

(이)나

or; as many as; any

Offers a choice between nouns. The same particle also expresses surprise at a large amount, and forms the "any-" words — three jobs that look unrelated until you see them side by side.

How it attaches

Situation	Form	Example
Ends in a vowel	나	커피나 차
Ends in a consonant	이나	밥이나 빵
After a number	as many as	세 시간이나 기다렸어요
Question words	fixed forms	언제나, 누구나, 어디나
Vague suggestion	or something	영화나 볼까요?
Joining verbs takes	-거나 instead	먹거나 마시거나 — not 먹나

Notes

The core use is "or" between nouns: 커피나 차를 마세요. Attach it to the first option and leave the second bare. It carries a shade of "either is fine with me," which is why it works so well for suggestions.

After a number it flips to "as many as" and signals that the amount is more than expected: 세 시간이나 기다렸어요 means the three hours felt long. Say 세 시간밖에 안 기다렸어요 and you get the opposite reaction to the same three hours.

Attached to a question word it produces the "any-" series: 언제나 (always), 어디나 (anywhere), 누구나 (anyone), 아무거나 (anything at all). These are fixed words worth learning whole.

Examples

- 커피나 차 중에서 골라 주세요.
Please choose between coffee and tea.
- 시간이 있으면 영화나 볼까요?
If you have time, shall we watch a film or something?
- 두 시간이나 걸렸어요.
It took as long as two hours.
- 이거나 저거나 다 좋아요.
Either this or that is fine with me.
- 누구나 실수할 수 있어요.
Anyone can make a mistake.
- 주스나 한 잔 주세요.
Just give me a glass of juice or something.

Compared with

-거나

(이)나 joins nouns; -거나 joins verbs and adjectives. English "or" covers both, so learners regularly reach for the wrong one.

커피나 차를 마세요. (coffee or tea) / 커피를 마시거나 차를 마세요. (drink coffee or drink tea)

아니면

아니면 is a connector standing between two full clauses, closer to English "or else." It is not a particle and takes no attachment.

커피나 차 주세요. / 커피 주세요. 아니면 차도 괜찮아요.

밖에

Both react to a quantity, in opposite directions. (이)나 says it is more than expected; 밖에 with a negative says it is less.

세 시간이나 잤어요. (slept a whole three hours) / 세 시간밖에 못 잤어요. (only got three hours)

Watch out

✗ 커피이나 차를 마세요.

○ 커피나 차를 마세요.

커피 ends in a vowel, so 나 alone. 이나 goes after a consonant, as in 밥이나.

✗ 먹나 마시나 하세요.

○ 먹거나 마시거나 하세요.

To offer a choice between actions, the ending is -거나 on the verb stem. (이)나 only attaches to nouns.

✗ 세 시간이나 못 잤어요.

○ 세 시간밖에 못 잤어요.

(이)나 marks an amount as generous, so it clashes with a negative complaint. For "only three hours," use 밖에.