

은/는

topic marker — as for, speaking of

Announces what the sentence is about. The form depends only on whether the noun ends in a consonant — but choosing 은/는 over 이/가 changes what your listener hears as the point.

■ How it attaches

Noun type	Form	Example
Ends in a consonant	은	학생은
Ends in a vowel	는	친구는
After 에, 에서, 한 테	stacks on	학교에서는
Replaces 이/가	not both	친구는 — not 친구는
Replaces 을/를	not both	김치는 — not 김치를
Spoken contraction	저는 → 전	나는 → 난, 이것은 → 이건

■ Notes

은/는 sets the frame. It tells the listener "here is what I am talking about now," and everything after it is the comment on that frame. This is why self-introductions open with it: 저는 마이클이에요 establishes you as the subject of discussion, not merely as the grammatical subject of one verb.

It has three everyday jobs. It marks the topic, as above. It marks contrast, often with a second 은/는 elsewhere in the sentence: 커피는 좋아하지만 술은 싫어해요. And it marks general truths and information both speakers already have: 고래는 포유류예요.

The contrast function is always lurking. Attach 은/는 where 이/가 or 을/를 would normally sit and Korean ears pick up an implied "...but not the others." That is useful when you mean it and confusing when you do not.

■ Examples

- ① 저는 한국어를 공부해요.
I study Korean.
- ② 오늘은 시간이 없어요.
I don't have time today.
- ③ 형은 회사원이고 동생은 학생이에요.
My older brother is an office worker, and my younger sibling is a student.
- ④ 커피는 마시지만 술은 안 마셔요.
I drink coffee, but I don't drink alcohol.
- ⑤ 이 책은 어때요?
How about this book?
- ⑥ 집에는 아무도 없었어요.
There was nobody at home.

■ Compared with

이/가

이/가 identifies the doer and presents it as new. 은/는 frames what the conversation is about and treats it as already established. The clearest test is a question: the new piece of information in your answer takes 이/가.

누가 왔어요? → 마이클이 왔어요. (Michael is the answer) / 마이클은 왔어요. (Michael did come — unlike the others)

Contrast without a second clause

A lone 은/는 in the object slot still signals contrast, even when nothing is contrasted out loud. Learners often produce this by accident when they meant a plain statement.

저는 김치를 좋아해요. (I like kimchi) / 저는 김치는 좋아해요. (kimchi at least, I like — implying other foods I do not)

도

도 means "also" and, like 은/는, replaces 이/가 and 을/를 rather than stacking on them. The two cannot appear together on one noun.

저도 갈게요. (I'll go too) / not 저는도

■ Watch out

✗ 누가 왔어요? — 마이클은 왔어요.

○ 누가 왔어요? — 마이클이 왔어요.

Your answer supplies the missing information, so it takes 이/가. 은/는 there sounds like you are contrasting Michael with someone else the listener never asked about.

✗ 친구는 왔어요.

○ 친구는 왔어요.

The choice depends on the final letter of the noun, nothing else. 친구 ends in a vowel, so 는.

✗ 저는 김치를 좋아해요.

○ 저는 김치는 좋아해요.

은/는 takes the place of 을/를 rather than sitting after it. The same applies to 이/가. It does stack after 에, 에서, and 한테.