



Korean Ladder Study Note

고개 숙여 인사

How Koreans Bow and Greet Elders

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Culture Etiquette	고개 숙여 인사 How Koreans Bow and Greet Elders

Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-CULTURE-ETQ-003)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-CULTURE-ETQ-003>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S70RoC0dxjk)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S70RoC0dxjk>

[Visit Korean Ladder for all free lessons](https://www.koreanladder.com)

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Core Idea

Okay, real talk — in Korean dramas everyone is bowing, and I never know how deep to go. Do I bend in half? Just nod? I freeze.

Same. And the bigger question — when I meet a group, who do I greet first? I just wave at whoever's closest.

These are the right questions. In Korea, the bow is everyday body language — it shows respect, and how deep you go depends on who you're greeting.

There are basically three levels. A small nod, a normal bow, and a deep bow. Today we focus on the first two — the ones you'll use every day.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	안녕하세요. 처음 뵙겠습니다. —	Hello. Nice to meet you (first time).



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	어서 오세요. 반가워요. —	Welcome. Glad to meet you.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
고개를 숙이다 gogae-reul sugida	to lower one's head / to bow	These are the right questions. In Korea, the bow is everyday body language — it shows respect, and how deep you go depends on who you're greeting.
목례 · 보통 인사 · 정중한 인사 mongnye · botong insa · jeongjunghan insa	slight nod · normal bow · respectful deep bow	There are basically three levels. A small nod, a normal bow, and a deep bow. Today we focus on the first two — the ones you'll use every day.
목례 mongnye	a slight nod of the head	목례. 목례는 가벼운 목인사예요. In English, 목례 is a slight nod of the head — for people you pass often, or someone your age.
보통 인사 botong insa	a normal, standard bow (~15-30°)	보통 인사. This is the standard bow — about a fifteen to thirty degree bend from the waist. You'll use this with most adults and elders.
안녕하세요 annyeonghaseyo	Hello (polite)	좋아요. You say 안녕하세요 while you bow. 안녕하세요 means hello in a polite way — it already shows respect.
눈을 살짝 내려요 nuneul saljjak naeryeoyo	lower your eyes a little	맞아요. In Korea, softening your eyes and lowering your head shows you respect the other person. Hard eye contact with an elder can feel like a challenge.
어른께 먼저 인사해요 eoreun-kke meonjeo insaheoyo	You greet the elder first	Now the second big question — who first. The rule is simple: 어른께 먼저 인사해요. You greet the eldest, or highest, person first.
께 kke	to (honorific) — polite form of 에게	께 is the polite version of 에게 — 'to.' 어른께 means 'to the elder,' said respectfully. 먼저 means first.



Grammar / Structure Notes

고개를 숙이다

고개를 숙이다 — to lower one's head / to bow

고개 = head/neck; 숙이다 = to lower

목례 · 보통 인사 · 정중한 인사

목례 · 보통 인사 · 정중한 인사 — slight nod · normal bow · respectful deep bow

Three everyday levels of greeting

목례

목례 — a slight nod of the head

For peers, or a quick passing greeting

보통 인사

보통 인사 — a normal, standard bow (~15-30°)

Default for elders, teachers, new adults

안녕하세요

안녕 + 하 + 세요 — Hello (polite)

좋아요. You say 안녕하세요 while you bow. 안녕하세요 means hello in a polite way — it already shows respect.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
처음 뵈겠습니다	cheoem boepgesseumnida
안녕하세요	annyeonghaseyo

Self-Check

- 1 Say 고개 숙여 인사 three times: slow, natural, then inside a short sentence.
- 2 Write one original sentence that was not in the video.
- 3 Rewatch the YouTube lesson and pause when the same pattern appears.

Related / Subsequent Studies



Lesson	Why study it next	Link
두 손으로 주세요 Why Koreans Give and Receive with Two Hands	A1 Culture: compare 두 손으로 주세요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-CULTURE-ETQ-002
잘 먹겠습니다 What Koreans Say Before Eating	A1 Culture: compare 잘 먹겠습니다 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-CULTURE-ETQ-001
경조사 예절 결혼식·장례식 봉투와 조의금	B2 Culture: compare 경조사 예절 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B2-CULTURE-ETQ-001
눈치 / 정 / 체면 The Social Concepts Behind Korean Behavior	C1 Culture: compare 눈치 / 정 / 체면 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-CULTURE-ETQ-001

My Notes

Free Korean lessons, one rung at a time. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.