

# -기

## nominalizing ending — turns a verb into a noun

Converts an action into something you can talk about. Simple to form, and it anchors a set of fixed patterns you will use constantly.

### How it attaches

| Situation          | Form            | Example           |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Any verb           | -기              | 읽다 → 읽기           |
| ㄹ stems keep the ㄹ | -기              | 만들다 → 만들기         |
| Easy, hard         | -기 쉽다 / 어렵다     | 읽기 쉬워요            |
| Start doing        | -기 시작하다         | 공부하기 시작했어요        |
| In order to        | -기 위해서          | 건강하기 위해서          |
| Never takes tense  | plain stem only | 갓기 시작했어요 is wrong |

### Notes

Attach -기 to any plain stem: 읽기, 쓰기, 만들기. Nothing changes, ㄹ stays, and tense never appears in front of it.

Most of the time you will meet it inside a fixed pattern rather than on its own: -기 쉽다 / 어렵다 (easy / hard to), -기 시작하다 (start doing), -기 좋다 / 싫다, -기 위해서 (in order to), and -기 전에. These take -기 and nothing else.

It also names activities in the abstract, which is why the four language skills are 읽기, 쓰기, 듣기, 말하기. Where you want to talk about a specific instance with its own tense, Korean switches to -는 것.

### Examples

- 1 한국어는 읽기가 어려워요.  
Reading is the hard part of Korean.
- 2 운동하기 시작했어요.  
I've started exercising.
- 3 이 책은 읽기 쉬워요.  
This book is easy to read.
- 4 내일 만나기로 했어요.  
We've arranged to meet tomorrow.
- 5 저는 요리하기를 좋아해요.  
I like cooking.
- 6 자기 전에 이를 닦으세요.  
Brush your teeth before going to bed.

### Compared with

#### -는 것

-기 names an activity in general; -는 것 refers to a particular instance and can carry tense. When a specific event with a time is involved, use -는 것.

수영하기를 좋아해요. (I like swimming) / 어제 수영한 것을 후회해요. (I regret swimming yesterday)

#### Fixed patterns

Several constructions accept only -기. Substituting -는 것 in them is ungrammatical rather than merely unusual.

읽기 쉬워요 / 가기 전에 / 시작하기 — never 읽는 것 쉬워요

#### -(으)ㅁ

Another nominalizer, restricted to formal writing and note-taking. It names a completed fact rather than an activity.

회의 참석하기 (attending meetings) / 회의에 참석함 (attended — in a report)

### Watch out

✗ 이 책은 읽는 것 쉬워요.

○ 이 책은 읽기 쉬워요.

쉽다 and 어렵다 take only -기. The same applies to 좋다, 싫다, 편하다 in this pattern.

✗ 작년에 배웠기 시작했어요.

○ 작년에 배우기 시작했어요.

-기 never carries tense. The past is expressed once, on 시작하다.

✗ 그 사람이 온 기를 몰랐어요.

○ 그 사람이 온 것을 몰랐어요.

To refer to a specific event that already happened, Korean needs the modifier plus 것. -기 cannot take a past form.