### When it's okay to speak casually:

In some situations, it can be **better** to speak casually – or at the very least, acceptable.

- ✓ Close friends of the same age or younger
- ✓ Boyfriend / Girlfriend
- ✓ Small children
- ✓ Family members
- ✓ Animals
- ✓ When given permission

By “close friend,” I mean someone who you're already well acquainted with; **it's not acceptable to use casual speech the first time you're meeting someone**, even if they're being introduced as a new friend. Make sure they're the same age as you or younger as well before speaking casually.

It's fine to use casual language with a boyfriend or girlfriend, even if they are older than you. However, **some couples might still prefer using at least some level of politeness when speaking to each other**, so it depends on the couple's wants. In general, it's acceptable.

When speaking with small children, it's okay to speak casually. You're free to speak politely as well, but it's not expected.

It's also fine to speak casually to other family members, including parents, though you may sometimes hear people speak politely to their parents – this is simply a matter of choice.

When speaking to animals (these situations can happen), **only use casual speech**. It can be seen as impolite to speak politely to an animal, while speaking the same level to a human.

On a case by case basis, some Koreans may give you permission to speak casually, even if they are older than you. In these cases, feel free to do so.

**For all other situations, you will need to speak polite Korean.** But speaking polite Korean isn't as difficult, or tedious, as it may sound. Let's go over how to do it.

### How to speak polite Korean:

- ✓ Use the "~요 form" or "~니다 form"
- ✓ Use 저 instead of 나
- ✓ Avoid slang and abbreviations
- ✓ Use particles and markers
- ✓ Use polite forms of particles

Use the "~요" form, or the "~니다" form, when speaking (for how to conjugate the "~요" form, see Episode 2). I'll go over how to conjugate the "~니다" form in this lesson.

Use "저" when referring to yourself instead of "나." Also, **avoid using "너"** when referring to other people in any non-casual situation. Even in many casual situations, "너" can sound rude, as it is considered another step lower in politeness; the same goes for calling out to people by saying "야."

Avoid slang, of course, but also be careful of abbreviations. A common abbreviation is "게," which is a shortened form of "것이." It isn't rude in itself at all, but it should be avoided in situations where you need to be polite.

Use particles (such as the Topic Marker, the Subject Marker, and Object Markers) wherever they normally should be used. It's common when speaking informally to leave them off, but it's proper to return them to their natural habitat when speaking politely.

Use the polite forms of particles when you're able to. An example would be using "께" instead of "에게" ("to" or "from" a person – see Episode 8) whenever referring to someone who you should normally show respect to, such as a teacher ("선생님") or when saying "부모님." It would be best to use "께" in these situations, or perhaps "에게" if you're not certain, but it would be a bit impolite to use "한테(서)," which is casual. Another example is using "와/과" for connecting words together, instead of the casual "(이)랑" (see Episode 20).

### Good examples:

선생님께 선물을 받았어요.

"I received a present from the teacher."

친구와 밥을 먹었어요.

"I ate with a friend."

### Bad examples:

선생님한테서 선물을 받았어요.

"I received a present from the teacher."

친구랑 밥 먹었어요.

"I ate with a friend."

This sentence is actually correct, and fine to use when speaking in a regular situation (since it uses the "~요" form), but it does not sound that polite because of its use of "랑;" it should therefore not be used in any formal situation.

There are other ways to sound polite as well, but these are the most basic and essential tips to follow.

## "~니다" form

You may have heard that the "~니다" form (e.g. "입니다," or "합니다") is only used in formal situations. While it's true that it is used in formal situations, it can also be used in regular situations when the speaker wants to sound a little extra polite – such as meeting people for the first time who are older than you, or for job interviews. Here's how to conjugate it:

## verb stem + ㅂ니다/습니다

Just take the verb stem (the verb with the "다" removed) and add either "ㅂ니다" if it ends in a vowel, or "습니다" if it ends in a consonant.

### Take the verb "가다," "to go."

1. Remove the "다" ⇨ "가"
2. It ends in a vowel, so add "ㅂ니다" ⇨ "갑니다"

### Take the verb "먹다," "to eat."

1. Remove the "다" ⇨ "먹"
2. It ends in a consonant, so add "습니다" ⇨ "먹습니다"

The only exception is for verbs that end with "르" – in these cases, simply remove the "르."

### Take the verb "살다," "to live."

1. Remove the "다" ⇨ "살"
2. It ends in "르," so remove it ⇨ "사"
3. Now it ends in a vowel, so add "ㅂ니다" ⇨ "삽니다"

This can work with any verb tense. Here are a few more examples:

### Let's try "가다" in the past tense (see Episode 15):

1. Take the past tense of "가다," without any additional conjugation ⇨ "갔다"
2. Remove the "다" ⇨ "갔"
3. It ends in a consonant, so add "습니다" ⇨ "갔습니다"

Note that **all past tense forms will add "습니다"** since all past tense verb stems end in "ㅅ".

### Let's try "먹다" in the future tense with "~겠다" (see Episode 16):

1. Take the future tense of "먹다," without any additional conjugation ⇨ "먹겠다"
2. Remove the "다" ⇨ "먹겠"
3. It ends in a consonant, so add "습니다" ⇨ "먹겠습니다"

Note that all future tense conjugations using “~겠다” will add “습니다.” However, there is one more way to make the future tense, as we learned in Episode 16.

**Let's try “먹다” in the future tense with “ㄹ/을 것이다” (see Episode 16):**

1. Take the future tense of “먹다,” without any additional conjugation ⇒ “먹을 것이다”
2. Remove the “다” ⇒ “먹을 것이”
3. It ends in a vowel, so add “습니다” ⇒ “먹을 것입니다” (or “먹을 겁니다”)

Here are some example sentences using the “~니다” form:

학교에 **갑니다**.

“I go to school.”

컴퓨터를 하고 **있습니다**.

“I am using the computer.”

“컴퓨터(를) 하다” means “to use the computer.”

오늘 운동을 **했습니다**.

“I exercised today.”

“운동(을) 하다” means “to exercise.”

한국어 시험이 **어려웠습니까?**

“Was the Korean test difficult?”

클럽에 가서 춤을 **춥니다**.

“I’m going to a club and dancing.”

“클럽” means “a club,” and “춤(을) 추다” means “to dance.”

클럽에 가서 춤을 **출 겁니다**.

“I will go to a club and dance.”

“겁니다” is another way to say “것입니다” (future tense), and is still polite.

음식이 입에 맞으면 **좋겠습니다**.

“I hope that the food is to your liking.”

“입에 맞다” means “to be to one’s liking (food)” – it literally means “to match the mouth.”

Read over this lesson again, and practice making your own sentences using the “~니다” form. Being polite in Korean, when in the right situations, will earn you respect from others, and show Koreans that you appreciate and truly understand their culture.

