KR

KOREAN LESSON

Korean Grammar 2 · Chapter 3 · Irregular Verbs

🔀 Irregular Verbs and Adjectives — 불규칙 용언

*So far every stem has simply taken its ending. Some stems change a sound when they meet certain endings. These are the **irregular** verbs and adjectives (**불규칙 용언**), and they are common: 춥다, 듣다, 쓰다, 모르다 and 살다 are all irregular. The changes follow patterns, so each type can be learned as a rule plus a short list. This chapter gives each rule, a full conjugation table, and the **regular look-alikes** that do not change. It is placed before the clause chapters, because the clause endings in Chapters 5 to 9 need these forms.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

First find the **last sound of the stem** and the **first sound of the ending**:
vowel-initial ending (-아/어요, -았/었-, -아/어서, -(으)ㄴ, -(으)ㄹ, -(으)면, -(으)니까, -(으)세요) → many irregulars change.
consonant-initial ending (-고, -지만, -습니다, -는) → most irregulars stay as they are (the main exception is ㄹ).
Learn each class by its **final letter**: ㅂ · ㄷ · ㅅ · ㅎ · ㅡ · 르 · ㄹ.

Where you met these before

Korean Basic Conversation 2 (chapter 4, Describing) introduced the ㅂ-irregular, and chapter 11 (Opinions) the 르-irregular. Korean Grammar 1 (chapter 6, Verbs 1: The Everyday Polite Present) gave the vowel rule for -아요/-어요 and the ㅡ-stem contractions you need here: 쓰다 → 써요. This chapter collects them in one place, adds the others, and shows each with the endings from later chapters.

1. Quick map of the classes

CLASS	WHICH WORDS	WHAT HAPPENS	EXAMPLE
ㅂ	many adjectives, some verbs	ㅂ → 우 before a vowel	**춥다 → 추워요**
ㄷ	verbs only	ㄷ → ㄹ before a vowel	**듣다 → 들어요**

CLASS	WHICH WORDS	WHAT HAPPENS	EXAMPLE
ㅅ	a few verbs and 낫다	ㅅ drops before a vowel	**짓다 → 지어요**
ㅎ	colour adjectives, 그렇다 and kin	ㅎ drops, and 아/어 merges	**빨갛다 → 빨개요**
ㅡ	stems ending in ㅡ	ㅡ drops before 아/어	**쓰다 → 써요**
르	most stems ending in 르	르 → ㄹㄹ before 아/어	**모르다 → 몰라요**
ㄹ	stems ending in ㄹ	ㄹ drops before ㄴ, ㅂ, ㅅ	**살다 → 삽니다**
러	푸르다, 이르다 (arrive), 누르다 (be yellow)	ending is 러, not 어	**푸르다 → 푸르러요**

2. The ㅂ-irregular

When a stem ends in ㅂ and the ending begins with a vowel, **ㅂ becomes 우**, and the 우 merges with 어 to 워: **춥다 → 추워요**. Before a consonant-initial ending the ㅂ stays: **춥고**, **춥습니다**. Most ㅂ-irregulars are adjectives: **덥다** (hot), **쉽다** (easy), **어렵다** (difficult), **맵다** (spicy), **가깝다** (near), **무겁다** (heavy), **귀엽다** (cute), **그립다** (miss), and the verb **눕다** (lie down).

Special case: 돕다 and 곱다. The two stems **돕다** (help) and **곱다** (pretty) change ㅂ to **와** before 아/어: **도와요**, **고와요**; before other vowels it is the normal 우: **도우면**.

Regular look-alikes (no change): 입다 (wear), **잡다** (catch), **좁다** (narrow), **씹다** (chew), **뽑다** (pick), **넓다** (wide): **입어요**, **좁아요**, **넓어요**. You must learn which -ㅂ words are regular.

3. The ㄷ-irregular

A **verb** stem ending in ㄷ changes to ㄹ before a vowel: **듣다 → 들어요** (listen), **걷다 → 걸어요** (walk), **묻다 → 물어요** (ask). It is verbs only. **Regular look-alikes: 받다** (receive), **닫다** (close), **믿다** (believe), **얻다** (get). **묻다** "to bury" and **걷다** "to roll up" are regular, so check the meaning: **질문을 물어요** (ask) but **땅에 묻어요** (bury).

4. The ㅅ-irregular

A stem ending in ㅅ **drops the** ㅅ before a vowel: **짓다 → 지어요** (build; make), **낫다 → 나아요** (get better), **붓다 → 부어요** (pour; swell), **잇다 → 이어요** (connect). The two vowels stay separate: 지어요, not 져요. **Regular look-alikes: 웃다** (laugh), **씻다** (wash), **벗다** (take off): **웃어요**, **씻어요**, **벗어요**.

5. The ㅎ-irregular

This class is made of **colour adjectives** and a few "how/like that" adjectives: **빨갛다** (red), **노랗다** (yellow), **파랗다** (blue), **하얗다** (white), **까맣다** (black), **그렇다** (be so), **이렇다**, **어떻다** (be how). The ㅎ **drops** before a vowel and the vowel of the ending merges with the stem, so 아/어 becomes **애** (or **얘** after ㅑ): **빨갛다 → 빨개요**, **하얗다 → 하얘요**, **그렇다 → 그래요**, **어떻다 → 어때요**. Before **-(으)ㄴ** the ㅎ simply drops: **빨간**, **노란**, **하얀**. Before -ㅂ니다 and consonant endings it stays: **빨갛습니다**, **빨갛고**. **좋다 is regular** (**좋아요**, **좋은**), and so are **많다**, **괜찮다**, **싫다** and the verbs **낳다**, **놓다**, **쌓다**.

6. The ㅡ-irregular

A stem whose last vowel is ㅡ loses it before **아/어**. To choose between 아 and 어, look at the vowel in the *syllable before* the ㅡ: ㅏ or ㅗ gives 아, anything else gives 어, and a **one-syllable stem** (쓰, 크, 끄) takes 어:

- **바쁘다 → 바빠요** (preceding vowel ㅏ → 아), **아프다 → 아파요**, **나쁘다 → 나빠요**, **고프다 → 고파요**
- **예쁘다 → 예뻐요** (ㅖ → 어), **슬프다 → 슬퍼요**, **기쁘다 → 기뻐요**
- **쓰다 → 써요**, **크다 → 커요**, **끄다 → 꺼요**, **뜨다 → 떠요** (one syllable → 어)
- **잠그다 → 잠가요**, **담그다 → 담가요** (preceding vowel ㅏ → 아)

Before consonant endings or -(으)면, -(으)니까, -(으)ㄴ nothing changes: **쓰면**, **바쁘고**, **예쁜**, **바쁩니다**. A few stems ending in 르 follow this class and not the 르-class: **따르다 → 따라요** (follow), **치르다 → 치러요** (pay), **들르다 → 들러요** (drop in). Learn them as exceptions.

7. The 르-irregular

Most stems ending in **르** double the ㄹ before 아/어: the 르 splits, the ㅡ drops and the ㄹ joins the *previous* syllable. **모르다** → **몰라요** (모ㄹ + 라요), **다르다** → **달라요**, **고르다** → **골라요**, **빠르다** → **빨라요**, **자르다** → **잘라요**, **오르다** → **올라요**, **부르다** → **불러요**, **흐르다** → **흘러요**. The choice of 라 or 러 follows the same vowel rule as 아/어: ㅏ and ㅗ give 라, all others give 러. Before other endings, nothing changes: **모르면**, **모릅니다**, **모른**.

8. The ㄹ-irregular ("ㄹ-drop")

A stem ending in **ㄹ loses the ㄹ before ㄴ, ㅂ and ㅅ**: **살다** → **삽니다** (ㅂ), **사니까** (ㄴ), **사세요** (ㅅ of -(으)시-), **산** (modifier -ㄴ), **사는** (-는). Before every other ending the ㄹ stays, and endings that normally add 으 (-(으)면) do not add it after ㄹ: **살면** (not 살으면), **살아요**, **살고**. Common ㄹ-stems: **살다** (live), **알다** (know), **만들다** (make), **팔다** (sell), **열다** (open), **놀다** (play), **길다** (long), **멀다** (far).

9. The 러-irregular and 이다 / 아니다

Three adjectives take **러** instead of 어: **푸르다** → **푸르러요** (be blue-green), **이르다** → **이르러요** (reach), **누르다** → **누르러요** (be yellow). They are rare; the verb **누르다** "press" is the 르-class (**눌러요**). A related oddity is **푸다** (scoop): **퍼요** (the 우 drops).

이다 and **아니다** are special in a different way: **이다** attaches to the noun and changes with the final sound: **학생이에요 / 의사예요**, **학생이었어요 / 의사였어요**, **학생이고**, **학생이면**, **학생인**, **학생입니다**; **아니다**: **아니에요**, **아니었어요**, **아니고**, **아니면**, **아닌**, **아닙니다**.

10. Full conjugation tables

One example for each class, with a regular look-alike for comparison. The columns: 해요체 present, past, **-(으)면** (if), **-고** (and), **-(으)ㄴ** (modifier, for adjectives; for verbs the past modifier), and 합쇼체.

DICTIONARY FORM	해요체	PAST	-(으)면	-고	-(으)ㄴ	합쇼체
춥다 cold *(ㅂ)*	**추워요**	**추웠어요**	**추우면**	**춥고**	**추운**	**춥습니다**
입다 wear *(regular)*	**입어요**	**입었어요**	**입으면**	**입고**	**입은**	**입습니다**
듣다 listen *(ㄷ)*	**들어요**	**들었어요**	**들으면**	**듣고**	**들은**	**듣습니다**
받다 receive *(regular)*	**받아요**	**받았어요**	**받으면**	**받고**	**받은**	**받습니다**
짓다 build *(ㅅ)*	**지어요**	**지었어요**	**지으면**	**짓고**	**지은**	**짓습니다**
웃다 laugh *(regular)*	**웃어요**	**웃었어요**	**웃으면**	**웃고**	**웃은**	**웃습니다**
빨갛다 red *(ㅎ)*	**빨개요**	**빨갰어요**	**빨가면**	**빨갛고**	**빨간**	**빨갛습니다**
좋다 good *(regular)*	**좋아요**	**좋았어요**	**좋으면**	**좋고**	**좋은**	**좋습니다**
쓰다 write *(ㅡ)*	**써요**	**썼어요**	**쓰면**	**쓰고**	**쓴**	**씁니다**
바쁘다 busy *(ㅡ)*	**바빠요**	**바빴어요**	**바쁘면**	**바쁘고**	**바쁜**	**바쁩니다**
모르다 not know *(르)*	**몰라요**	**몰랐어요**	**모르면**	**모르고**	**모른**	**모릅니다**
살다 live *(ㄹ)*	**살아요**	**살았어요**	**살면**	**살고**	**산**	**삽니다**
만들다 make *(ㄹ)*	**만들어요**	**만들었어요**	**만들면**	**만들고**	**만든**	**만듭니다**

Watch out: the "-ㄴ" column mixes two jobs

For **adjectives**, -(으)ㄴ is the present modifier (**추운 날**, "a cold day"). For **verbs**, -(으)ㄴ is the *past* modifier (**들은 노래**, "a song I heard"), and the present modifier is -는 (**듣는 노래**, "a song I'm listening to"). Modifiers are the topic of Chapter 7.

Watch out: how to spot the class from the dictionary form

The letters give you only a guess: ㅂ, ㄷ, ㅅ, ㅎ, ㅡ, 르 and ㄹ at the end of the stem *might* be irregular, but many are regular (입다, 받다, 웃다, 좋다). Dictionaries mark the class; learn each new word with its 해요체 form (**춥다 / 추워요**) and you will never have to guess.

🗣️ In Use — 실제 예문

① A cold morning (ㅂ, ㄷ)

A:

오늘 정말 추워요. 저는 음악을 들어요.

It's really cold today. I'm listening to music.

B:

저는 더웠어요. 그래서 코트를 벗었어요.

I was hot. So I took my coat off.

② At work (ㅡ, 르, ㄹ)

A:

요즘 많이 바빠요? 이 일을 알아요?

Are you very busy these days? Do you know about this job?

B:

네, 많이 바빠요. 그리고 잘 몰라요. 사무실도 멀어요.

Yes, very busy. And I don't know it well. The office is far, too.

③ Describing colours (ㅎ)

A:

얼굴이 왜 이렇게 빨개요?

Why is your face so red?

B:

하얀 셔츠를 입었어요. 덥고 부끄러워요.

I put on a white shirt. I'm hot and I feel shy.

📋 Quick Reference — 요약표

CLASS	CHANGE	BEFORE VOWEL-INITIAL ENDING	BEFORE CONSONANT-INITIAL ENDING
ㅂ	ㅂ → 우	추워요, 추우면, 추운	춥고, 춥습니다
ㄷ	ㄷ → ㄹ	들어요, 들으면, 들은	듣고, 듣습니다

CLASS	CHANGE	BEFORE VOWEL-INITIAL ENDING	BEFORE CONSONANT-INITIAL ENDING
ㅅ	ㅅ drops	**지어요, 지으면, 지은**	**짓고, 짓습니다**
ㅎ	ㅎ drops; 아/어 → 애	**빨개요, 빨가면, 빨간**	**빨갛고, 빨갛습니다**
ㅡ	ㅡ drops before 아/어	**써요, 바빠요**	**쓰고, 쓰면, 바쁩니다**
르	르 → ㄹ라/ㄹ러 before 아/어	**몰라요, 불러요**	**모르고, 모르면, 모릅니다**
ㄹ	ㄹ drops before ㄴ, ㅂ, ㅅ	**살아요, 살면**	**삽니다, 사세요, 사니까, 산**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — 연습

Work out the answer first, then click to check.

1. Give the 해요체 of: **덥다**, **돕다**, **입다**.

▼ Show answer

더워요 · **도와요** · **입어요** (입다 is regular)

2. Give the past of: **듣다**, **걷다**, **받다**.

▼ Show answer

들었어요 · **걸었어요** · **받았어요** (받다 is regular)

3. Give the 해요체 of: **짓다**, **웃다**, **낫다**.

▼ Show answer

지어요 · **웃어요** (regular) · **나아요**

4. Say "The house is white" and "a red apple" with **하얗다** and **빨갛다**.

▼ Show answer

집이 하얘요. · **빨간 사과**

5. Give the 해요체 and past of **쓰다**, **예쁘다** and **크다**.

▼ Show answer

써요 / 썼어요 · **예뻐요 / 예뻤어요** · **커요 / 컸어요**

6. Give the 해요체 of **모르다**, **부르다**, **고르다**.

▼ Show answer

몰라요 · **불러요** · **골라요**

7. Give the 합쇼체 and the honorific 해요체 of **살다** and **만들다**.

▼ Show answer

삽니다 / 사세요 · **만듭니다 / 만드세요**

8. Which is regular: **닫다**, **묻다** (ask) or **믿다**? Give the 해요체 of each.

▼ Show answer

닫아요 and **믿어요** are regular. **묻다** "to ask" is ㄷ-irregular: **물어요**.

Coming up in Chapter 4: Tenses and Aspect. The past, the past perfect (-았/었었-), future and intent (-겠-, -(으)ㄹ 거예요), -고 있다 versus -아/어 있다, the "remembered past" -던 and the "since" pattern -(으)ㄴ 지.