



## Korean Ladder Study Note

# -던 / -았던 / -었던

## Retrospective Modifiers for Past Memory

Level	Topic	Focus
C1 · Advanced TOPIK 5	Grammar Modifiers & Clauses	-던 / -았던 / -었던 Retrospective Modifiers for Past Memory

## Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-GRAM-MOD-001>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1LMb0Z7A3E>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

## Core Idea

Here is my real question. I learned 마신 커피 for 'the coffee I drank.' So why do I keep hearing 마시던 커피? Isn't that also past?

Same problem here. I see -은 and -던, and my brain just says, both are past, good luck.

좋은 질문이에요. 마신 커피 is a finished fact. 마시던 커피 is the coffee you were drinking, maybe the one you left unfinished.

Today we study retrospective modifiers: -던, and -았던 or -었던. They put a noun inside a remembered past scene.

## Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	여기가 우리가 자주 오던 카페예요. —	This is the cafe we used to come to often.



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	맞아요. 그때 마시던 차, 기억나요? —	Right. Do you remember the tea we were drinking back then?
Hana	그럼요. 우리가 처음 만났던 날이었죠. —	Of course. It was the day we first met.
Junho	아직도 분위기가 좋네요. —	The atmosphere is still nice.

## Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
-던 / -았던 / -었던 -deon / -atdeon / -eotdeon	retrospective modifiers: a noun remembered from the past	Today we study retrospective modifiers: -던, and -았던 or -었던. They put a noun inside a remembered past scene.
가다 → 가던 길 gada → gadeon gil	the road I used to take / was taking	먼저 -던을 볼게요. -던 often means something you used to do, or something that was in progress in the past.
제가 다니던 학교 jega danideon hakgyo	the school I used to attend	예를 들어, 제가 다니던 학교. That means the school I used to attend. 다니던 shows a repeated past connection.
-던 -deon	used to / was doing / remembered as ongoing	맞아요. It looks backward, and it often carries habit, continuation, or an unfinished feeling.
가다 → 갔던 곳 gada → gatdeon got	the place I went to before	Now add the past marker before 던: -았던 or -었던. This makes the action or state feel completed, but still remembered.
-았던 · -었던 · 했던 -atdeon · -eotdeon · haetdeon	same vowel pattern as the past tense	규칙은 과거형과 같아요. Stems with ㅏ or ㅑ usually take -았던. Other vowels take -었던. 하다 becomes 했던.
우리가 만났던 카페 uriga mannatdeon kape	the cafe where we met	우리가 만났던 카페. The cafe where we met. 만났던 tells us the meeting happened and is complete, but the speaker is remembering it.
마시던 커피 / 마셨던 커피 masideon kape / masyeotdeon kape	the coffee I was drinking / the coffee I drank before	Let me test this. 마시던 커피 is the coffee I was drinking. 마셨던 커피 is the coffee I drank before, and now I'm remembering it.



## Grammar / Structure Notes

### -던 / -았던 / -었던

-던 / -았던 / -었던 — retrospective modifiers: a noun remembered from the past

Attach to a verb or adjective stem before a noun.

### 가다 → 가던 길

가다 → 가던 길 — the road I used to take / was taking

-던 = habitual or unfinished past, recalled now

### 제가 다니던 학교

제가 + 다니 + 던 + 학교 — the school I used to attend

예를 들어, 제가 다니던 학교. That means the school I used to attend. 다니던 shows a repeated past connection.

### -던

-던 — used to / was doing / remembered as ongoing

The past is viewed as a remembered scene.

### 가다 → 갔던 곳

가다 → 갔던 곳 — the place I went to before

-았던/-었던 = completed past, recalled as memory

## Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
제가 좋아하던 노래	jega joahadeon norae
좋아하던	joahadeon

## Self-Check

- 1 Say -던 / -았던 / -었던 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
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>
-는 셈이다 / -기 마련이다 / -는 법이다 Endings for Generalizing and Concluding	C1 Grammar: compare -는 셈이다 / -기 마련이다 / -는 법이다 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-GRAM-END-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-GRAM-END-001</a>
-더라도 / -(으)러더라도 Saying 'Even If' for Strong Concession	C1 Grammar: compare -더라도 / -(으)러더라도 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-GRAM-CON-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-GRAM-CON-001</a>
(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>

## My Notes

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