

-고 말다

end up doing — despite yourself

Reports an outcome that arrived against your wishes. Where -아/어 버리다 can go either way emotionally, this one lands almost entirely on regret.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Any verb	-고 말다	울다 → 울고 말았어요
ㄹ stems keep the ㄹ	-고 말다	만들다 → 만들고 말았어요
Usual tense	past	지고 말았어요
Determination	-고 말겠다	합격하고 말겠어요
Adjectives	impossible	좋고 말다 does not exist
Never takes tense	plain stem + 고	울었고 말았어요 is wrong

WHEN TO USE IT

Attach -고 말다 to any verb stem — no vowel rule, ㄹ stays, tense on 말다. It appears overwhelmingly in the past: 울고 말았어요, 지고 말았어요.

The sense is that something reached an end you did not want and could not stop: 참으려고 했는데 울고 말았어요. There is often a struggle implied beforehand.

One exception flips it entirely. In the future with -겠, it expresses determination: 이번에는 꼭 합격하고 말겠어요 — I will pass this time, whatever it takes. Same form, opposite energy, and worth learning as a separate item.

It belongs to writing and to emphatic speech. In casual conversation -아/어 버리다 is far more common.

IN USE

- 1 참으려고 했는데 결국 울고 말았어요.
I tried to hold it in, but I ended up crying.
- 2 열심히 했지만 시험에서 지고 말았어요.
We worked hard, but we lost the match after all.
- 3 조심했는데도 접시를 깨고 말았어요.
I was careful, and still I broke the plate.
- 4 비밀을 지키려다가 결국 말하고 말았어요.
I meant to keep the secret, but it came out in the end.
- 5 그 회사는 결국 문을 닫고 말았다.
The company ended up closing down.

6 이번에는 꼭 합격하고 말겠어요.

This time I'm going to pass, no matter what.

COMPARED WITH

-아/어 버리다

버리다 can express relief as easily as regret; -고 말다 is nearly always regret, and often implies you resisted first.

다 해 버렸어요. (glad it's over) / 지고 말았어요. (we lost, sadly)

-게 되다

-게 되다 reports a change neutrally, even favourably. -고 말다 marks the outcome as unwelcome.

한국에서 일하게 됐어요. (it worked out) / 회사가 문을 닫고 말았어요. (it came to that)

-고 말겠다

The future form reverses the meaning into resolve. Treat it as a separate expression rather than a tense change.

지고 말았어요. (we lost) / 이기고 말겠어요. (we will win)

WATCH OUT

X 결국 울었고 말았어요.

O 결국 울고 말았어요.

-고 never carries tense here. The past goes on 말다 at the end.

X 시험에 합격하고 말았어요. — meaning "I passed, happily"

O 시험에 합격했어요.

-고 말다 frames the outcome as unwelcome. For good news, use the plain past.

X 날씨가 춥고 말았어요.

O 날씨가 추워지고 말았어요.

This ending takes action verbs. An adjective needs -아/어지다 first to become a change.