

-(으)ㄴ/는데

background, contrast, lead-in

The most-used connector in spoken Korean, and the hardest to pin down in English. It sets up context and leaves the rest of the sentence room to land.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Verb, present	-는데	가다 → 가는데
Adjective	-(으)ㄴ데	좋다 → 좋은데
Past, any word type	-았/었는데	갔는데 / 좋았는데
이다	-인데	학생인데
Ends in ㄹ	ㄹ drops	만들다 → 만드는데
Trailing off	-(으)ㄴ/는데요	좀 바쁘네요

WHEN TO USE IT

The form splits like the modifier system. Verbs take -는데: 가는데, 먹는데. Adjectives take -(으)ㄴ데: 좋은데, 바쁜데. Past tense always takes -는데, whatever the word class: 갔는데, 좋았는데. Stems in ㄹ drop it: 만드는데, 긴데.

Its core job is setting the scene before the main point: 지금 밖인데 조금 늦을 것 같아요. The first clause is not a reason and not really a contrast — it is context.

From there it stretches. It can mark contrast, more softly than -지만. It softens requests, which is why so many polite openings use it: 저기, 길을 좀 묻고 싶은데요. And left hanging at the end of a sentence, it invites the listener to respond.

IN USE

- 1 지금 밖인데 조금 늦을 것 같아요.
I'm out at the moment, so I might be a bit late.
- 2 저기, 길을 좀 묻고 싶은데요.
Excuse me, I'd like to ask for directions.
- 3 어제 갔는데 문이 닫혀 있었어요.
I went yesterday, but the door was closed.
- 4 이 식당은 비싼데 맛있어요.
This restaurant is expensive, but the food is good.
- 5 지금 저녁을 만드는데 같이 드실래요?
I'm making dinner now — would you like to join?

6 시간 있으세요? — 지금은 좀 바쁜데요.

Do you have a moment? — I'm a bit busy right now.

COMPARED WITH

-지만

-지만 states an opposition plainly; -는데 often just supplies background and lets the listener draw the contrast. -는데 is far more common in speech.

비싸지만 맛있어요. (expensive but tasty) / 비싼데 맛있어요. (it's pricey — and good)

-아서/어서

-아서 claims a causal link; -는데 does not. Use -는데 when the first clause merely sets the stage.

비가 와서 안 갔어요. (because it rained) / 비가 오는데 갈까요? (it's raining — shall we still go?)

-거든요

-거든요 explains a reason the listener did not know; -는데 opens a topic. They often appear in the same conversation but do different work.

지금 바쁜데요. (I'm busy — leaving it there) / 지금 바쁘거든요. (the thing is, I'm busy)

WATCH OUT

X 이 식당은 비싸는데 맛있어요.

O 이 식당은 비싼데 맛있어요.

비싸다 is an adjective, so it takes -(으)ㄴ데. -는데 belongs to verbs in the present.

X 어제 갔는데 문이 닫혀 있었어요.

O 어제 갔는데 문이 닫혀 있었어요.

In the past, everything takes -는데, adjectives included: 좋았는데, 바빴는데.

X 지금 저녁을 만들는데요.

O 지금 저녁을 만드는데요.

Stems ending in ㄹ drop it before -는데, exactly as before -는 and -네요.