



Korean Ladder Study Note

들

When to Mark Korean Nouns as Plural—and When to Leave Them Singular

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Grammar Particles	들 When to Mark Korean Nouns as Plural—and When to Leave Them Singular

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-029>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXe5XDMvdNY>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

Okay, confession. At a fruit stand in Seoul, I said 사과들 세 개 주세요. The owner smiled and gave me three apples, but I felt like I said something weird.

괜찮아요. 다 알아들었을 거예요. Everyone understood you. But Koreans usually just say 사과 세 개 주세요.

But in English, three apples needs an s. Isn't 들 the Korean s?

좋은 질문이에요. 들은 복수 표시예요. It's a plural marker, so yes, it's a little like the English s.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	하나 씨, 오늘 누가 와요? —	Hana, who's coming today?
Hana	대학교 친구들이 와요. —	My college friends are coming.



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	몇 명 와요? —	How many are coming?
Hana	세 명 와요. —	Three are coming.
Junho	그럼 커피 세 잔 주문할까요? —	Then shall we order three coffees?
Hana	좋아요. 쿠키도 다섯 개 살게요. —	Sounds good. I'll buy five cookies, too.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
명사 + 들 noun + deul	plural marker: more than one	좋은 질문이에요. 들은 복수 표시예요. It's a plural marker, so yes, it's a little like the English s.
학생들이 공부해요 haksaeng-deul-i gongbuhayeo	The students are studying.	먼저 사람부터 볼게요. 학생들이 공부해요. The students are studying.
아이들 · 친구들 · 학생들 ai-deul · chingu-deul · haksang-deul	kids · friends · students	아이들이 놀아요. The kids are playing. 친구들이 와요. My friends are coming. 들은 사람하고 잘 어울려요. 들 feels most natural with people.
강아지들이 뛰어요 gangaji-deul-i ttwieoyo	The puppies are running.	동물에도 자주 써요. 강아지들이 뛰어요. The puppies are running.
고양이가 세 마리 있어요 goyang-i-ga se mari isseoyo	There are three cats.	이제 들이 없는 문장을 볼게요. 고양이가 세 마리 있어요. There are three cats, and no 들 at all.
책이 많아요 chaeg-i manyo	There are a lot of books.	책이 많아요. There are a lot of books. 많아요라는 말이 이미 여럿을 보여 줘요. 많아요 already says 'many,' so we don't need 들.
사과 세 개 · 학생 세 명 sagwa se gae · haksang se myeong	three apples · three students	맞아요. 숫자가 있으면 보통 들은 안 써요. When there's a number, you usually don't need 들.
고양이가 있어요 goyang-i-ga isseoyo	There's a cat. OR There are cats.	And with no number? Like 고양이가 있어요?



Grammar / Structure Notes

명사 + 들

명사 + 들 — plural marker: more than one

Attaches right after the noun

명사 + 들

명사 + 들 — plural marker: more than one

Often optional in Korean

들: 쓸까? 뺄까?

들: 쓸까? 뺄까? — Use it? Or leave it out?

그래서 오늘의 핵심은 언제 쓰고 언제 빼는지 아는 거예요. So today's key is knowing when to use it, and when to leave it out.

학생들이 공부해요

학생 + 들 + 이 + 공부 + 해요 — The students are studying.

먼저 사람부터 볼게요. 학생들이 공부해요. The students are studying.

학생들이 공부해요

학생 + 들 + 이 + 공부 + 해요 — The students are studying.

학생 다음에 들, 그리고 조사 이가 와요. Noun first, then 들, then the particle 이.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
친구드리 와요	chingu-deul-i wayo
학생드리 공부해요	haksaeng-deul-i gongbuhaeyo

Self-Check

- 1 Say 들 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
(으)로 Saying 'By', 'With', and 'Toward' in Korean	A1 Grammar: compare (으)로 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-012
같이 / 와 함께 / 하고 Saying 'Together With' Someone	A1 Grammar: compare 같이 / 와 함께 / 하고 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-017
끼리 Saying 'Among Ourselves' and 'Between Friends'	A1 Grammar: compare 끼리 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-023
도 안 / 도 못 / 도 없어요 Saying 'Not Even' with 도 and Negatives	A1 Grammar: compare 도 안 / 도 못 / 도 없어요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-GRAM-PRT-021

My Notes

Your ladder to fluent Korean. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.