

께서

subject marker — honorific

The respectful replacement for 이/가. Using it commits the rest of the sentence: the verb has to be honorific too.

How it attaches

Situation	Form	Example
Honorific subject	께서	선생님께서 오셨어요
As topic	께서는	부모님께서 부산에 계세요
Also, too	께서도	사장님께서도 아세요
Verb must match	-(으)시-	가시다, 오시다, 하시다
Special verbs	계시다, 드시다, 주무시다	할아버지께서 주무세요
Never for yourself	use 제가	제가 하겠습니다 — not 저께서

Notes

께서 marks the subject when that subject deserves respect — a teacher, a parent, a grandparent, a boss, a customer. It takes the place of 이/가 and never appears alongside it.

The important part is what it obliges. Korean honorifics work as a set: once the subject is honoured with께서, the verb needs -(으)시-, and some verbs switch to special forms — 있다 becomes 계시다, 먹다 becomes 드시다, 자다 becomes 주무시다. 할아버지께서 주무세요.

One absolute rule: never use it about yourself. Honorifics raise other people, so 저께서 or 제가께서 does not exist. Speaking about your own family to an outsider, Korean also tends to lower the register, so께서 with 우리 엄마 can sound out of place in that situation.

Examples

- 1 선생님께서 말씀하셨습니다.
The teacher said so.
- 2 할머니께서 편찮으세요.
My grandmother is unwell.
- 3 부모님께서 오셨어요.
My parents have arrived.
- 4 사장님께서 지금 안 계세요.
The director isn't in at the moment.
- 5 아버지께서도 같이 가세요.
My father is going along as well.
- 6 교수님께서 추천해 주셨어요.
The professor recommended it to me.

Compared with

이/가

Same grammatical job, different level of respect. 이/가 with an honorific verb is possible and common in casual speech;께서 raises the formality of the whole sentence.

선생님이 오셨어요. (everyday) / 선생님께서 오셨습니다. (formal)

께

께서 marks the honoured person as the one doing;께 marks them as the one receiving. One syllable of difference, opposite roles.

선생님께서 주셨어요. (the teacher gave) / 선생님께 드렸어요. (I gave to the teacher)

은/는

To make an honoured subject the topic, stack 는 onto께서 rather than replacing it. The result is께서는.

부모님께서 서울에 계세요. / not 부모님은께서

Watch out

✗ 선생님께서 왔어요.

○ 선생님께서 오셨어요.

Honorifics come as a set. Once께서 marks the subject, the verb needs -(으)시-. A mismatch sounds worse than using no honorific at all.

✗ 저께서 하겠습니다.

○ 제가 하겠습니다.

Honorifics raise other people, never the speaker. For yourself, use제가 and let the verb ending carry the politeness.

✗ 선생님께서 책을 드렸어요.

○ 선생님께 책을 드렸어요.

드리다 means the speaker is giving upward, so the teacher is the recipient and takes께.께서 would make the teacher the giver.