

-고 싶다

want to

Attaches to a verb stem to express desire. Straightforward to build — the catch is that Korean only lets you use it about yourself and the person you are talking to.

How it attaches

Situation	Form	Example
Any action verb	-고 싶다	가다 → 가고 싶어요
ㄹ stems keep the ㄹ	-고 싶다	만들다 → 만들고 싶어요
Past	tense on 싶다	가고 싶었어요
Third person	-고 싶어 하다	동생은 가고 싶어 해요
Object particle	을/를 or 이/가	물을 / 물이 마시고 싶어요
Adjectives	use -아/어지고 싶다	예뻐지고 싶어요

Notes

Attach -고 to any action verb stem and conjugate 싶다 at the end: 한국에 가고 싶어요. No vowel rule, no consonant rule, and ㄹ stays put.

Korean treats inner states as private. You may report your own desires, and ask about the listener's, but stating what a third person wants requires -고 싶어 하다: 동생은 가고 싶어 해요. English has no equivalent split, so this is a mistake that persists for a long time.

Two smaller points. Tense goes on 싶다, not on the main verb: 가고 싶었어요. And because 싶다 is an adjective, the object of the sentence can take either 을/를 or 이/가 — 물을 마시고 싶어요 and 물이 마시고 싶어요 are both correct, the second slightly more emphatic.

Examples

① 한국에 가고 싶어요.

I want to go to Korea.

② 뭐 먹고 싶어요?

What do you want to eat?

③ 동생이 게임을 하고 싶어해요.

My younger sibling wants to play games.

④ 좀 쉬고 싶은데요.

I'd like to take a short break.

⑤ 다시 만나고 싶었어요.

I wanted to see you again.

⑥ 한국어를 잘하고 싶어요.

I want to get good at Korean.

Compared with

-고 싶어 하다

The third-person version. Adding 하다 turns the adjective into a verb of behaviour, so it reports what someone appears to want rather than what they feel.

저는 가고 싶어요. / 친구는 가고 싶어 해요.

-(으)면 좋겠다

-고 싶다 wants to do something; -(으)면 좋겠다 wishes a situation were so, including things outside your control.

쉬고 싶어요. (I want to rest) / 내일 비가 안 오면 좋겠어요. (I hope it doesn't rain)

원하다

원하다 takes a noun object and sounds formal or written. For everyday "I want to do X," Korean uses -고 싶다 almost without exception.

쉬고 싶어요. (natural) / 휴식을 원합니다. (formal, written)

Watch out

✗ 동생은 한국에 가고 싶어요.

○ 동생은 한국에 가고 싶어 해요.

-고 싶다 belongs to the speaker and the listener. For anyone else, Korean requires 싶어 하다.

✗ 저는 예쁘고 싶어요.

○ 저는 예뻐지고 싶어요.

-고 싶다 attaches only to action verbs. To want a state, first turn the adjective into a change with -아/어지다.

✗ 어제 한국에 갔고 싶었어요.

○ 어제 한국에 가고 싶었어요.

Tense goes on 싶다 at the end. The main verb stays in its plain stem form.