

방금 vs 금방 vs 곧

just now · just now / right away, quickly · soon, shortly

The key is the direction of time: **방금** looks back (just now), **곧** looks ahead (soon), and **금방** can go either way, with an added sense of “quickly”.

■ At a glance

Word	Core meaning	Nuance	Typical pattern
방금	just now, a moment ago	Past only. Used with past tense; set phrase 방금 전(에).	방금 -았/었어요 방금 전(에)
금방	right away, in no time; also just now	Both directions, conversational. Stresses speed: 금방 끝나요, 금방 더러워져요. 금방이라도 = any minute.	금방 갈게요 / 금방 끝나요 금방이라도 -(으)ㄹ 것 같다
곧	soon, shortly	Future only. Neutral to formal; common in announcements. Set phrase 곧 있으면.	곧 -(으)ㄹ 거예요 / -겠습니다 곧 있으면

■ How they differ

1. Which way does time point? 방금 왔어요 (I just arrived) looks back. 곧 와요 (he's coming soon) looks ahead. 금방 does both: 금방 왔어요 (I just got here) and 금방 갈게요 (I'll be there right away). So: 곧 왔어요 × for “just came”, 방금 갈게요 × for “coming soon”.

2. 금방 = quickly; 곧 = soon. 금방 is about how fast something happens: 흰 옷은 금방 더러워져요 (white clothes get dirty so fast) ○ / 곧 더러워져요 △. 곧 simply says the time until an event is short: 곧 겨울이에요 (winter is coming soon).

3. Fixed phrases. Each word has its own set phrase: 방금 전(에) (a moment ago), 금방이라도 (any minute now), 곧 있으면 (before long). They don't swap: 금방 전 △, 방금이라도 ×.

4. Register. 금방 is conversational. 곧 sounds neutral and is the natural choice in formal announcements: 곧 착륙하겠습니다 (we will be landing shortly). English “soon / in a sec” can both be 금방 in casual speech, but only 곧 in a PA announcement.

■ One step further

For “already / so soon”, Korean uses 벌써: 벌써 끝났어요? In writing, 곧 also means “that is / namely” (이것이 곧 문제의 핵심이다), a separate usage. To say what you are about to do, 곧 pairs well with -(으)ㄹ 거예요: 곧 출발할 거예요.

■ Practice

1. ____ 전까지 여기 있었는데 어디 갔지?
2. ____ 있으면 크리스마스예요.
3. 하늘이 너무 어두워요. ____이라도 비가 올 것 같아요.
4. 1부가 끝나고 ____ 이어 2부가 시작됐어요.
5. 이 책은 쉬워서 하루 만에 ____ 다 읽었어요.

Answers: 1 방금 · 2 곧 · 3 금방 · 4 곧 · 5 금방

■ Examples

- 1 방금 버스가 떠났어요.**
The bus just left.
- 2 방금 전에 한 말 다시 한번 해 주세요.**
Please say again what you said a moment ago.
- 3 금방 끝나니까 조금만 기다려 주세요.**
It'll be done in no time, so please wait a little.
- 4 하늘이 어두워서 금방이라도 비가 올 것 같아요.**
The sky is so dark it looks like it could rain any minute.
- 5 곧 있으면 여름 방학이에요.**
Summer vacation is coming up soon.
- 6 공연이 곧 시작됩니다. 자리에 앉아 주세요.**
The performance will begin shortly. Please take your seats.

■ Which one fits?

Sentence	방금	금방	곧
____ 전화 온 사람이 누구예요?	◎	○	×
잠깐만 기다려. ____ 갈게.	×	◎	◎
(안내 방송) 우리 비행기는 ____ 인천공항에 착륙하겠습니다.	×	△	◎
흰 옷은 ____ 더러워서 잘 안 입어요.	×	◎	△
빵이 ____ 나와서 아직 따뜻해요.	◎	○	×

◎ natural ○ possible △ awkward × wrong

■ Watch out

- × 저도 곧 왔어요. 오래 안 기다렸어요.
○ 저도 방금 왔어요. 오래 안 기다렸어요.
곧 points to the future; “I just got here” is 방금 왔어요.
- × 지금 나가요! 방금 갈게요!
○ 지금 나가요! 금방 갈게요!
방금 only refers to the past; for “I'll be right there” use 금방 (or 곧).
- × 하늘이 너무 어두워요. 방금이라도 비가 올 것 같아요.
○ 하늘이 너무 어두워요. 금방이라도 비가 올 것 같아요.
“Any minute now” is the set phrase 금방이라도; 방금 can only look back.