

아직 vs 이미 vs 벌써

not yet / still · already (a fact) · already (sooner than expected)

English gets by with “yet”, “still” and “already”. Korean splits “already” in two: **이미** states a fact, **벌써** adds the speaker’s surprise that it happened so soon.

At a glance

Word	Core meaning	Nuance	Typical pattern
아직	not yet / still — the expected change hasn’t happened	neutral (아직도 = impatient)	아직 안 -았/었어요 아직 -고 있어요
이미	already — completed before a point in time	neutral, objective; often “too late”	이미 -았/었어요 이미 늦었다
벌써	already — earlier or faster than expected	surprise	벌써 -았/었어요? 벌써 ~이네요

How they differ

1. **아직 vs 벌써** — **opposite answers to the same question.** To 밥 먹었어요?, you answer **아직 안 먹었어요** (not yet) or **벌써 먹었어요** (I already ate). With a past-tense verb, 아직 almost always needs 안 or 못. With an ongoing or present state it means “still”: **아직 자고 있어요, 아직 괜찮아요.**

2. **이미 vs 벌써** — **two kinds of “already”.** 이미 reports that something was finished before a reference point, with no emotion: **기차는 이미 떠났습니다** (so it’s too late). 벌써 carries the feeling “so soon?”: **기차가 벌써 떠났어요?**. Because of that feeling, 벌써 is the natural choice for exclamations and questions.

3. **Only 벌써 works for the near future.** When a guest gets up to leave: **벌써 가요?** ○ / **이미 가요?** ×. 이미 describes something already completed, so it can’t react to what is about to happen.

4. **Formal writing prefers 이미.** Fixed expressions like **이미 알려진 바와 같이** (as is already known) or **이미 말씀드린 대로** (as I already mentioned) never take 벌써.

One step further

아직도 adds impatience or surprise that something is still the case: **아직도 안 끝났어요?** 벌써 often pairs with a length of time to say “time flies”: **한국에 온 지 벌써 3년이 됐어요.**

Practice

- 영화가 ____ 끝났어요? 두 시간이 이렇게 빨리 지나가다니!
- 죄송하지만 그 상품은 ____ 품질되었습니다.
- 비가 ____ 오고 있어요. 우산 가져가세요.
- A: 숙제 다 했어? B: 아니, ____ 못 했어.
- 우리 아이가 ____ 초등학생이 됐어요.

Answers: 1 **벌써** · 2 **이미** · 3 **아직** · 4 **아직** · 5 **벌써**

Examples

- 아직 숙제를 못 했어요.**
I haven’t been able to do my homework yet.
- 동생은 아직 자고 있어요.**
My younger brother is still sleeping.
- 벌써 가을이네요.**
It’s autumn already!
- 한국에 온 지 벌써 1년이 됐어요.**
It’s already been a year since I came to Korea.
- 회의는 이미 시작됐습니다.**
The meeting has already started.
- 그건 이미 알고 있는 내용이에요.**
That’s something I already know.

Which one fits?

Sentence	아직	이미	벌써
____ 12시예요? 시간 정말 빠르네요.	×	△	◎
기차는 ____ 떠났습니다. 다음 기차를 이용하세요.	×	◎	○
____ 가요? 좀 더 있다 가세요.	×	×	◎
보고서 ____ 안 끝났어요?	◎	×	×
____ 알려진 바와 같이	×	◎	×

◎ natural ○ possible △ awkward × wrong

Watch out

× **아직 먹었어요.**

○ **아직 안 먹었어요.**

With a past-tense verb, 아직 means “not yet”, so it needs 안 or 못.

× **(to a guest leaving) 이미 가요?**

○ **벌써 가요?**

Surprise that something is happening early is 벌써. 이미 only reports completed facts.

× **벌써 알려진 바와 같이**

○ **이미 알려진 바와 같이**

Formal fixed expressions use 이미.