



## Korean Ladder Study Note

# -았었- / -었었-

## The Past Perfect for a Discontinued Past

| Level                    | Topic            | Focus                                                   |
|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| C1 · Advanced<br>TOPIK 5 | Grammar<br>Tense | -았었- / -었었-<br>The Past Perfect for a Discontinued Past |

## Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

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

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJsB3Ptnjno>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

## Core Idea

Here is my problem. If 살았어요 means “I lived there,” why do Koreans sometimes say 살았었어요? Is it just extra past tense?

핵심은 끝났다는 느낌이에요. In English, think “that was true back then, but it changed.”

So 살았었어요 quietly adds: not anymore.

맞아요. 오늘의 패턴은 동사나 형용사 어간에 -았었어요, -었었어요를 붙이는 거예요.

## Conversation Snapshot

| Speaker | Korean                    | Meaning                                                 |
|---------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Hana    | 준호 씨, 예전에 제주도에 살았었죠?<br>— | Junho, you used to live on Jeju before, right?          |
| Junho   | 네, 대학 때 잠깐 살았었어요.<br>—    | Yes, I lived there briefly during college, but not now. |



| Speaker | Korean               | Meaning                   |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Hana    | 지금은 서울에 살아요?<br>—    | Do you live in Seoul now? |
| Junho   | 네, 지금은 서울에 살아요.<br>— | Yes, now I live in Seoul. |

## Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

| Word                                                          | Meaning                                                      | Example                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 살았었어요<br>sarasseosseoyo                                       | I used to live there / I had lived there before, but not now | 좋은 질문이에요. 살았어요 is plain past. 살았었어요 often means I lived there before, but I do not live there now. |
| -았었어요 / -었었어요<br>-asseosseoyo / -eosseosseoyo                 | was true in the past, but is no longer true                  | 핵심은 끝났다는 느낌이에요. In English, think “that was true back then, but it changed.”                       |
| 어간 + -았었어요 / -었었어요<br>eogan +<br>-asseosseoyo / -eosseosseoyo | stem + double past polite ending                             | 맞아요. 오늘의 패턴은 동사나 형용사 어간에 -았었어요, -었었어요를 붙이는 거예요.                                                    |
| 단순 과거 vs 끝난 과거<br>—                                           | plain past vs. discontinued past                             | 단순 과거는 그냥 과거 사실을 말해요. 끝난 과거는 지금은 아니라는 대비가 강해요.                                                     |
| 서울에 살았어요<br>seoure sarasseoyo                                 | I lived in Seoul.                                            | 예를 들어, 서울에 살았어요. This can simply mean I lived in Seoul.                                            |
| 서울에 살았었어요<br>seoure sarasseosseoyo                            | I used to live in Seoul, but not now.                        | 서울에 살았었어요. This strongly suggests I used to live in Seoul, but I do not live there now.            |
| 살다 → 살았었어요<br>salda → sarasseosseoyo                          | The Past Perfect for a Discontinued Past                     | '아'나 '오' 모음이 있는 어간에는 -았어요가 붙어요. 살다 becomes 살았었어요.                                                  |
| 먹다 → 먹었었어요<br>meokda → meogeosseosseoyo                       | The Past Perfect for a Discontinued Past                     | 그 외의 모음에는 보통 -었어요가 붙어요. 먹다 becomes 먹었었어요.                                                          |



## Grammar / Structure Notes

### 살았었어요

살 + 았 + 었 + 어요 — I used to live there / I had lived there before, but not now

좋은 질문이에요. 살았어요 is plain past. 살았었어요 often means I lived there before, but I do not live there now.

### -았었어요 / -었었어요

-았었어요 / -었었어요 — was true in the past, but is no longer true

Double past can signal a discontinued past state.

### 예전에 살았었어요.

예전에 살았었어요. — I used to live there before, but not anymore.

예전에 often fits naturally with this pattern.

### 어간 + -았었어요 / -었었어요

어간 + -았었어요 / -었었어요 — stem + double past polite ending

Use it when the past situation has clearly ended or reversed.

### 단순 과거 vs 끝난 과거

단순 과거 vs 끝난 과거 — plain past vs. discontinued past

The difference is not time only. It is contrast with now.

## Pronunciation Loop

| Phrase         | How to practice                                 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 살았었어요          | salda → sarasseosseoyo                          |
| 먹었어요           | meokda → meogeosseosseoyo                       |
| 유명했어요          | yumyeonghayeosseosseoyo → yumyeonghaesseosseoyo |
| 예전에 제주도에 살았었어요 | yejeone jejudo-e sarasseosseoyo                 |

## Self-Check

- 1 Say -았- / -었- 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<br>The Korean Future Tense and Plans           | A2 Grammar: compare (으)ㄹ 거예요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.      | Open lesson<br><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> |
| -겠-<br>하겠습니다 / 오겠어요로<br>의지와 추측 말하기                      | A2 Grammar: compare -겠- with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.           | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-003">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-003</a> |
| -고 있다 / -아 있다<br>Ongoing Actions vs<br>Resulting States | B1 Grammar: compare -고 있다 / -아 있다 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer. | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-TNS-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B1-GRAM-TNS-001</a> |
| 았어요 / 었어요<br>The Korean Past Tense                      | A2 Grammar: compare 았어요 / 었어요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.     | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-GRAM-TNS-001</a> |

## My Notes

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