GENERAL

basic korean words for beginners

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Welcome to the World of Basic Korean Words for Beginners

Learning a new language can feel like stepping into a vast, uncharted territory. For many, the Korean language—known for its melodic flow and rich cultural heritage—offers both an exciting challenge and a gateway to a vibrant society. Whether you're planning a trip to Seoul, watching K dramas with subtitles, or simply curious about Hangul, starting with the most essential Korean words is the first, most crucial step. In this guide, we'll walk you through the foundational vocabulary every beginner should master, explain why these words matter, and provide practical tips to help you remember and use them confidently.

Why Mastering Basic Korean Words Matters

Before diving into lists of vocabulary, it's helpful to understand the role of basic Korean words in language learning. Think of these words as the building blocks of communication—like the bricks that hold up a house. By mastering a core set of terms, you'll:

- Gain immediate confidence in everyday conversations.
- Build a solid foundation for more advanced grammar and nuance.
- Create a memorable mental map that speeds up future learning.
- Show respect and curiosity to Korean speakers, which can open doors culturally and socially.

In short, basic Korean words for beginners are the bridge between the curiosity of a novice and the fluency of an experienced speaker.

Essential Categories of Korean Vocabulary

Below, we've grouped the most common words into intuitive categories. This structure will help you focus your study sessions and quickly recognize patterns across topics.

1. Greetings and Polite Expressions

Politeness is a cornerstone of Korean culture. Mastering these greetings will set a respectful tone in any interaction.

- ÅH±UÕXÁ8Æ" (annyeonghaseyo) – "Hello" (polite)
- ¬ À¬Õi²È²ä (gamsahamnida) – "Thank you" (polite)
- »øÅHÕi²È²ä (mianhamnida) – "I'm sorry" (polite)
- È‹Ç@ ÅDÎhÇtÅÐÆ" (joeun achimieyo) – "Good morning"
- ÅH±U×ˆ ¬ Á8Æ" (annyeonghi gaseyo) – "Goodbye" (to someone leaving)
- ÅH±U×ˆ ¬ÄÁ8Æ" (annyeonghi gyeseyo) – "Goodbye" (to someone staying)
- Ç˜ ÉÀ°´Á8Æ"? (jal jinaeseyo?) – "How are you?"
- ±$ (ne) – "Yes"
- ÅD²ÈÆ" (aniyo) – "No"
- È ¼ (jebal) – "Please"

2. Numbers and Counting

Numbers are indispensable for shopping, traveling, and everyday life. Korean offers two counting systems—native

Korean and Sino Korean—so it’s useful to know both.

- Ç| (il) – 1 (native)
- Çt (i) – 2 (native)
- À¼ (sam) – 3 (native)
- À¬ (sa) – 4 (native)
- Æ$ (o) – 5 (native)
- Ç! (yuk) – 6 (native)
- Î` (chil) – 7 (native)
- Ó (pal) – 8 (native)
- -I (gu) – 9 (native)
- Âí (sip) – 10 (native)
- Ç| (il) – 1 (Sino Korean)
- Çt (i) – 2 (Sino Korean)
- À¼ (sam) – 3 (Sino Korean)
- À¬ (sa) – 4 (Sino Korean)
- Æ$ (o) – 5 (Sino Korean)
- Ç! (yuk) – 6 (Sino Korean)
- Î` (chil) – 7 (Sino Korean)
- Ó (pal) – 8 (Sino Korean)
- -I (gu) – 9 (Sino Korean)
- Âí (sip) – 10 (Sino Korean)

3. Family and Social Relationships

Family terms help you describe relationships and show respect in Korean society.

- ¬ Èq (gajok) – “Family”
- ÅD¼„ÉÀ (abeoji) – “Father”
- Å´º8²È (eomeoni) – “Mother”
- Ö (hyeong) – “Older brother” (male speaker)
- ² °˜ (nuna) – “Older sister” (male speaker)
- Æ$¾` (oppa) – “Older brother” (female speaker)
- Å¸²È (eonni) – “Older sister” (female speaker)
- °¨³ÙÀÝ (nandongsaeng) – “Younger brother”
- Åì³ÙÀÝ (yeodongsaeng) – “Younger sister”
- Î\-I (chingu) – “Friend”
- Çt¹„ (ireum) – “Name”

4. Food and Dining

Food is central to Korean culture. Knowing these words will help you order, describe, and enjoy meals.

- ¼% (bap) – “Rice/Meal”
- ¬à®0 (gogi) – “Meat”
- ®@ÎX (kimchi) – “Fermented cabbage”
- -m (guk) – “Soup”
- ¼ Ì, (banchan) – “Side dishes”
- ÇLÂÝ (eumsik) – “Food”
- ¹ÛÇˆÅ´Æ” (masisseoyo) – “It tastes good”
- ¼0¬àÓ Æ” (baegopayo) – “I’m hungry”

- Ç˜ º9¬ Âµ²È²ä (jal meokgesseumnida) – “I’ll eat well” (said before a meal)
- Ç˜ º9ÅÈÂµ²È²ä (jal meogeosseumnida) – “I ate well” (after a meal)

5. Travel and Transportation

When you travel, these words will help you navigate public transport, ask for directions, and handle tickets.

- ¼„Â¤ (beoseu) – “Bus”
- ÉÀÕXÌ (jihacheol) – “Subway”
- ÐÝÂÜ (taeksi) – “Taxi”
- Åí (yeok) – “Station”
- Íœ¼ (chulbal) – “Departure”
- ³ÄÌ) (dochag) – “Arrival”
- ÂÜ¬ Ô\ (siganhweo) – “Schedule”
- Òð Ï (tiket) – “Ticket”
- Åì-Œ (yeogwon) – “Passport”
- ¾DÇ• (bija) – “Visa”

6. Everyday Verbs

Verbs are the engine of sentences. These common actions will let you describe what you do and what others are doing.

- ÕX²ä (hada) – “To do”
- ¬ ²ä (gada) – “To go”
- Æ$²ä (oda) – “To come”
- º9²ä (meokda) – “To eat”
- ¹ÈÂÜ²ä (masida) – “To drink”
- ¼ô²ä (boda) – “To see”
- ´ã²ä (deutda) – “To listen”
- ¹ÐÕX²ä (malhada) – “To speak”
- Ç}²ä (ikda) – “To read”
- Äð²ä (sseuda) – “To write”
- À´²ä (salda) – “To live”
- Ç•²ä (jada) – “To sleep”

7. Descriptive Adjectives

Adjectives add color and detail to your speech. These simple descriptors are perfect for beginners.

- È‹²ä (jota) – “Good”
- °˜ÀX²ä (nappeuda) – “Bad”
- ÅD¹„²õ²ä (areumdaptda) – “Beautiful”
- Ç‘²ä (jakda) – “Small”
- Ðl²ä (keuda) – “Large”
- ¾`¹t²ä (ppareuda) – “Fast”
- ²•¹¬²ä (neuridda) – “Slow”
- ±’²ä (nopda) – “High”
- °®²ä (najda) – “Low”
- ÂÜÆÐÕX²ä (siwonhada) – “Cool” (temperature)
- µ0·;ÕX²ä (ttatteuthada) – “Warm” (temperature)

How to Practice Basic Korean Words Effectively

Acquiring vocabulary is only half the battle; retaining it requires active practice. Here are proven strategies to embed basic Korean words into your daily routine.

1. Use Flashcards Wisely

Digital flashcard apps like Anki or Quizlet employ spaced repetition algorithms that remind you of words at optimal intervals. Create separate decks for each category—greetings, numbers, food, etc.—and review daily. Aim for short, focused sessions (10–15 minutes) rather than marathon cram.

2. Label Your Environment

Stick sticky notes on household items with their Korean names. Seeing “°ÉÇ¥¬à” (naengjanggo – refrigerator) every time you open the fridge reinforces memory through visual association.

3. Speak, Even if You’re Wrong

Language learning thrives on active usage. Try to incorporate new words into your daily conversations—whether speaking to yourself, a language partner, or a native speaker. Don’t fear mistakes; they’re stepping stones to fluency.

4. Engage with Korean Media

Watching K dramas, listening to K pop, or following Korean podcasts exposes you to authentic pronunciation and context. Pause and repeat phrases, then write them down. This multimodal approach solidifies both listening and writing skills.

5. Keep a Vocabulary Journal

Writing words in a dedicated notebook helps cement them in memory. Include the Hangul, Romanization, meaning, and a sample sentence. Review the journal weekly to track progress.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Learning Basic Korean Words

Even seasoned learners stumble on certain pitfalls. Awareness can help you sidestep these errors early.

- Mixing up polite and casual forms: Korean verbs and nouns have honorific levels. Using casual forms (e.g., “ÅH±U” instead of “ÅH±UÕXÁ8Æ””) in formal settings can appear disrespectful.
- Forgetting honorific particles: Words like “Å(” (ssi) or “²Ø” (nim) add politeness. Omitting them when addressing someone older or higher in status may be seen as rudeness.
- Overlooking the difference between native and Sino Korean numbers: Using the wrong counting system for dates, age, or money can confuse listeners.
- Pronunciation missteps: Korean has subtle consonant distinctions (e.g., “1B” vs. “1M”). Practice with native speakers or audio resources to nail the sounds.

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