Bootstrap Korean Grammar

Learn Korean grammar step-by-step with
185 topics and over 3,200 examples

First Edition

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Declan Software Ltd.

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The application contains all the same content as this book but with the addition of high-quality native speaker recordings of all examples. So, if you prefer to have the grammar set out in book form but would also like to be able to listen to the example sentences, then the book/app combination is perfect for you.

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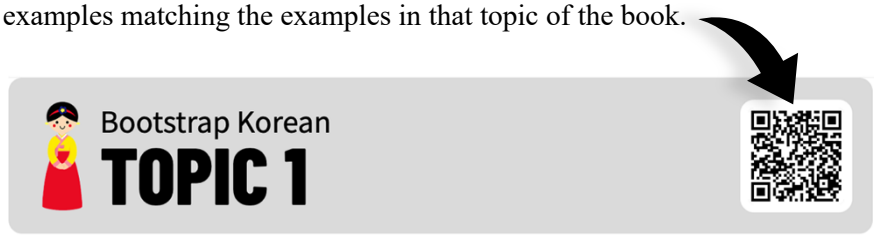

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TOPIC 1

❖ The verb ‘to be’ - 이에요/예요

Pattern: Noun + 이에요 or Noun + 예요

The Korean verb 이다 means 'to be'. Its present tense forms are 이에요 & 예요.

To say A is B we attach one of the two present tense forms of the verb to the object noun B.

- We attach 이에요 when the object noun ends with a consonant.
- We attach 예요 when the object noun ends with a vowel.

In the examples below the subject noun (A) – who or what is doing the verb – is absent. This is common in Korean when it is obvious from the context.

EXAMPLES:

1 **학생이에요.**

(I) am a student.

학생 (ends with the consonant ㅇ) + 이에요 ⇒ 학생이에요

학생 means 'student'

2 **겨울이에요.**

(It) is winter.

겨울 (ends with the consonant ㄹ) + 이에요 ⇒ 겨울이에요

겨울 means 'winter'

3 **월요일이에요.**

(It) is Monday.

월요일 (ends with the consonant ㄹ) + 이에요 ⇒ 월요일이에요

월요일 means 'Monday'

4 **나무예요.**

(It) is a tree.

나무 (ends with the vowel ㅜ) + 예요 ⇒ 나무예요

나무 means 'tree'

5 **누나예요.**

(She) is (my) older sister.

누나 (ends with the vowel ㅏ) + 예요 ⇒ 누나예요

누나 means 'a male's older sister'

6 **강이에요.**

(It) is a river.

강 (ends with the consonant ㅇ) + 이에요 ⇒ 강이에요

강 means 'river'

7 **초콜릿이에요?**

Is (it) chocolate?

초콜릿 (ends with the consonant ㅅ) + 이에요 ⇒ 초콜릿이에요

초콜릿 means 'chocolate'

Questions can be formulated in Korean by just using a pronounced upwards inflection.

8 **학생이에요?**

Is (he) a student?

학생 (ends with the consonant ㅇ) + 이에요 ⇒ 학생이에요

학생 means 'student'

9 **서준이에요.**

(He) is Seojun.

서준 (ends with the consonant ㄴ) + 이에요 ⇒ 서준이에요

서준 is a common male name.

10 **지아예요?**

Is (she) Jia?

지아 (ends with the vowel ㅏ) + 예요 ⇒ 지아예요

지아 is a common female name.

❖ The Topic marker - 은/는

Pattern: Noun + 은/는

In Korean, markers are attached to the end of words to convey their grammatical function. The Topic marker 은 or 는 is one such marker.

This marker is used to identify a noun that is the topic of a sentence and about which general or habitual information is being given.

- Attach 은 to a noun that ends with consonant.
- Attach 는 to a noun that ends with vowel.

Note that if the topic noun is a person's name and the name ends in a consonant, then 이 should be inserted before a marker or particle.

EXAMPLES:

1. **아버지는 선생님이에요.**
   (My) father is a teacher.
   - 아버지 (ends in the vowel ㅣ) + 는 ⇒ 아버지는
   - 아버지 means 'father'
   - 선생님 means 'teacher'

2. **오늘은 화요일이에요.**
   Today is Tuesday.
   - 오늘 (ends with the consonant ㄹ) + 은 ⇒ 오늘은
   - 오늘 means 'today'
   - 화요일 means 'Tuesday'

3. **남자는 조종사예요?**
   Is the man a pilot?
   - 남자 (ends with the vowel ㅏ) + 는 ⇒ 남자는
   - 남자 means 'man'
   - 조종사 means 'pilot'

4 **이것은 꽃이에요.**

This is a flower.

이것 (ends with the consonant ㅅ) + 은 ⇒ 이것은

이것 means 'this thing'

꽃 means 'flower'

5 **학생은 미국인이에요.**

The student is American.

학생 (ends with the consonant ㅇ) ⇒ 학생은

학생 means 'student'

미국인 means "American person'

6 **지아는 한국인이에요.**

Jia is Korean.

지아 (name ends with the vowel ㅏ so don't add 이) + 는 ⇒ 지아는

지아 is a common female name

한국인 means 'Korean person'

7 **서준이는 학생이에요?**

Is Seojun a student?

서준 (name ends with the consonant ㄴ so add 이 before the marker) + 는 ⇒ 서준이는

서준 is common female name

8 **지아는 누나예요?**

Is Jia (your) (males's older) sister?

지아 (name ends with the vowel ㅏ so don't add 이) + 는 ⇒ 지아는

누나 means 'older sister of a male'

9 **한울이는 한국 사람이에요.**

Hanul is Korean.

한울 (name ends with the consonant ㄹ) + 은 ⇒ 한울이는

한울 is common female name

한국 사람 means 'Korean person'

10 **광일이는 축구 선수예요?**

Is Kwangil a soccer player?

광일 (name ends with the consonant ㄹ) + 은 ⇒ 광일이는

광일 is a common male name

11 **어머니는 간호사예요.**

(My) mother is a nurse.

어머니 (ends with the vowel ㅣ) + 는 ⇒ 어머니는

어머니 means 'mother'

간호사 means 'nurse'

12 **형은 야구 선수예요.**

(My) older brother is a baseball player.

형 (ends with the consonant ㅇ) + 은 ⇒ 형은

형 means 'older brother of a male'

선수 means 'baseball player'

13 **내일은 일요일이에요.**

Tomorrow is a Sunday.

내일 (ends with the consonant ㄹ) + 은 ⇒ 내일은

내일 means 'tomorrow'

일요일 means 'Sunday'

14 **누나는 미국 사람이에요?**

Is (your) sister American?

누나 (ends with the vowel ㅏ) + 는 ⇒ 누나는

누나 means 'older sister of a male'

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TOPIC 3

❖ The Subject marker 이/가 and Existence/Possession 있다

Pattern: Noun + 이/가 and the verb 있다

The verb 있다 is used to express existence: 'to exist' or 'there is' . Or possession: 'to have'.

있다 (with the 다 ending) is its dictionary or infinitive form. When in a sentence, it will conjugate depending on how it is used.

- For instance, in the present tense 있다 becomes 있어요.

The object noun that is said to exist or be possessed using 있다 is typically marked with the Subject marker 이/가.

- Use 이 if the noun ends with a consonant sound;
- and use 가 if the noun ends with a vowel.

EXAMPLES:

1. 쥐가 있어요.
   There is a mouse.
   쥐 (ends in a vowel so use 가) ⇒ 쥐가
   쥐 means 'mouse'

2. 아이가 있어요.
   (I) have a child.
   아이 (ends in a vowel so use 가) ⇒ 아이가
   아이 means 'child' or 'baby'

3. 강이 있어요.
   There is a river.
   강 (ends in a consonant so use 이) ⇒ 강이
   강 means 'river'

4 **컴퓨터가 있어요.**
(I) have a computer.
컴퓨터 (ends in a vowel so use 가) ⇒ 컴퓨터가
컴퓨터 means 'computer'

5 **우산이 있어요?**
Do (you) have an umbrella?
우산 (ends in a consonant so use 이) ⇒ 우산이
우산 means 'umbrella'

6 **꽃이 있어요.**
There is a flower.
꽃 (ends in a consonant so use 이) ⇒ 꽃이
꽃 means 'flower'

7 **나무가 있어요?**
Is there a tree?
나무 (ends in a vowel so use 가) ⇒ 나무가
나무 means 'tree'

8 **사과가 있어요.**
(I) have an apple.
사과 (ends in a vowel so use 가) ⇒ 사과가
사과 means 'apple'

9 **모자가 있어요?**
Does (he) have a hat?
모자 (ends in a vowel so use 가) ⇒ 모자가
모자 means 'hat'

10 **책이 있어요.**
There is a book.
책 (ends in a consonant so use 이) ⇒ 책이
책 means 'book'

11 **펜이 있어요?**

Do (you) have a pen?

펜 (ends in a consonant so use 이) ⇒ 펜이

펜 means 'pen'

❖ The Subject marker 이/가 and Absence 없다

Pattern: Subject + 이/가 and 없다

The verb 없다 is used to express absence: 'to not have'. Or non-existence: 'to not exist' or 'there isn't'.

It can be thought of as the opposite of 있다 (to exist, to have)

- In the present tense 없다 becomes 없어요.

The thing that 없다 designates as 'not possessed' or 'not existing' is marked with the Subject marker 이/가.

In all these examples where there is only an object and the verb, it is unclear whether the examples mean 'the object doesn't exist' or '<someone> doesn't have the object'. This must come from the context.

Also the number is ambiguous - whether 'I don't have one chair' (singular), or 'I don't have a number of chairs' (plural) is ambiguous in these examples.

- Both of these issues will be solved in later topics.

EXAMPLES:

1. **의자가 없어요.**
   There are no chairs. / (I) don't have a chair.
   The subject could also be 'he doesn't have..' or 'she doesn't have..' etc. If the subject of the verb is absent,it should be clear from the context of the discussion.

2. **돈이 없어요.**
   (I) don't have money. / There is no money.

3. **물이 없어요.**
   There is no water. / (I) don't have water.
   물 means 'water'

4. **동생이 없어요?**
   Don't (you) have younger siblings?
   동생 means 'younger sibling'

5 **여자 친구가 없어요.**
(I) don't have a girlfriend.
여자 친구 means 'girlfriend'

6 **과일이 없어요.**
There is no fruit. / (I) don't have fruit.
과일 means 'fruit'

7 **고기가 없어요.**
There is no meat. / (I) don't have meat.
고기 means 'meat'

8 **지우개가 없어요.**
There is no eraser. / (I) don't have an eraser.
지우개 means 'eraser'

9 **기운이 없어요?**
Don't (you) have (any) energy?
기운 means 'strength', 'vigor' or 'energy'

10 **누나가 없어요.**
(I) don't have a (male's) older sister.
누나 means 'elder sister of a male'

11 **우산이 없어요.**
(I) don't have an umbrella. / This is no umbrella.

12 **책이 없어요.**
There is no book. / (I) don't have a book.

13 **애가 없어요.**
(I) don't have kids. / There are no kids.
애 means 'kids' or 'children' - a contaction of 아이

14 **시간이 없어요.**

(I) don't have time. / There is no time.

시간 means 'time.

❖ Subject - Object - Verb (SOV)

We have already seen that in Korean the verb typically comes at the end of a sentence.

More generally the order of Korean sentences is <subject> <object> <verb>.

- The subject is what is doing the verb. For example: the person 지아 (Jia)
- The object is what the verb is acting on. (for example: 책 - 'a book')
- The verb is the doing or action word (for example: 있어요 - 'has' or ' possesses')

So the order is: <Jia> <book> <has> OR <지아> <책> <있어요>.

- And with the topic and subject markers: <지아는> <책이> <있어요>.

EXAMPLES:

1. **지아는 책 있어요.**
   Jia has a book.
   지아 (subject) + 책 (object) + 있어요 (verb)

2. **학생은 가방 있어요.**
   The student has a bag.
   학생 (subject) + 가방 (object) + 있어요 (verb)
   가방 means 'bag'

3. **선생님은 자동차 있어요?**
   Does the teacher have a car?
   선생님 (subject) + 자동차 (object) + 있어요 (verb)
   자동차 means 'car'

4 **서준이는 남동생 없어요.**

Seojun doesn't have a younger brother.

서준 (subject) + 남동생 (object) + 없어요 (verb)

남동생 means 'younger brother'

5 **곰은 꼬리 없어요.**

The bear doesn't have a tail.

곰 (subject) + 꼬리 (object) + 없어요 (verb)

곰 means 'bear'

꼬리 means 'tail'

6 **남자는 우산 없어요.**

The man doesn't have an umbrella.

남자 (subject) + 우산 (object) + 없어요 (verb)

우산 means 'umbrella'

7 **광일이는 자전거 있어요?**

Does Gwangil have a bike?

광일이 (subject) + 자전거 (object) + 있어요 (verb)

자전거 means 'bike'

8 **운전사는 전화 없어요.**

The driver doesn't have a phone.

운전사 (subject) + 전화 (object) + 없어요 (verb)

운전사 means 'driver'

전화 mean 'phone'

9 **이것은 꽃이에요.**

This is a flower.

이것 (subject) + 꽃 (object) + 이에요 (verb)

10 **학생은 한국 사람이에요.**

The student is Korean.

학생 (subject) + **한국 사람** (object) + **이에요** (verb)

한국 means 'Korea'

사람 means 'person'

11 **존은 영국인이에요.**

John is British.

존 (subject) + **영국인** (object) + **이에요** (verb)

영국인 means 'British person'

12 **내일은 금요일이에요.**

Tomorrow is a Friday.

내일 (subject) + **금요일** (object) + **이에요** (verb)

금요일 means 'Friday'

13 **아버지는 변호사에요.**

(My) father is a lawyer

아버지 (subject) + **변호사** (object) + **에요** (verb)

변호사 means 'lawyer'

❖ Pronouns - 저, 우리, 그 and 그녀

In general, in Korean, we try to avoid using pronouns like 'me', 'you' and 'they' when context is sufficient.

But when required the pronoun can be used. However which pronoun we use often depends on the level of politeness.

Common polite pronouns are:

- **저** (I); This becomes **제가** when combined with the subject marker **가**
- **저희** or **우리** (we)
  - Note that **저희** typically excludes the listener.
- **자네** or **당신** (you). These are used when addressing people of higher status but should be avoided if at all possible.
  - Addressing and referring to people of higher status is complicated in Korean and will be covered in a later topic.
- **그** (he / she); **그녀** (she); and **그들** (they).

All these pronouns are commonly used with a topic marker (**은/는**) or a subject marker (**이/가**).

EXAMPLES:

1. **저는 여기 있어요.**
   I am here.
   여기 means 'here'
   Note that in Korean one exists (**있다**) in a location rather than being (**이다**) at a location.

2. **저는 한국 사람이에요.**
   I am Korean.

3. **그녀는 대학생이에요.**
   She is a college student.
   대학생 means 'university student'

4 **저희는 간호사예요.**
We are nurses.
간호사 means 'nurse'

5 **우리는 학생이에요.**
We are students.

6 **그는 배우예요.**
He is an actor.

7 **그녀는 돈이 없어요.**
She doesn't have money.

8 **그들은 시간이 없어요.**
They don't have time.

9 **우리는 기운이 없어요.**
We have no energy.

10 **그녀는 의사예요.**
She's a doctor.
의사 means 'doctor'

11 **제가 사장이에요.**
I am the boss.
저 + 가 ⇒ 제가
사장 means 'boss' or 'director'

12 **그들은 자전거 있어요?**
Don't they have bikes?

13 **그녀는 자전거 있어요?**
Does she have a bike?

14 **그는 변호사예요.**
He is a lawyer.

❖ This and that: 이, 그, and 저

Pattern: 이, 그 or 저 + Noun

Korean has three common demonstratives that correspond to 'this', 'that', and 'that over there'.

- 이 (this) for an object close to the speaker.
- 그 (that) for an object closer to the listener than the speaker.

- 그 is also used when the speaker has already mentioned the object. Like 'the' in English.

- 저 (that) for an object over there, far from both the speaker and listener.

EXAMPLES:

1. **이 학생은 가방이 있어요.**
   This student has a bag.

2. **저 선생님은 차 있어요?**
   Does that teacher have a car?

3. **그 소녀는 남동생 없어요.**
   That girl doesn't have a younger sibling.

4. **저 곰은 꼬리가 없어요.**
   That (distant) bear doesn't have a tail.

5. **이 남자는 우산이 없어요.**
   This man doesn't have an umbrella.

6. **이 꽃은 빨간색이에요.**
   This flower is red.
   빨간색 means 'red'

7. **그 학생은 한국인이에요.**
   That student is Korean.

8 **저 남자는 변호사이에요.**

That (unseen) man is a lawyer

9 **저 지하철은 역 아주 멀어요.**

That (distant) subway station is very far away.

- **아주** means 'very' or 'extremely'
- **멀다** means 'to be distant' or 'to be far away'

10 **저 사람은 한국인이에요?**

Is that (distant) person a Korean?

❖ The verb ‘to not be’ - 아니다

Pattern: Noun + 아니에요

The opposite to the verb 이다 (to be) is 아니다 (to not be).

- 아니다 takes the present tense form 아니에요.

The subject of the verb 아니다 nearly always takes the subject marker 이/가.

And unlike 이다, the verb 아니다 is detached from the subject (and its subject marker).

Note that the exclamation 'no' is 아니요 and not 아니에요.

EXAMPLES:

1. **저는 학생이 아니에요.**
   I am not a student.

2. **아직 여름이 아니에요.**
   (It) is not yet summer.
   아직 means 'yet' or 'still'. When combined with a negative it means 'not yet'.

3. **오늘은 일요일이 아니에요?**
   Is today not Sunday?
   일요일 means 'Sunday'

4. **그녀는 누나가 아니에요.**
   She is not (my) older sister.

5. **도로가 아니에요.**
   (It) is not a road.
   도로 means 'road'

6 **그 사람은 한국인이 아니에요?**
Isn't that person Korean?
사람 means 'person'

7 **내일은 생일이 아니에요.**
Tomorrow is not (my) birthday.
내일 means 'tomorrow'
생일 means 'birthday'

8 **그건 맞는 장소가 아니에요.**
That's not the right place.
맞는 means 'right' or 'correct'
장소 means 'place';

9 **어제가 마감일이 아니에요?**
Isn't yesterday the deadline?
어제 means 'yesterday'
마감일 means 'day of the deadline'

10 **아버지는 선생님이 아니에요.**
(My) father is not a teacher.

11 **오늘은 화요일이 아니에요.**
Today is not Tuesday.

12 **남자는 조종사가 아니에요.**
The man a not pilot?

13 **그는 선생님이 아니에요.**
He is not a/the teacher.

14 **그녀는 일본인이 아니에요.**
She is not Japanese.

15 **꽃이 아니에요.**
(This) is a not flower.

16 **학생은 미국인이 아니에요.**
The student is not American.

17 **지아는 한국인이 아니에요.**
Jia is not Korean.

18 **서준이는 학생이 아니에요?**
Is Seojun a not student?

19 **지아는 여동생이 아나에요?**
Is Jia not (your) (male's older) sister?

20 **한울은 일본인이 아니에요.**
Hanul is not Japanese.

21 **광일이은 축구선수가 아니에요?**
Is Kwangil not a soccer player?

22 **어머니는 간호사가 아니에요.**
(My) mother is not a nurse.

23 **형은 야구선수가 아니에요.**
(My) older brother is not a baseball player.

24 **오늘은 일요일이 아니에요.**
Today is not Sunday.

25 **여동생은 미국인이 아니에요?**
Is (your) (younger) sister not American?

❖ The location of existence - the particle 에

Pattern: Noun + 에

When specifying the location of existence (있다) or absence (없다) we attach the locative particle 에 to the location/place noun.

- This particle is analogous to 'at', 'in' or 'on'.

As we will see later, this particle also means 'to' when used with verbs of motion.

In Korean when talking about position or location, we do not use the verb 'to be' (이다) or 'to not be' (아니다) but rather then verbs 'to exist' (있다) or 'to not exist' (없다).

- So in Korean a thing 'exists' or 'does not exist' at a location rather than 'is' or 'is not' at a location.

EXAMPLES:

1. **그 언덕에 나무가 있어요.**
   There is a tree on that hill.
   - 언덕 means 'hill'

2. **이 교실에 책상이 있어요.**
   There is a desk in this classroom.
   - 교실 means 'classroom'

3. **공원에 분수가 있어요.**
   There is a fountain in the park.
   - 공원 means 'park'
   - 분수 means 'fountain'

4. **슈퍼마켓에 감자가 없어요.**
   There are no potatoes in the supermarket.
   - 슈퍼마켓 means 'supermarket'
   - 감자 means 'potato'

5 **한국은 아시아에 있어요.**
Korea is in Asia.
아시아 means 'Asia'

6 **현수는 지금 학교에 있어요.**
Hyunsoo is now at school.

7 **영민이는 해변에 있어요?**
Is Youngmin on the beach?
해변 means 'beach'

8 **어머니는 병원에 있어요.**
Mother is at the hospital.
병원 means 'hospital'

9 **저는 집에 있어요.**
I am at home.
집 means 'home' or 'house'

10 **한라산은 제주도에 있어요.**
Mt. Halla is on Jeju Island.

11 **남동생은 집에 없어요?**
Isn't (your) younger brother at home?

❖ Korean Verbs - The Infinitive

Pattern: Verb stem + 다

The infinitive or dictionary form of Korean verbs comprises the verb stem and the infinitive ending 다.

- So the verb 이다 (to be) has the stem 이 and the ending 다
- And the verb 아니다 (to not be) has the stem 아니 and the ending 다
- And the verb 있다 (to exist, to have) has the stem 있 and the ending 다
- And the verb 없다 (to not exist, to not have) has the stem 없 and the ending 다

This topic lists a bunch of common verbs in their infinitive form.

The notes include information about each verb that determines how the verb conjugates into its present (covered in the next topic) and other tense forms.

EXAMPLES:

1. **자다**
   to sleep
   - stem 자 + ending 다
   - verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅏ

2. **가다**
   to go
   - stem 가 + ending 다
   - verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅏ

3. **앉다**
   to sit, to sit down
   - stem 앉 + ending 다
   - verb stem final letter is a consonant, final vowel is ㅏ

4 **보다**

to look

stem 보 + ending 다

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅗ

5 **오다**

to come

stem 오 + ending 다

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅗ

6 **아프다**

to be sick

stem 아프 + ending 다

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅡ

7 **아름답다**

to be beautiful

stem 아름답 + ending 다

verb stem final letter is ㅂ

8 **차갑다**

to be cold

stem 차갑 + ending 다

verb stem final letter is ㅂ

9 **더럽다**

to be dirty

stem 더럽 + ending 다

verb stem final letter is ㅂ

10 **무겁다**

to be heavy

stem 무겁 + ending 다

verb stem final letter is ㅂ

11 **일하다**
to work
stem **일하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

12 **공부하다**
to study
stem **공부하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

13 **노래하다**
to sing
stem **노래하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

14 **질주하다**
to gallop
stem **질주하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

15 **수영하다**
to swim
stem **수영하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

16 **운동하다**
to exercise
stem **운동하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

17 **운전하다**
to drive
stem **운전하** + ending **다**
this is **하다** verb

18 **가르치다**

to teach

stem **가르치** + ending **다**

this is **하다** verb

19 **달리다**

to run

stem **달리** + ending **다**

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅣ

20 **느리다**

to be slow

stem **느리** + ending **다**

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅣ

21 **짖다**

to bark

stem **짖** + ending **다**

verb stem final letter is a consonant, final vowel is ㅣ

22 **맛있다**

to be tasty

stem **맛있** + ending **다**

verb stem final letter is a consonant, final vowel is ㅣ

맛 means 'taste'

23 **서다**

to stand

stem **서** + ending **다**

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅓ

24 **배우다**

to learn

stem **배우** + ending **다**

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅜ

25 **싸우다**

to fight

stem 싸우 + ending 다

verb stem final letter and final vowel is ㅜ

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