

-(으)ㄹ락 말락 하다

on the verge of, barely

Something hovering right at a threshold — almost happening, not quite. The paired 락 sets the two states against each other and leaves the thing suspended between them.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Ends in a vowel	-ㄹ락 말락	들리다 → 들릴락 말락
Ends in a consonant	-을락 말락	닿다 → 닿을락 말락
Ends in ㄹ	nothing added	만들다 → 만들락 말락
Usually followed by	하다	닿을락 말락 했다
Before a noun	-(으)ㄹ락 말락 한	들릴락 말락 한 소리
Indecision instead	-(으)ㄹ까 말까 하다	갈까 말까 했어요

WHEN TO USE IT

Attachment is the standard rule with the ㄹ short form. The pairing is fixed — the verb with 락, then 말다 with 락 — and 하다 normally follows.

It describes a state at the edge of happening: 손끝이 닿을락 말락 했다 — fingertips almost touching. The observer is watching something teeter.

Compared with -(으)ㄹ까 말까 하다, which is about a person's indecision, this one is about a physical or perceptual threshold. Nobody is deciding anything.

Before a noun it becomes -(으)ㄹ락 말락 한: 들릴락 말락 한 소리.

IN USE

- 1 두 사람의 손끝이 닿을락 말락 했다.
Their fingertips were almost touching.
- 2 들릴락 말락 한 목소리로 무언가 중얼거렸다.
He muttered something in a barely audible voice.
- 3 해가 산 너머로 넘어갈락 말락 하고 있었다.
The sun was just on the point of slipping behind the mountain.
- 4 눈물이 떨어질락 말락 눈가에 맺혔다.
Tears gathered at her eyes, on the verge of falling.
- 5 모양이 겨우 만들어질락 말락 한 상태였다.
The shape was only just beginning to hold.

- 6 잠이 들락 말락 할 때 전화가 울렸다.
The phone rang just as I was drifting off.

COMPARED WITH

-(으)ㄹ까 말까 하다

Similar shape, different subject matter. -(으)ㄹ까 말까 is a person weighing a choice; -(으)ㄹ락 말락 is a thing hovering at a threshold.

갈까 말까 했어요. (I couldn't decide) / 닿을락 말락 했다. (almost touching)

-(으)ㄹ 뻔하다

뻔하다 reports a near miss that is over and usually alarming; -(으)ㄹ락 말락 describes the hovering itself, often calmly.

떨어질 뻔했어요. (nearly fell) / 떨어질락 말락 했다. (on the verge of falling)

-(으)ㄹ 정도로

정도로 measures how far something went; -(으)ㄹ락 말락 places it exactly at the boundary.

안 들릴 정도로 작았다. (so quiet it couldn't be heard) / 들릴락 말락 했다. (just barely audible)

WATCH OUT

X 모임에 갈락 말락 고민했어요.

O 모임에 갈까 말까 고민했어요.

Weighing a decision takes -(으)ㄹ까 말까. -(으)ㄹ락 말락 describes something hovering at a threshold.

X 손끝이 닿을락 했다.

O 손끝이 닿을락 말락 했다.

The pairing is fixed. One half alone is not an expression.

X 들릴락 말락 소리로 말했다.

O 들릴락 말락 한 소리로 말했다.

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