

-다가

in the middle of doing, and then

Breaks off one action to start another. The first action was under way and did not finish — which is what separates it from -고.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Any verb	-다가	가다 → 가다가
Spoken short form	-다	가다 만났어요
Interrupted action	plain stem	가다가 왔어요 — never arrived
Completed, then reversed	-았/었다가	갔다가 왔어요 — went and returned
Unwanted result	-다가	뛰어가다가 넘어졌어요
Same subject	required	different subjects need -는 동안

WHEN TO USE IT

Attach -다가 to the plain stem, often shortened to -다 in speech: 학교에 가다가 친구를 만났어요 — I was on my way to school when I ran into a friend. The going was interrupted.

The subject must be the same in both clauses, as with -(으)면서.

Adding the past marker changes the picture entirely. -았/었다가 means the first action completed and was then reversed or followed by something opposite: 학교에 갔다가 왔어요 (I went to school and came back). Compare 가다가 왔어요, where you never arrived.

It also marks an unwanted result: 뛰어가다가 넘어졌어요. Here the first action caused the second, and the outcome is usually negative.

IN USE

- 1 학교에 가다가 친구를 만났어요.
I ran into a friend on my way to school.
- 2 텔레비전을 보다가 잠이 들었어요.
I fell asleep while watching TV.
- 3 뛰어가다가 넘어졌어요.
I fell over while running.
- 4 은행에 갔다가 바로 집에 왔어요.
I went to the bank and came straight home.
- 5 책을 읽다가 재미없어서 그만뒀어요.
I was reading the book but stopped because it was dull.

- 6 저녁을 만들다가 손을 베었어요.
I cut my hand while making dinner.

COMPARED WITH

-고

-고 says the first action finished; -다가 says it was cut short. The difference is whether you arrived.

학교에 가고 친구를 만났어요. (got there, then met) / 학교에 가다가 만났어요. (met on the way)

-(으)면서

-(으)면서 has both actions running together; -다가 stops one to begin the other.

음악을 들으면서 공부해요. (both at once) / 공부하다가 음악을 들었어요. (stopped studying to listen)

-았/었다가

Adding tense flips the meaning from "interrupted" to "completed and then reversed." A frequent source of confusion.

가다가 왔어요. (turned back on the way) / 갔다가 왔어요. (went there and came back)

WATCH OUT

X 제가 요리하다가 동생이 왔어요.

O 제가 요리하는 동안 동생이 왔어요.

-다가 requires one subject for both clauses. With two people, use -는 동안.

X 은행에 가다가 왔어요. — meaning "I went and came back"

O 은행에 갔다가 왔어요.

Without the past marker, you never reached the bank. 갔다가 says you got there and then returned.

X 공부하다가 친구가 전화했어요.

O 공부하다가 친구한테 전화했어요.

Same-subject rule again: the person who was studying has to be the one who then phones.