

(으)로

by, with, toward, as — means, direction, material

One particle covering several English prepositions. The form follows the usual consonant rule, with one exception that catches everybody: nouns ending in ㄹ.

How it attaches

Noun type	Form	Example
Ends in a vowel	로	버스로 가요
Ends in a consonant	으로	젓가락으로 먹어요
Ends in ㄹ	로 — not 으로	지하철로 가요
Material	—	나무로 만들었어요
Role, capacity	—	선생님으로 일해요
Choice	—	커피로 할게요

Notes

The thread running through every use is the means by which. A tool: 젓가락으로 먹어요. A vehicle: 버스로 가요. A language: 한국어로 말해요. A material: 나무로 만들었어요.

It also gives direction, which is where it brushes against 에. 에 names the endpoint; (으)로 names the way you are heading. With 가다 both work, and the difference is small — but on signs and directions, (으)로 is what you see: 오른쪽으로 가세요.

Two more uses worth knowing early: choice, as in 저는 커피로 할게요 (I'll have the coffee), and capacity, as in 선생님으로 일해요 (I work as a teacher).

Examples

- 지하철로 삼십 분 걸려요.**
It takes thirty minutes by subway.
- 한국어로 말해 주세요.**
Please speak in Korean.
- 이쪽으로 오세요.**
Come this way, please.
- 나무로 만든 의자예요.**
It's a chair made of wood.
- 감기로 학교를 쉬었어요.**
I stayed home from school with a cold.
- 볼펜으로 쓰지 마세요.**
Please don't write in ballpoint pen.

Compared with

에

에 marks the destination as a fixed endpoint; (으)로 marks the direction of travel. For a plain "I'm going to school" use 에; for turning, heading, or pointing, use (으)로.

학교에 가요. (going to school) / 오른쪽으로 가세요. (go to the right)

와/과, 하고

English "with" splits here. A person you did it with takes 하고; a tool you used takes (으)로.

친구하고 만들었어요. (with a friend) / 손으로 만들었어요. (with my hands)

에서

에서 gives the place an action happens; (으)로 gives the instrument or route. A vehicle takes (으)로 when it is how you travel, and 에서 when something happens inside it.

버스로 왔어요. (came by bus) / 버스에서 잤어요. (slept on the bus)

Watch out

✗ 지하철로 갔어요.

○ 지하철로 갔어요.

Nouns ending in ㄹ take the short 로, breaking the usual consonant rule. The same goes for 서울로, 연필로, 술로.

✗ 버스에 왔어요.

○ 버스로 왔어요.

A vehicle used as transport takes (으)로. 에 would make the bus a destination, which is not what you mean.

✗ 손에 먹지 마세요.

○ 손으로 먹지 마세요.

A body part used as a tool takes (으)로. 손에 would mean "in the hand" as a location.