

-(으)ㄹ까 말까 하다

be in two minds about

Weighing whether to do something or not. The form literally sets the two options against each other — do it, don't do it — and leaves you hovering.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Ends in a vowel	-ㄹ까 말까	가다 → 갈까 말까
Ends in a consonant	-을까 말까	먹다 → 먹을까 말까
Ends in ㄹ	nothing added	만들다 → 만들까 말까
With other verbs	고민하다, 망설이다	갈까 말까 고민했어요
Before a noun	-(으)ㄹ까 말까 한	들릴까 말까 한 소리
Leaning toward doing	-(으)ㄹ까 하다	갈까 해요

WHEN TO USE IT

Attachment is the standard rule with the ㄹ short form: 만들다 gives 만들까 말까. It takes action verbs only.

The hesitation is normally your own, and 하다 can be swapped for 고민하다 or 망설이다: 갈까 말까 고민했어요.

A second use describes something on the edge of perception or measurement: 들릴까 말까 한 소리 — a sound barely audible. Here the modifier form -(으)ㄹ까 말까 한 attaches to a noun.

Compare -(으)ㄹ까 하다, which is a loose plan leaning toward doing it. Adding 말까 removes the lean and leaves genuine indecision.

IN USE

- 모임에 갈까 말까 아직도 고민 중이에요.
I'm still torn about whether to go to the gathering.
- 살까 말까 한참 망설이다가 그냥 나왔어요.
I dithered for ages over buying it and came away empty-handed.
- 말할까 말까 하다가 결국 말했습니다.
I hesitated over saying it and ended up saying it anyway.
- 직접 만들까 말까 고민하고 있어요.
I'm weighing up whether to make it myself.
- 들릴까 말까 한 소리로 대답했어요.
She answered in a voice barely audible.
- 보일까 말까 할 정도로 흐릿했습니다.
It was so faint you could only just make it out.

COMPARED WITH

-(으)ㄹ까 하다

-(으)ㄹ까 하다 is a soft plan already tilted toward doing it. Adding 말까 restores the balance and states real indecision.

갈까 해요. (I'm thinking of going) / 갈까 말까 해요. (I can't decide)

-(으)ㄴ/는지

-(으)ㄴ지 -지 embeds an indirect question; -(으)ㄹ까 말까 is a set phrase specifically for a yes-or-no dilemma.

갈지 안 갈지 모르겠어요. (I don't know if I'll go) / 갈까 말까 고민이에요. (I'm torn)

-(으)ㄹ까 말까 한

The modifier form describes something at the threshold of being perceived or measured — barely audible, barely visible.

갈까 말까 해요. (I'm torn) / 들릴까 말까 한 소리 (barely audible)

WATCH OUT

X 직접 만들을까 말까 고민하고 있어요.

O 직접 만들까 말까 고민하고 있어요.

A stem ending in ㄹ already supplies it, as with 만들 거예요 and 만들 뿐이다.

X 예뻐까 말까 고민이에요.

O 살까 말까 고민이에요.

The construction weighs an action you might take. Adjectives describe states, not choices.

X 들릴까 말까 소리로 대답했어요.

O 들릴까 말까 한 소리로 대답했어요.

Before a noun the phrase needs 한, since it is functioning as a modifier.