KR

KOREAN LESSON

Korean Grammar 2 · Chapter 7 · Modifiers

🧩 Modifiers and Relative Clauses — 관형사형과 명사형

*English builds long noun phrases after the noun: "the book **that I read yesterday**". Korean puts the whole clause **before** the noun, with no "that / who / which" at all: **어제 읽은 책**. A verb or adjective that ends in a modifier ending (**관형사형**) works like a long adjective. This chapter gives the forms for every word class, how to read and write relative clauses, and the three ways of turning a whole clause into a noun: **-는 것**, **-기** and **-(으)ㅁ**.*

THE CORE PATTERN

[clause ending in a modifier] + noun

영어를 공부하는 학생 "the student who studies English"

어제 읽은 책 "the book (that) I read yesterday"

내일 만날 친구 "the friend (whom) I'll meet tomorrow"

The modifier ending carries the **tense** (present / past / future); the noun after it is the one being described, and it is simply "missing" from the clause.

1. The forms

	PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE	REMEMBERED / HABITUAL PAST
Verb	**-는** 가는, 먹는	**-(으)ㄴ** 간, 먹은	**-(으)ㄹ** 갈, 먹을	**-던 / -았/었던** 가던, 갔던
Adjective	**-(으)ㄴ** 큰, 좋은	**-았/었던** 컸던, 좋았던	**-(으)ㄹ** 클, 좋을	(same as past)
있다 / 없다	**-는** 있는, 없는	**-었던** 있었던, 없었던	**-을** 있을, 없을	있던, 없던
이다	**인** 학생인	**이었던 / 였던** 학생이었던	**일** 학생일	(same as past)

The three things that decide the form:

- **Verbs have all three plain tenses.** Present **-는**: **영어를 공부하는 학생** "the student who studies English". Past **-(으)ㄴ**: **한국어를 가르친 선생님** "the teacher who taught Korean". Future **-(으)ㄹ**: **한국어를 가르칠 선생님** "the teacher who will teach Korean". For -던 see Chapter 4.
- **Adjectives use -(으)ㄴ for the present**, not for the past: **예쁜 여자** "a pretty girl", **똑똑한 학생** "a smart student", **가까운 좌석** "a closer seat". For an adjective in the past use -았/었던: **예뻤던 여자**, **시끄러웠던 교실** "the classroom that was noisy".
- **있다 / 없다 behave like verbs** in the present (**-는**): **돈이 있는 사람** "a person who has money", **재미있는 영화**, **맛없는 음식**. This is general knowledge; the sources checked for this chapter were not conclusive on this point.

The same applies to compounds of 있다/없다 (맛있다, 재미있다, 관심 없다). The helper 싶다 takes **-은**, as an adjective: **이 수업을 등록하고 싶은 사람이 적어요** "Few people want to register for this class".

2. Spelling rules

STEM TYPE	-는 (PRESENT)	-(으)ㄴ (PAST/ADJ.)	-(으)ㄹ (FUTURE)
vowel stem	**가는**	**간** · **큰** (ㄴ)	**갈** (ㄹ)
consonant stem	**먹는**	**먹은** · **좋은** (은)	**먹을** (을)
ㄹ-stem	**사는** · **만드는** (ㄹ drops)	**산** · **만든** (ㄹ drops)	**살** · **만들** (ㄹ stays)
ㅂ-irregular	**돕는**	**도운** · **추운**	**도울** · **추울**
ㄷ-irregular	**듣는**	**들은**	**들을**
ㅅ-irregular	**짓는**	**지은**	**지을**
ㅎ-irregular	(adjectives only)	**빨간** · **하얀**	**빨갈**
ㅡ and 르 stems	**쓰는** · **모르는**	**쓴** · **모른** · **바쁜**	**쓸** · **모를**

Remember that ㅂ-, ㄷ- and ㅅ-stems change only before a *vowel*, and -(으)ㄴ / -(으)ㄹ count here as vowel-initial endings, while -는 starts with a consonant, so the stem is unchanged (**듣는**, **짓는**, **돕는**). The ㄹ-stem rule is the mirror of Chapter 3: the ㄹ drops before -는 and -ㄴ, but stays before -ㄹ (**사는 집**, **산 집**, **살 집**).

3. Building relative clauses

A relative clause is just an ordinary sentence with the described noun left out and the verb or adjective turned into a modifier. The noun can be any part of the original sentence:

ROLE OF THE NOUN	ORIGINAL SENTENCE	MODIFIER CLAUSE + NOUN
subject	**학생이 영어를 공부해요.**	**영어를 공부하는 학생**
object	**제가 책을 읽었어요.**	**제가 읽은 책**
place	**제가 집에서 살아요.**	**제가 사는 집**
time	**제가 그때 태어났어요.**	**제가 태어난 때**
possession	**친구가 돈이 있어요.**	**돈이 있는 친구**

More: **옆에 사는 이웃은 너무 시끄러워요** "The neighbour who lives next door is too noisy"; **이 동네에서 축구를 잘 하는 청소년들이 많아요** "There are many young people in this area who are good at football"; **제가 받을 점수는 중요해요** "The score I will receive is important".

Particles inside the clause. The clause's own subject is usually marked with 이/가 (**제가 읽은 책**); the topic marker 은/는 is normally avoided inside a modifier clause, though it can appear for contrast. This tip is from general knowledge. A relative clause can be long, and can itself sit inside a longer sentence: **친구가 선물한 책을 읽고 있어요** "I'm reading the book that my friend gave me".

4. When the head noun is a placeholder

Where English says "the thing that", "the place where", "the person who" or "the time when", Korean uses a general noun after the modifier:

- **것** "thing": **먹을 것** "something to eat", **마실 것** "something to drink", **읽을 것** "something to read"
- **곳 / 데** "place": **살 곳** "a place to live", **갈 데가 없어요** "There's nowhere to go"
- **사람** "person": **저를 도와 주는 사람** "the person who helps me"
- **때** "time": **어렸을 때** "when I was little" (Chapter 5)
- **일** "thing to do / matter": **할 일** "things to do", **오늘 할 일이 많아요** "I have a lot to do today"

5. Clauses turned into nouns: -는 것

To say "*doing* X" or "*that* X happens" as the subject or object of a sentence, put -는 것 (present), -(으)ㄴ 것 (past) or -(으)ㄹ 것 (future) after the clause, then add the particle:

- **담배를 피우는 것은 건강에 나빠요.** "Smoking is bad for your health."
- **이 문제를 극복하는 것이 힘들 거예요.** "It will be difficult to overcome this problem."
- **저는 친구가 사과를 가져오는 것을 원해요.** "I want my friend to bring apples."
- **제 취미는 요리하는 것이에요.** "My hobby is cooking." (이다 follows -는 것: **-는 것이다**)

In speech 것 + 이/을/은 usually contracts: **것이** → **게**, **것은** → **건**, **것을** → **걸**, **것이에요** → **거예요**. So **요리하는 게 재미있어요** "Cooking is fun". Notice that the (으)ㄹ 거예요 of Chapter 4 is this same *것이에요*.

6. Clauses turned into nouns: -기

Verb stem + **-기** turns a verb into a noun without any tense, and is common with a fixed set of predicates:

- **-기 시작하다** "begin to": **밥을 먹기 시작했어요**
- **-기 싫다** "not want to": **쌀을 씻기 싫어요**
- **-기 좋다 / 쉽다 / 어렵다** "easy to … / hard to …": **이 책은 읽기 쉬워요**
- **-기 전에** "before" (Chapter 6) and **-기 위해** "in order to" (Chapter 6)

The -기 forms of irregulars never change (they start with a consonant): **듣기**, **춥기**, **살기** (a noun use: **듣기** and **읽기** are also the names of the listening and reading tests). Fixed nouns made

with -기: **달리기** (running), **줄넘기** (skipping rope). For most other sentences, -는 것 is the more natural choice: "I want my friend to bring apples" is -는 것 (**가져오는 것**), not 가져오기.

7. Clauses turned into nouns: -(으)ㅁ

Vowel stem + **-ㅁ**, consonant stem + **-음** makes a noun, but it mostly gives **set nouns** that you learn as vocabulary, and a clause nominalised with -(으)ㅁ is a written or formal style:

VERB / ADJECTIVE	NOUN	MEANING
싸우다	**싸움**	fight
기쁘다	**기쁨**	joy
돕다	**도움**	help
걷다	**걸음**	step, walk
죽다	**죽음**	death
느끼다	**느낌**	feeling
살다	**삶**	life

Examples: **나는 아빠의 죽음을 잊지 않았어** "I didn't forget my father's death"; **나는 형이랑 싸움에서 이겼어** "I won the fight with my brother". The irregulars show up here as nouns (돕다 → 도움, 걷다 → 걸음). The clause use (**나는 네가 먹고 있음을 알았어** "I knew you were eating") is rare in speech and found in books and notices.

	-는 것	-기	-(으)ㅁ
Tense	present / past / future	none	none (+ -았/었음)
Where	everywhere	fixed expressions	set nouns; formal writing
Example	**요리하는 것**	**요리하기 싫다**	**도움**

> **Watch out: the adjective that "looks" past**

The -(으)ㄴ ending on an **adjective** is the *present* (**큰 집** = a big house, not "a house that was big"). On a **verb** the very same -(으)ㄴ is past (**먹은 밥** = rice that was eaten). Check the word class first.

Watch out: 있다 and 없다 are not adjectives here

Although 있다/없다 translate like adjectives ("have", "not have"), they take **-는** as verbs do: **있는**, **없는**, **재미있는**. The form **있은** is not used.

In Use — 실제 예문

① Describing people

A:

저기 앉아 있는 사람이 누구예요?

Who is the person sitting over there?

B:

어제 우리 반에 온 학생이에요. 한국어를 잘하는 사람이에요.

It's the student who joined our class yesterday. They're someone who speaks Korean well.

② Things and places

A:

내일 만날 친구가 먹을 것을 살 거예요.

The friend I'm meeting tomorrow will buy something to eat.

B:

좋아요! 우리가 갈 곳은 제가 어렸을 때 살던 동네예요.

Great! The place we're going is the neighbourhood where I lived when I was little.

③ Hobbies

A:

취미가 뭐예요?

What's your hobby?

B:

제 취미는 책을 읽는 거예요. 읽기 쉬운 책이 좋아요.

My hobby is reading books. I like books that are easy to read.

📋 Quick Reference — 요약표

WORD CLASS	PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
Verb	가는 사람	간 사람	갈 사람
Adjective	큰 집	컸던 집	클 집
있다 / 없다	있는 돈	있었던 돈	있을 돈
이다	학생인 사람	학생이었던 사람	학생일 사람
Clause → noun	가는 것	간 것	갈 것

✏️ Try It Yourself — 연습

Work out the answer first, then click to check.

1. Make modifiers with the noun 사람 for: **먹다 (present)**, **가다 (past)**, **만나다 (future)**.

▼ Show answer

먹는 사람 · **간 사람** · **만날 사람**

2. Make modifiers with 집 for: **살다** (present, past, future).

▼ Show answer

사는 집 · **산 집** · **살 집** (the ㄹ drops before -는 and -ㄴ but stays before -ㄹ)

3. Say "a cold day" and "the day that was cold" (**춥다** + 날).

▼ Show answer

추운 날 · **추웠던 날**

4. Combine into one noun phrase: **제가 책을 샀어요.** → "the book I bought".

▼ Show answer

제가 산 책

5. Say "a restaurant with delicious food" and "a film with no fun in it" (**맛있다**, **재미없다**).

▼ Show answer

맛있는 식당 (more naturally: 음식이 맛있는 식당) · **재미없는 영화**

6. Say "Something to drink" and "I have a lot to do today".

▼ Show answer

마실 것 · **오늘 할 일이 많아요.**

7. Say "Swimming is fun" with -는 것 and its contracted form (**수영하다**, **재미있다**).

▼ Show answer

수영하는 것이 재미있어요. → **수영하는 게 재미있어요.**

8. Give the nouns made with -(으)ㅁ from **돕다**, **살다**, **기쁘다**.

▼ Show answer

도움 (help) · **삶** (life) · **기쁨** (joy)

Coming up in Chapter 8: Quotation and Reported Speech. Direct quotation with 라고, indirect statements, questions, commands and suggestions (-다고, -(으)냐고, -(으)라고, -자고) and their contractions: -대요, -냐요, -래요, -재요.