

이/가

subject marker

Marks who or what performs the action. Which of the two forms you use depends on one thing only: whether the noun ends in a consonant.

How it attaches

Noun type	Form	Example
Ends in a consonant	이	학생이
Ends in a vowel	가	친구가
나 (I, casual)	내가	내가 — not 나가
저 (I, polite)	제가	제가 — not 저가
너 (you, casual)	네가	네가 — spoken as 니가
누구 (who)	누가	누가 — not 누군가
Honorific subject	께서	선생님께서

Notes

이/가 points at the doer. In 고양이 **가** 자요, the cat is the one sleeping, and the particle is what tells you so — Korean word order alone will not.

Beyond that basic job, 이/가 carries a second signal that English has no equivalent for: it presents the noun as new or selected information. Answer the question 누가 왔어요? and the answer must take 이/가, because the whole point of your reply is to identify which person. This is the difference that trips up learners, and it is why 이/가 and 은/는 are not interchangeable even though both can sit on a subject.

It is also required, not optional, after certain predicates: 있다, 없다, 되다, 아니다, and adjectives describing a state all take a 이/가 subject.

Examples

- 동생이 지금 자요.
My younger sibling is sleeping right now.
- 친구가 한국에서 왔어요.
A friend came from Korea.
- 시간이 없어요.
There is no time.
- 누가 이 책을 읽었어요?
Who read this book?
- 제가 하겠습니다.
I will do it.
- 할아버지께서 신문을 보세요.
Grandfather is reading the newspaper.

Compared with

은/는

은/는 marks the topic — what the sentence is about, or what is being contrasted. 이/가 marks the subject and presents it as new. Both can attach to the same noun, and swapping them changes what the listener hears as the point of the sentence.

제 이름은 마이클이에요. (introducing myself: the topic is my name) / 마이클이 제 이름이에요. (of the names available, Michael is mine)

Answering a question

When your reply supplies the missing piece of information, that piece takes 이/가. Using 은/는 there sounds like you are changing the subject.

누가 왔어요? → 마이클이 왔어요. (correct) / 마이클은 왔어요. (as for Michael, he did come — but what about the others?)

께서

The honorific form of 이/가, used when the subject is someone you are showing respect to. The verb usually takes -(으)시- to match.

선생님께서 오셨어요. / 친구가 왔어요.

Watch out

✗ 나가 할게요.

○ 내가 할게요.

나 and 저 change shape before 가. There is no 나가 or 저가 — only 내가 and 제가. This is the most frequent beginner error in speech.

✗ 누군가 왔어요?

○ 누가 왔어요?

누구 contracts to 누 before 가. The full form survives elsewhere, as in 누구를 or 누구예요.

✗ 친구이 왔어요.

○ 친구가 왔어요.

Choose by the last letter of the noun, not by meaning or by how the word feels. 친구 ends in a vowel, so it takes 가.