

-고 있다

be doing — action in progress

Korean's progressive. Narrower than English "-ing": it covers what is happening right now, but not habits, and not the state left behind after an action finishes.

How it attaches

Situation	Form	Example
Any action verb	-고 있다	먹다 → 먹고 있어요
ㄹ stems keep the ㄹ	-고 있다	만들다 → 만들고 있어요
Past	-고 있었다	먹고 있었어요
Honorific subject	-고 계시다	오고 계세요
Resulting state	-아/어 있다	문이 열려 있어요
Habits	plain present	매일 학교에 가요

Notes

Attach -고 to the stem and conjugate 있다: 지금 밥을 먹고 있어요. No vowel rule, no ㄹ dropping. For an honoured subject, 있다 becomes 계시다: 선생님께서 오고 계세요.

The trap for English speakers is that Korean does not use it for habits. "I'm studying Korean these days" is fine, because that is an ongoing project, but "I go to school every day" must stay in the plain present: 매일 학교에 가요, never 가고 있어요.

A second trap: with verbs of putting on clothes, -고 있다 is ambiguous. 코트를 입고 있어요 can mean either "is putting the coat on" or "is wearing it." For a state that remains after the action, Korean generally prefers -아/어 있다 — 문이 열려 있어요 (the door is open), not 열리고 있어요.

Examples

1 지금 밥을 먹고 있어요.

I'm eating right now.

2 비가 오고 있어요.

It's raining.

3 한국어를 배우고 있어요.

I'm learning Korean.

4 선생님이 전화를 하고 계세요.

The teacher is on the phone.

5 그 사람은 안경을 쓰고 있어요.

He wears glasses.

6 뭐 하고 있었어요?

What were you doing?

Compared with

-아요/어요

The plain present already covers habits and general truths, so adding -고 있다 to them is wrong rather than merely redundant.

매일 커피를 마셔요. (every day) / 지금 커피를 마시고 있어요. (right now)

-아/어 있다

-고 있다 describes the action unfolding; -아/어 있다 describes the state it left behind. Verbs of position and opening take the second.

앉고 있어요. (in the act of sitting down) / 앉아 있어요. (is seated)

-는 중이다

Close in meaning and slightly more emphatic, stressing that you are in the middle of something and cannot be interrupted. It attaches to nouns as well: 회의 중이에요.

공부하고 있어요. / 공부하는 중이에요.

Watch out

✗ 저는 매일 학교에 가고 있어요.

○ 저는 매일 학교에 가요.

Habits take the plain present in Korean. -고 있다 is only for something happening at the moment of speaking, or an ongoing project like 요즘 배우고 있어요.

✗ 창문이 열리고 있어요. — meaning "the window is open"

○ 창문이 열려 있어요.

-고 있다 would mean the window is in the process of opening. For the resulting state, use -아/어 있다.

✗ 선생님께서 오고 있어요.

○ 선생님께서 오고 계세요.

With an honorific subject, 있다 has to rise to 계시다 so the whole sentence matches.