

-ㅂ니다/습니다

formal polite present

The formal register: presentations, announcements, interviews, the news. Simpler to form than -아요/어요 — no vowel harmony, no merging — with one irregular stem type.

How it attaches

Stem type	Form	Example
Ends in a vowel	-ㅂ니다	가다 → 갑니다
Ends in a consonant	-습니다	먹다 → 먹습니다
Ends in ㄹ	ㄹ drops	만들다 → 만듭니다
하다 verbs	-ㅂ니다	공부하다 → 공부합니다
Question	-ㅂ니까 / -습니까	가니까? / 먹습니까?
이다	입니다	학생입니다

Notes

The rule has two lines. A stem ending in a vowel takes -ㅂ니다, and the ㅂ tucks into the last syllable: 가 becomes 갑니다. A stem ending in a consonant takes -습니다: 먹 becomes 먹습니다. Questions swap 다 for 까: 갑니까, 먹습니까.

One stem type breaks the pattern. Verbs ending in ㄹ drop it before this ending: 만들다 becomes 만듭니다, not 만들습니다. 살다, 알다, 놀다, 팔다 all behave this way.

Choosing between this and -아요/어요 is a question of setting rather than politeness. Both are polite. -ㅂ니다 creates distance and authority; used with a friend it sounds like a joke or a rebuke. Note also that this ending is written 니다 but pronounced closer to [nida] with the ㅂ assimilating — 갑니다 sounds like [감니다].

Examples

- 안녕하십니까? 처음 뵙겠습니다.
Hello. It's a pleasure to meet you.
- 지금부터 발표를 시작하겠습니다.
I will now begin the presentation.
- 어디에서 오셨습니까?
Where have you come from?
- 감사합니다. 수고하셨습니다.
Thank you. Well done today.
- 저는 회사원입니다.
I'm an office worker.
- 내일 다시 연락드리겠습니다.
I'll contact you again tomorrow.

Compared with

-아요/어요

Same politeness, different distance. Use -ㅂ니다 when you are addressing a room, a customer, or a superior in a formal setting; use -아요 for ordinary conversation, including with people you respect.

발표를 시작하겠습니다. (to an audience) / 이제 시작해요. (to a colleague)

-(으)십시오

The formal imperative that belongs with this register. Its everyday counterpart is -(으)세요, which pairs with -아요/어요.

이쪽으로 오십시오. (formal) / 이쪽으로 오세요. (everyday)

Mixed registers

Korean speakers do move between the two inside one conversation, softening a formal talk with occasional -아요. What sounds wrong is switching mid-sentence or mid-thought.

감사합니다. 그럼 시작할게요. (natural) / 감사해요. 그럼 시작하겠습니다. (jarring)

Watch out

✗ 이 제품은 한국에서 만들습니다.

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Stems ending in ㄹ drop it before -ㅂ니다. The same applies to 삽니다, 압니다, 늙니다, 팝니다.

✗ 저는 학교에 가습니다.

○ 저는 학교에 갑니다.

가 ends in a vowel, so it takes -ㅂ니다 and the ㅂ joins the syllable. -습니다 is only for consonant stems.

✗ 친구야, 우리 밥 먹습니다.

○ 친구야, 우리 밥 먹자.

The formal ending clashes with casual address. Register has to stay consistent across the whole sentence.