

Korean TOPIK 2 (A2)

— What to Study

Level: **TOPIK 2 · CEFR A2 (Waystage)** · Language: **Korean** · Audience: **Learners**

TOPIK 1 got you through transactions. TOPIK 2 is where Korean starts to behave like a language rather than a phrasebook: you stop producing single sentences and start joining them, and you gain the endings that let you express intention, ability, obligation and reason.

TOPIK level 2 describes someone who can handle everyday routines — making a phone call, asking a favour, using public facilities — and can talk about familiar topics using roughly 1,500 to 2,000 words. Crucially, it also expects you to distinguish formal and informal situations and choose your language accordingly.

That last point is the real content of this level. At TOPIK 1 politeness was one form you used with everyone. Here it becomes a choice you have to make correctly.

Grammar to master

Connecting clauses. This is the centre of the level. Korean joins clauses with verb endings rather than conjunction words, so every connector is a change to the verb.

- -고 for sequence and listing
- -아서/어서 for cause and sequence — note it cannot be used with commands or suggestions
- -(으)니까 for reason, which *can* be used with commands, and is the usual choice when the reason justifies a request
- -지만 for contrast
- -는데 / -(으)ㄴ데 for background, contrast and softening — extremely frequent and worth over-studying
- -(으)면 for conditions
- -(으)러 for going somewhere in order to do something

The -아서/어서 versus -(으)니까 distinction is the first place Korean punishes a direct translation from English "because".

Modal and intentional endings.

- -(으)ㄹ 수 있다 / 없다 for ability and possibility
- -아/어야 하다 (되다) for obligation
- -(으)면 안 되다 for prohibition, and -아/어도 되다 for permission
- -고 싶다 for wanting, and the fact that it only works for first and second person

- -(으)ㄹ까요? for suggestions and -(으)십시오 for proposals
- -(으)세요 for polite commands and requests

Noun modifiers. Korean has no relative pronouns. Instead the whole clause goes in front of the noun and the verb takes a modifying ending. This is structurally alien to European languages and repays deliberate practice.

- Present -는 (verbs), -(으)ㄴ (adjectives)
- Past -(으)ㄴ
- Future -(으)ㄹ
- 것 as a general nominaliser: -는 것, and the contraction 거

Aspect and experience.

- -고 있다 for ongoing action
- -아/어 있다 for a resulting state, which is not the same thing
- -(으)ㄴ 적이 있다 / 없다 for past experience
- -아/어 보다 for trying something

Irregular verbs. At TOPIK 1 you could mostly ignore these. Here they become unavoidable.

- — irregular: 바쁘다 → 바빠요
- ㅁ irregular: 춥다 → 추워요
- ㄷ irregular: 듣다 → 들어요
- ㄹ irregular: 모르다 → 몰라요
- ㅅ irregular: 낫다 → 나아아요
- ㅎ irregular: 그렇다 → 그래요

Honorifics, properly. TOPIK 1 taught you to be polite to your listener. Now you learn to be polite *about* the person you are describing.

- Subject honorific -(으)시-
- Honorific particles 께서, 께
- Suppletive honorific verbs: 주무시다, 드시다, 계시다, 돌아가시다
- Humble forms: 드리다, 뵙다
- Formal -(스)ㅂ니다 as a productive form, not just something you recognise

More particles.

- 부터 / 까지 for from and until
- 보다 for comparison, with 더 and 제일
- 처럼, 같이 for similarity
- 마다 for every

- (이)나 for "or" and for "as many as"
- 밖에 with a negative verb

Vocabulary areas

Aim for 1,500 to 2,000 words. The jump from TOPIK 1 is less about new topics than about being able to say more within the same ones.

- Telephone language and the fixed expressions calls run on
- Health: symptoms, the pharmacy, the doctor
- Public facilities: post office, bank, immigration office, 관공서
- Travel, tickets, reservations and directions in detail
- Work and study: schedules, appointments, requests, apologies
- Feelings and opinions beyond 좋아요 and 싫어요
- Describing people: appearance, character, relationships
- Plans, invitations, and declining politely — a genuinely hard skill in Korean
- Frequent adverbs: 아주, 너무, 조금, 별로, 벌써, 아직, 자주, 가끔

What you should be able to do

- Make a phone call to book, cancel or ask about something
- Ask a favour and refuse one without causing offence
- Explain why you cannot do something, giving a reason
- Describe a past event in several connected sentences rather than one
- Talk about your plans and intentions
- Use a public office or hospital for a routine matter
- Give your opinion on a familiar topic and agree or disagree simply
- Understand the gist of a slow announcement or a simple notice
- Switch between 해요 and -(스)ㅂ니다 according to the situation
- Write a short message, note or simple letter with connected sentences

Common difficulties

-아서/어서 versus -(으)니까. Both mean "because", and English gives you no help choosing. Start with the mechanical rule — you cannot use -아서/어서 before a command or suggestion — and let the softer

distinction come later.

Noun modifiers invert your instincts. "The book I read yesterday" becomes 어제 읽은 책, with the whole clause piled in front of the noun. Producing these in real time is the single clearest marker of moving beyond beginner Korean.

-고 있다 versus -아/어 있다. 앉고 있다 is in the act of sitting down; 앉아 있다 is seated. English uses "is sitting" for both.

Irregular verbs arrive all at once. They are not truly irregular — each follows a pattern based on the final consonant — but there are six patterns and they interact with every ending you have learned. Expect a period where your accuracy drops before it recovers.

Honorifics can be over-applied. Using -(으)시- about yourself is a common and conspicuous beginner error. The honorific marks the person you are talking *about*, not your own politeness.

Refusing and disagreeing. A direct 아니요 or 싫어요 is much stronger in Korean than its English equivalent. This is a language problem, not only a cultural one, and it needs studying like any other pattern.

How to know you are ready for TOPIK 3

You are ready when you can hold a conversation that lasts, rather than a series of exchanges — when you connect clauses without stopping to assemble them, when the six irregular patterns have stopped surprising you, and when you can choose between 해요 and -(스)ㅂ니다 without thinking. TOPIK 3 assumes all of that and moves into abstract and social topics.

TOPIK 2 is commonly estimated at a further 150 to 200 hours beyond level 1. As always, treat that as a scale rather than a target — the variable that moves it most is how much you speak.

Next step

Practise it live. Reading about -는데 will not make it automatic; using it with someone who will correct you will. Book a Korean conversation class and put this level to work.

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