Learn Korean Ep. 7: Negative Sentences

What is a negative sentence? In English we might say "I study Korean" – this would be a normal sentence. A negative version of the same sentence would be "I **do not** study Korean."

There are two ways to make a sentence negative. One way is by taking the verb stem (remember that the verb stem is just the verb with the 다 removed) and attaching "지 않다," and then conjugating the "않다" part at the end. Another way is by simply adding "안" before the verb, and conjugating the verb like normal.

Is there a difference between "~지 않다" and "안?" Yes, but it's not a big difference; "안" sounds a bit more informal than "~지 않다."

verb stem + 지 않다

You can make any verb negative by taking its verb stem and attaching "지 않다" onto the end. Then, simply conjugate "않다" anyway you'd like. Here are some example sentences:

저는 한국말을 자주 공부하**지 않아요**.
"I <u>do not</u> study Korean often."

날씨가 좋**지 않습니다**.
"The weather <u>is not good</u>."

그렇게 나쁘**지 않아**.
"<u>It's not</u> that bad."
"그렇게" means "that" or "so," and is used as an adverb.

You can also use "~지 않다" when asking questions to convey the meaning of "Don't you?" or "Aren't you?" In English, you'd have to rearrange the words in a sentence when asking questions like this, but in Korean the word order stays the same.

김치를 좋아하**지 않아요**?
"<u>Don't</u> you <u>like</u> kimchi?"

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그 여자를 사랑하**지 않아**?
"<u>Don't</u> you <u>love</u> her?"

Sometimes you might see other particles attached between the "지" and the "않다" parts, such as "도," the subject marker (이/가) or the topic marker (은/는). This is perfectly normal.

그는 학교에 가**지도 않아요**.
"He <u>doesn't</u> *even* <u>go</u> to school."

And here are some common ways to conjugate "않다" as well:
- 않습니다   (more polite – only as a statement)
- 않습니까?   (more polite – only as a question)
- 않아요   (polite)
- 않아   (casual)

안 + verb

The other way to make a sentence negative is by adding "안" before the verb. Before I explain when it can be used, here are some examples (these sentences are for casual use only):

나는 **안 심심해**.
"<u>I am not bored.</u>"

학교에 **안 가**?
"<u>Aren't you going</u> to school?"

그거 **안 먹어**?
"<u>Aren't you going to eat</u> that?"
"거" is a common abbreviation of "것"

Which one can I use?

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So you've now learned how to use both "~지 않다" and "안" to make negative sentences, but the question is often asked, "Which one can I use?" There is a simple answer, and a not-so-simple answer to this question.

You can use "~지 않다" with any verb you'd like. You can use "안" with many verbs, but not with all verbs.

This is the simple answer. If you're not sure which verbs can use "안," then use "~지 않다" to make them negative. If you'd like the not-so-simple answer for exactly when you can use "안" then keep reading. If you're a beginner who's learning Korean, you may want to ignore the following section, which I've written in purple below.

About 60~65% of the Korean language comes from Chinese. Before 한글 was created, the only way to write was using the Chinese language, and only educated people could read and write Chinese. Due to China's long history with Korea, over time many words came into the Korean language – we call these words "Sino-Korean" ("Sino" means "China"). You can see an example of Chinese in Korea if you look at their numbers. "일, 이, 삼" is how Koreans count "1, 2, 3," but Koreans also have their own "Pure-Korean" numbers, which begin with "하나, 둘, 셋." These words did not come from China, which is why they're called "Pure-Korean."

So why is that important? Because only Pure-Korean verbs can use "안," and Sino-Korean verbs can only use "~지 않다." However, Pure-Korean verbs can also use "~지 않다," which is why I say that **if you're not sure if you can use "안," just use "~지 않다" to make a verb negative**.

There are some exceptions. "정하다" and "통하다" are Sino-Korean, but can also use "안."

How can I tell a Pure-Korean verb from a Sino-Korean verb? The short answer is "you can't," but there are some tricks that can help. For example, all verbs that only contain two characters will be Pure-Korean verbs. This includes many of the verbs you may already be familiar with such as "가다," "오다," "먹다," etc. However, this rule does not always include "하다," since "하다" appears in both Sino-Korean and Pure-Korean verbs.

Unless you're interested in learning which verbs came from China and which ones are Pure-Korean (even most native Koreans will not know) you will have to rely on what you've heard before, and use "안" with verbs that you know are okay to use them with.

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Okay, we're back now. To summarize what I've written above, you can use "안" only with verbs that you know it is okay to use "안" with; for all other verbs, use "~지 않다." **If you're not sure whether you can use "안" with a verb or not, just use "~지 않다."**

I hope this lesson will help you to make better negative sentences in Korean. I recommend that you practice by making your own example sentences with what we've gone over. Good luck in your studies!

그럼, 다음에 또 봐!

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