

-거든요

the thing is, you see

Supplies a reason the listener did not know. The mirror image of -잖아요, which recalls something they did.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Any verb or adjective	-거든요	바쁘다 → 바쁘거든요
ㄹ stems keep the ㄹ	-거든요	만들다 → 만들거든요
Past	-았/었거든요	갔거든요
이다	-(이)거든요	학생이거든요
Casual	-거든	바쁘거든
Known information takes	-잖아요	바쁘잖아요

WHEN TO USE IT

Attach -거든요 to any stem — no vowel rule, ㄹ stays, tense goes in front: 갔거든요, 좋았거든요. With a noun you need the copula: 학생이거든요.

Its usual job is explaining. Someone asks why you are leaving early and you answer 약속이 있거든요 — here is the piece of information you were missing. It is warmer than a bare 있어요 because it acknowledges that the listener needed an explanation.

It also opens stories. 어제 시장에 갔거든요. 그런데... sets the scene and signals that more is coming, rather like English "so I was at the market yesterday..."

The one thing it cannot do is state something the listener already knows. That is -잖아요, and swapping the two reverses who is supposed to know what.

IN USE

- 1 먼저 갈게요. 약속이 있거든요.
I'll head off first — I have plans, you see.
- 2 오늘은 좀 바쁘거든요. 내일 만날까요?
I'm a bit busy today. Shall we meet tomorrow?
- 3 어제 시장에 갔거든요. 그런데 문을 닫았더라고요.
So I went to the market yesterday — and it was closed.
- 4 저는 매운 걸 잘 못 먹거든요.
The thing is, I can't really handle spicy food.

- 5 제가 아직 학생이거든요. 할인 되나요?
I'm still a student — is there a discount?
- 6 이 빵은 제가 만들거든요. 한번 드셔 보세요.
I make this bread myself. Do try some.

COMPARED WITH

-잖아요

The two divide by who knows. -거든요 tells the listener something new; -잖아요 reminds them of something old. Getting it backwards is confusing at best and rude at worst.

바쁘거든요. (you didn't know) / 바쁘잖아요. (you knew)

-아서/어서

-아서 links cause and result inside one sentence; -거든요 gives the reason as a separate remark, usually after the fact.

바빠서 못 가요. (I can't go because I'm busy) / 못 가요. 바쁘거든요. (I can't go — I'm busy, you see)

-(으)ㄴ/는데

-는데 opens a topic and leaves it hanging; -거든요 closes an explanation. They often sit next to each other in the same exchange.

지금 바쁜데요. (I'm busy, so...) / 지금 바쁘거든요. (I'm busy — that's why)

WATCH OUT

X 오늘 일요일이거든요. — when you both obviously know

O 오늘 일요일이잖아요.

-거든요 presents information as new. For a fact the listener can see for themselves, use -잖아요.

X 제가 학생거든요.

O 제가 학생이거든요.

A noun needs the copula 이다 before this ending. The same applies to -잖아요 and -는데.

X 부장님, 그건 이미 끝났거든요.

O 부장님, 그건 이미 끝났습니다.

Explaining with -거든요 to a superior can sound like you are defending yourself. Use a plain formal statement instead.