KR

KOREAN LESSON

Korean Grammar 2 · Chapter 2 · Honorifics

🙇 Honorifics and Humble Forms — 높임말과 낮춤말

*The speech level (Korean Grammar 2, chapter 1, Speech Levels in Depth) shows respect to the **listener**. **Honorifics** show respect to the **person you are talking about**, and **humble forms** lower **you** when you speak to or about someone senior. Together they make up **높임말** ("raising language"). This chapter covers the honorific verb suffix **-(으)시-**, the special honorific verbs and nouns, the particles **께서** and **께**, the humble verbs, and how to address people with **님** and **씨**.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Honour the doer of the action, never yourself.

A respected *subject* → **-(으)시-** on the verb (and 께서 after the subject); or a special honorific word.

A respected *receiver* of your action → a **humble** verb (드리다, 뵙다, 여쭙다, 모시다).

저 / 저희 replace **나 / 우리** when you speak to someone senior.

1. The honorific suffix -(으)시-

Attach **-시-** to a **vowel** stem and **-으시-** to a **consonant** stem, before any tense or ending: **가다 → 가시다**, **받다 → 받으시다**, **작다 → 작으시다**. It works on verbs and adjectives alike. Then the ending is added as usual.

PLAIN VERB	HONORIFIC STEM	해요체 (PRESENT)	합쇼체 (PRESENT)	PAST (해요체)	FUTURE (해요체)
가다 go	가시-	가세요	가십니다	가셨어요	가실 거예요
읽다 read	읽으시-	읽으세요	읽으십니다	읽으셨어요	읽으실 거예요
바쁘다 be busy	바쁘시-	바쁘세요	바쁘십니다	바쁘셨어요	바쁘실 거예요

PLAIN VERB	HONORIFIC STEM	해요체 (PRESENT)	합쇼체 (PRESENT)	PAST (해요체)	FUTURE (해요체)
살다 live (ㄹ stem)	**사시-**	**사세요**	**사십니다**	**사셨어요**	**사실 거예요**
이다 be (noun)	**(이)시-**	**선생님이세요**	**선생님이십니다**	**선생님이셨어요**	—

How the forms come about: **-시- + 어요 → -세요** (the everyday polite ending contracts), **-시- + ㅂ니다 → -십니다**, and the past is **-셨-**. A stem ending in ㄹ drops the ㄹ before -시-, as it does before -ㅂ니다 (**살다 → 사시다**, **만들다 → 만드시다**). The casual form is **-셔** (**선생님이 오셔**, "the teacher is coming"). The command **-(으)세요** and the formal command **-(으)십시오** are the same suffix. In 합쇼체 the question is **-(으)십니까?**.

> **Watch out: never honour yourself**
>
> Say **저는 학교에 가요**, never **저는 학교에 가세요**. -(으)시- is for the person you respect. For your own action toward a senior, use a humble verb (section 4), or the plain verb.

2. Special honorific verbs and nouns

A few common words do not take -(으)시-. They are replaced by a **different word**. You must memorise the pairs.

PLAIN	HONORIFIC	EVERYDAY POLITE HONORIFIC	MEANING
있다	**계시다**	**계세요**	be (somewhere); stay
있다 (to have)	**있으시다**	**있으세요**	have (**시간 있으세요?**)
먹다 / 마시다	**드시다** (also **잡수시다**)	**드세요**	eat; drink
자다	**주무시다**	**주무세요**	sleep

PLAIN	HONORIFIC	EVERYDAY POLITE HONORIFIC	MEANING
말하다	말씀하시다	말씀하세요	speak; say
배고프다	시장하시다	시장하세요	be hungry
죽다	돌아가시다	돌아가셨어요	pass away (a respectful way to say it)

PLAIN NOUN	HONORIFIC NOUN	MEANING
밥	진지	meal
나이	연세	age
이름	성함	name
집	댁	house; home
말	말씀	words; speech
사람	분	person

Kinship terms also take **-님** for elders: **할머니** → **할머님**, **아버지** → **아버님**. Questions you will hear: **성함이 어떻게 되세요?** ("may I have your name?") and **연세가 어떻게 되세요?** ("how old are you, sir/madam?"). Remember the speech level (Chapter 1) must also match: honorific nouns are used with a polite level, not with casual speech.

3. Particles: 께서 and 께

When the subject is respected, the subject particle **이/가** changes to **께서**, and the topic **은/는** to **께서는**. The dative **에게 / 한테** ("to") changes to **께**. The place particle 에 has no honorific form for things.

PLAIN	HONORIFIC
선생님이 오세요.	**선생님께서 오세요.** The teacher is coming.

PLAIN	HONORIFIC
할머니는 주무세요.	**할머니께서는 주무세요.** Grandmother is sleeping.
친구에게 선물을 줘요.	**선생님께 선물을 드려요.** I give a present to the teacher.

Notice the last row: giving to a respected person needs **both** the particle **께** and the humble verb **드리다**.

4. Humble forms: lowering yourself

A humble verb is used for **your own action** directed at someone you respect. It does not honour the subject: it honours the **receiver**.

PLAIN	HUMBLE	EXAMPLE
주다 give	**드리다**	**선생님께 책을 드렸어요.** I gave the teacher a book.
-아/어 주다 do for	**-아/어 드리다**	**도와 드릴게요.** I'll help you.
보다 / 만나다 see; meet	**뵙다**	**내일 뵙겠습니다.** I'll see you tomorrow.
묻다 ask	**여쭙다 / 여쭈다**	**하나 여쭤봐도 될까요?** May I ask something?
데리고 가다 take (someone)	**모시고 가다**	**부모님을 모시고 가요.** I take my parents along.
말하다 tell	**말씀드리다**	**제가 말씀드릴게요.** I'll tell you.

The pronouns follow the same logic: **나** → **저** ("I") and **우리** → **저희** ("we", humble) when speaking to a senior or a customer. **말씀** is two-faced: it is the honorific word for *their* speech (**선생님 말씀**) and the humble word for *your* speech to them (**말씀드리다**).

> **Watch out: no "you" for a senior**
>
> Second-person pronouns are avoided in honorific speech. Use the person's **title** + **님** (**선생님**, **사장님**) or a name, not **너**. The pronoun **당신** is described as used only between married partners, or

sarcastically between strangers, so it is not a safe "you" for a learner. For a respected third person who is present or absent you can say **그분** ("that person", honorific), from **분** above.

5. Titles: 님 and 씨

- **-님** is the highest form of address. It goes on titles and kinship terms (**선생님**, **사장님**, **부장님**) and is used for customers, guests and people you do not know (**손님**). A title is not used bare to someone senior: **사장님**, not 사장.
- **-씨** is used between people of about equal rank, after a full name or first name: **민수 씨**, **김민수 씨**. A **surname alone with 씨** (**김 씨**) can sound rude.
- A person's name with a space and 님 (**민수 님**) is also heard, especially online and in service settings.

Watch out: honouring a person who is below another senior

Traditional etiquette (**압존법**, "relative honorifics") dropped the honorific for someone junior to the person you are speaking to: a child told a grandparent **할아버지, 아버지가 아직 안 왔습니다** ("Grandfather, father hasn't come yet"), without the honorific on *father*. Today at work this is considered out of date, and people use the honorific for their own senior even to a more senior listener: **부장님, 이 과장님은 지금 자리에 안 계십니다** ("Director, Manager Lee is not at the moment"). Family usage still varies.

Watch out: do not honour objects

A common service-language habit is to use -(으)시- on objects: **커피 나오셨습니다** ("your coffee has come out, sir/madam"). The honorific goes with *people*, so the correct form is **커피 나왔습니다**. This is general knowledge about usage and was not in the sources consulted for this chapter.

In Use — 실제 예문

Honorific and humble forms in four settings.

① Visiting grandparents

A:

② A phone call

A:

할머니, 진지 드셨어요?

Grandmother, have you had your meal?

B:

그래, 먹었다. 너는 먹었니?

Yes, I've eaten. Have you eaten?

김 부장님 계세요?

Is Director Kim there?

B:

지금 회의 중이십니다. 메모 남겨 드릴까요?

He is in a meeting at the moment. Shall I leave a message for him?

③ In the classroom

A:

선생님, 하나 여쭤봐도 될까요?

Teacher, may I ask something?

B:

네, 말씀하세요.

Yes, go ahead.

④ Meeting someone senior

A:

성함이 어떻게 되세요?

May I have your name?

B:

박민수입니다. 만나 뵙게 되어 반갑습니다.

I'm Park Minsu. I'm glad to meet you.

📋 Quick Reference — 요약표

JOB	FORM	EXAMPLE
honour the subject	-(으)시- + ending	**가세요**, **읽으세요**
special words	계시다, 드시다, 주무시다, 말씀하시다	**드세요**, **주무세요**
honorific nouns	진지, 연세, 성함, 댁, 말씀, 분	**성함이 어떻게 되세요?**
honorific particles	께서, 께서는, 께	**선생님께서**, **선생님께**
humble verbs	드리다, 뵙다, 여쭙다, 모시다, 말씀드리다	**도와 드릴게요**
humble pronouns	저, 저희	**저희 회사**
titles	님 (senior, customers); 씨 (equals)	**사장님**, **민수 씨**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — 연습

Work out the answer first, then click to check.

1. Make these honorific (해요체): **가요**, **읽어요**, **바빠요**.

▼ Show answer

가세요 · **읽으세요** · **바쁘세요**

2. Make it honorific: **할머니는 밥을 먹어요.** (Grandmother is eating.)

▼ Show answer

할머니께서는 진지를 드세요.

3. Make it honorific: **선생님이 자요.** (The teacher is sleeping.)

▼ Show answer

선생님께서 주무세요.

4. Say "I'll give this to the teacher."

▼ Show answer

이것을 선생님께 드릴게요.

5. What is wrong with **저는 내일 가세요**? Correct it.

▼ Show answer

It honours the speaker. Correct: **저는 내일 가요.**

6. Say in 합쇼체: "The president is in the office."

▼ Show answer

사장님은 사무실에 계십니다.

7. Ask politely for someone's name and age.

▼ Show answer

성함이 어떻게 되세요? 연세가 어떻게 되세요?

8. Say "May I ask you something?" to a teacher.

▼ Show answer

하나 여쭤봐도 될까요?

Coming up in Chapter 3: Irregular Verbs and Adjectives. You will learn the ㅂ-, ㄷ-, ㅅ-, ㅎ-, ㅡ-, 르- and ㄹ-irregulars, with a full conjugation table for each, since the clause endings in the chapters after that need them.