



Korean Ladder Study Note

# 았어요 / 었어요

## The Korean Past Tense

Level	Topic	Focus
A2 · Elementary TOPIK 2	Grammar Tense	았어요 / 었어요 The Korean Past Tense

### Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-001)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-001>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7SxSstM_dY)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7SxSstM\\_dY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7SxSstM_dY)

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### Core Idea

Okay, real question. I know 먹다 means 'to eat.' But when I want to say 'I ate' — yesterday, done, finished — what do I actually change?

좋은 질문이에요. You take the verb and add **았어요** or **었습니다** to the stem. 먹다 → 먹었어요. That's it — past tense, done.

여기 핵심이에요. The whole pattern is just: verb stem plus **았어요** or **었습니다**. **았어요**나 **었습니다**, 둘 중 하나예요.

그런데 둘 중에 뭘 골라요? You choose by the stem's vowel. **ㅏ**나 **ㅑ**가 있으면 **았어요**, 그 외에는 **었습니다**. If the last stem vowel is **ㅏ** or **ㅑ**, use **았어요**; otherwise **었습니다**.

### Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	준호 씨, 어제 뭐 했어요? —	Junho, what did you do yesterday?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	친구를 만났어요. 같이 영화를 봤어요. —	I met a friend. We watched a movie together.
Hana	재미있었어요? —	Was it fun?
Junho	네, 정말 좋았어요. 하나 씨는요? —	Yes, it was really good. And you, Hana?
Hana	저는 집에서 책을 읽었어요. —	I read a book at home.

## Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
먹다 → 먹었어요 meok-da → meo-geo-sseo-yo	to eat → ate	좋은 질문이에요. You take the verb and add 았어요 or 었어요 to the stem. 먹다 → 먹었어요. That's it — past tense, done.
동사 어간 + 았어요 / 었어요 dongsa eogan + ass-eo-yo / eoss-eo-yo	verb stem + past-tense ending	여기 핵심이에요. The whole pattern is just: verb stem plus 았어요 or 었어요. 았어요나 었어요, 둘 중 하나예요.
어간 ㅏ·ㅑ → 았어요 / 그 외 → 었어요 ㅏ·ㅑ → ass-eo-yo / else → eoss-eo-yo	vowel harmony picks the ending	그런데 둘 중에 뭘 골라요? You choose by the stem's vowel. ㅏ나 ㅑ가 있으면 았어요, 그 외에는 었어요. If the last stem vowel is 아 or 오, use 았어요; otherwise 었어요.
밥을 먹었어요 bab-eul meo-geo-sseo-yo	I ate (a meal).	예문을 볼게요. 밥을 먹었어요. The stem 먹 has the vowel 어, so we use 었어요 — 먹었어요. 'I ate.'
먹 + 었어요 = 먹었어요 meok + eoss-eo-yo	stem + ending = past tense	Oh nice — so the verb just grew a little tail. 먹 became 먹었어요.
가다 → 갔어요 ga-da → ga-sseo-yo	to go → went	이번엔 가다예요. 가 has the vowel 아, so it takes 았어요. 가 + 았어요 — and the vowels merge into 갔어요. 'went.'
가 + 았 → 갔 ga + ass → gass	same vowels merge	Whoa, the two 아 sounds just squished together into one. 갔어요.
마시다 → 마셨어요 ma-si-da → ma-syeo-sseo-yo	to drink → drank	맞아요. 마시다도 봐요. 마시 + 았어요 → 마셨어요. 'I drank.' The 이 and 어 blend into 셧.



## Grammar / Structure Notes

### 먹다 → 먹었어요

먹다 → 먹었어요 — to eat → ate

Drop 다, add the past ending.

### 동사 어간 + 았어요 / 었어요

동사 어간 + 았어요 / 었어요 — verb stem + past-tense ending

Two endings, one job: 'it happened.'

### 어간 ㅏ·ㅑ → 았어요 / 그 외 → 었어요

어간 ㅏ·ㅑ → 았어요 / 그 외 → 었어요 — vowel harmony picks the ending

Match the bright vowels 아/오 with 았어요.

### 밥을 먹었어요

밥 + 을 + 먹 + 었어요 — I ate (a meal).

예문을 볼게요. 밥을 먹었어요. The stem 먹 has the vowel 어, so we use 었어요 — 먹었어요. 'I ate.'

### 먹 + 었어요 = 먹었어요

먹 + 었어요 = 먹었어요 — stem + ending = past tense

Oh nice — so the verb just grew a little tail. 먹 became 먹었어요.

## Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
어제 뭐 했어요?	eo-je mwo hae-sseo-yo?
저는 커피를 마셨어요.	jeo-neun keo-pi-reul ma-syeo-sseo-yo.

## Self-Check

- 1 Say 았어요 / 었어요 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)ㄹ 거예요 The Korean Future Tense and Plans	A2 Grammar: compare (으)ㄹ 거예요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-002">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-002</a>
고 싶어요 Saying What You Want to Do	A2 Grammar: compare 고 싶어요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-END-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-END-001</a>
아서 / 어서 Saying 'Because' and 'And Then'	A2 Grammar: compare 아서 / 어서 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-CON-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-CON-001</a>
관형형 Turning Verbs into Modifiers	B1 Grammar: compare 관형형 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-MOD-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-MOD-001</a>

## My Notes

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