

Learn Korean Ep. 34: "Can" and "Can't"

This lesson will go over how to say "can" and "can't" in Korean. Specifically, this is for talking about things that a person is **capable of** doing, or **not capable of** doing.

Can: verb stem + 을/ㄹ 수 있다

Can't: verb stem + 을/ㄹ 수 없다

Take the verb stem and add "을" if it ends in a consonant, or "ㄹ" if it ends in a vowel. Then add 수. Finally, attach the verb "있다" ("to exist") if you want to say "can." Attach the verb "없다" ("to not exist") if you want to say "can't."

할 수 있어요.

"I can do it."

할 수 없어요.

"I can't do it."

먹을 수 있어요.

"I can eat it."

먹을 수 없어요.

"I can't eat it."

It's pretty straightforward. Let's look at some real example sentences.

내일 식당에 갈 수 있어요?

"Can you go to the restaurant tomorrow?"

"식당" means "restaurant."

이해할 수 없으면 물어보세요.

"Ask me if you can't understand."

"이해하다" means "to understand," and "물어보다" means "to ask."

철수는 할 수 있다고 말했어요.

"Cheolsoo said that he can do it."

Can't: verb stem + 지 못하다

Here's one more form to learn – a second way to say "can't." It's a bit shorter and simpler.

Take the verb stem and add "지," then add the verb "못하다." If the verb that you're working with is just the verb "하다" then all you have to do is change it to "못하다" and you're done.

못해요.

"I can't do it."

저는 영어를 못해요.

"I can't speak English." (Literally this means "I can't do English")

저는 우유를 마시지 못합니다.

"I can't drink milk."

Additional Notes

There is one more way to say "can't" in Korean, and it's even simpler than the above two methods. However, because the rules to apply it are not simple, I'm putting it into a separate section. Feel free to read this section over if you're interested, but learn the above forms first.

못 + Pure-Korean verb

Isn't that simple? Just add "못" before a Pure-Korean verb, and you're done. But what is a Pure-Korean verb? Check out the PDF lesson file for Episode 7, in which I go over this in more detail. If you already know what a Pure-Korean verb is, then feel free to use this form.

못 가요.

"I can't go."

못 했어요.

"I couldn't do it."

오늘 못 온다고 했어요.

"He said that he can't come today."

Conclusion

Feel free to skip the above purple section if this is your first time learning how to say "can" and "can't," as it contains more intermediate level information.

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

