



Korean Ladder Study Note

안

Two Ways to Say 'No/Can't'

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Grammar Negation	안 Two Ways to Say 'No/Can't'

Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-NEG-001)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-NEG-001>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vwzd-9Q1GbQ)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vwzd-9Q1GbQ>

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

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Core Idea

Okay, real talk. In Korean, how do I say 'I don't drink' versus 'I can't drink'? Aren't those the same word?

좋은 질문이에요. They feel the same in English, but Korean splits them. 안 is one word, 못 is the other.

여기 핵심이 있어요. 안 means 'don't' or 'won't' — it's your choice. In English, you simply choose not to.

그리고 못 means 'can't' — you are unable. 능력이나 상황 때문이에요. It's ability or circumstance, not choice.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	준호 씨, 오늘 저녁에 시간 있어요? —	Junho, do you have time this evening?
Junho	미안해요, 오늘은 못 가요. 일이 많아요. —	Sorry, I can't go today. I have a lot of work.
Hana	그럼 술은요? —	Then how about a drink?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	저는 술을 안 마셔요. 물 마실게요. —	I don't drink. I'll have water.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
안 an	don't / won't (by choice)	여기 핵심이 있어요. 안 means 'don't' or 'won't' — it's your choice. In English, you simply choose not to.
못 mot	can't (unable)	그리고 못 means 'can't' — you are unable. 능력이나 상황 때문이에요. It's ability or circumstance, not choice.
저는 술을 안 마셔요 jeoneun sureul an masyeoyo	I don't drink (alcohol).	이렇게 말해요. 저는 술을 안 마셔요. In English, 'I don't drink.' Notice 안 sits right before the verb.
안 마셔요 an masyeoyo	(I) don't drink — by choice	여기서 안 마셔요 means it's a choice. 술이 싫어서, 또는 그냥 안 마시는 거예요. You could, but you decide not to.
저는 술을 못 마셔요 jeoneun sureul mot masyeoyo	I can't drink (alcohol).	이제 못으로 바꿔요. 저는 술을 못 마셔요. In English, 'I can't drink.' 못 goes in the same spot — right before the verb.
못 마셔요 mot masyeoyo	(I) can't drink — unable	못 마셔요 means you are unable. 알레르기가 있거나, 약을 먹는 중이거나. The body or the situation says no.
안 / 못 + 동사 an / mot + verb	choice vs ability	So 안 is like 'I choose not to,' and 못 is 'I'm not able to.' Same verb, just swap the little word in front?
동사 바로 앞 dongsa baro ap	right before the verb	맞아요. 안 is choice, 못 is can't. 그리고 항상 동사 바로 앞에 와요. Both always sit right before the verb.



Grammar / Structure Notes

안

안 — don't / won't (by choice)

simple negation, your decision

못

못 — can't (unable)

ability or situation stops you

저는 술을 안 마셔요

저는 + 술을 + 안 + 마셔요 — I don't drink (alcohol).

이렇게 말해요. 저는 술을 안 마셔요. In English, 'I don't drink.' Notice 안 sits right before the verb.

안 마셔요

안 마셔요 — (I) don't drink — by choice

여기서 안 마셔요 means it's a choice. 술이 싫어서, 또는 그냥 안 마시는 거예요. You could, but you decide not to.

저는 술을 못 마셔요

저는 + 술을 + 못 + 마셔요 — I can't drink (alcohol).

이제 못으로 바뀌어요. 저는 술을 못 마셔요. In English, 'I can't drink.' 못 goes in the same spot — right before the verb.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
못	mot
모뎁쇼	mot wayo
안마셔요	an masyeoyo
안 ≈ smooth · 못 ≈ links	Listen first, then repeat slowly.
저는 술을 안 마셔요	jeoneun sureul an masyeoyo
안 마셔요	an masyeoyo
모까요	mot gayo
저는 오늘 못 가요	jeoneun oneul mot gayo

Self-Check

1 Say 안 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
도 Saying 'Also', 'Too', and 'Even' in Korean	A1 Grammar: compare 도 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-006
아요 / 어요 The Polite Present Tense	A1 Grammar: compare 아요 / 어요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-CNJ-001
에 The Korean Particle for Place and Time	A1 Grammar: compare 에 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-004
에서 Where the Action Happens	A1 Grammar: compare 에서 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-005

My Notes

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