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Unit 0: Lessons 1 - 3

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The following are the first set of Korean consonants that you need to get into your brain. There is no easy way to explain them; you just need to memorize them:

ㄱ = k

ㄴ = n

ㄷ = d

ㄹ = r/l *

ㅁ = m

ㅂ = b

ㅅ = s

ㅈ = j

ㅎ = h

** (This sound is very difficult to write in English, and is the reason why people from Korea/Japan have trouble pronouncing the R and L sound in English. The sound of this letter (to me) is half way between an R and L. For example, if you were to say “I hadda good time last night” the ㄹ sound is very similar to the “dd” in the slang “hadda.” It’s not quite an R, and it’s not quite an L.)*

I want to say one incredibly important thing before you continue. People constantly ask me about the pronunciation of Korean letters, and how they can be best represented using English (Latin) characters. There is no perfect way to represent Korean characters using English letters (or sounds). The English letters presented above are the letters that you will commonly find being used to represent their respective Korean letters. While it is helpful (at first) to memorize the general sound of a Korean letter by using the English letter – you have to remember that Korean sounds are vastly different than English sounds. Not only are Korean sounds different than English sounds – but English sounds different depending on who is speaking (because of accents). Therefore, there is no perfect way to represent the Korean sounds in English. For example, you will often see:

“K” and “G” used to represent “ㄱ.”

Or “D” and “T” to represent “ㄷ”

Or “R” and “L” to represent “ㄹ”

Truth is, none of those letters matches perfectly with the sound of their respective Korean letter. The *only* way to know exactly how a Korean letter sounds is to listen to it. Trying to represent it with an English letter (whose pronunciation could change based on the person speaking) doesn’t work. Throughout our lessons (not just in this Unit, but in future Units as well), you will find *thousands* of audio files attached to vocabulary, letters and example sentences. The best thing you can do is listen to those audio recordings as much as possible to train your ear to the correct sounds.

Anyways, memorize the English equivalents of the characters to help you at this stage, but try not to think that the sounds are exactly the same.

Next are the basic vowels you will need to know. Again, do whatever you can to memorize the English representations to help you learn them.

- | = i
- ┆ = a
- ┆ = eo (Romanized as “eo” but it sounds closer to “uh” in English)
- = eu
- ┆ = u
- ┆ = o

You should notice that the first three vowels are drawn vertically, and the bottom three are drawn horizontally. If you can’t see what I mean, look at the following picture for a more exaggerated depiction.



In that picture, it should be clear that the ones on the left are drawn vertically, and the ones on the right are drawn horizontally. The difference is very important because the way every Korean letter is written depends on if the vowel is drawn vertically or horizontally.

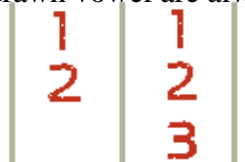
Let’s take a look at how it is done.

Korean is written into “blocks” that make up one syllable. One block always has exactly one syllable. The blocks are ALWAYS drawn in one of the following ways:



Important rules you need to know about these structures:

1. Number “2” is ALWAYS a vowel. Always always always always always.
2. Number “1, 3 (and sometimes 4) are ALWAYS consonants. Always.
3. Blocks containing a horizontally drawn vowel are always drawn in one of these two ways:



4. Blocks containing a vertically drawn vowel are always drawn in one of these two ways:



Now that you know those rules, it is just a matter of putting the consonants and vowels together to make blocks. For example, if I want to write “bab”:

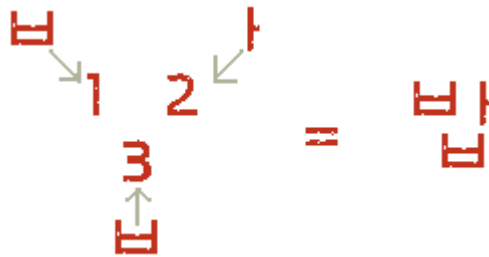
Step 1: Determine if the vowel is horizontal or vertical. a (ㅏ) is vertical, so we will use:



Step 2: Determine if the syllable ends in a consonant. Yes, it does. So we need to fill 1, 2 and 3, so we need to use:



Step 3: Place the starting letter “b (ㅂ)”, the middle letter “a (ㅏ)” and the ending letter “b (ㅂ)” into 1, 2, and 3 respectively.



Let’s practice a few before we finish:

ㄱ = k

ㅏ = a

ㄴ = n

ㅏ is vertically aligned, so if we make a syllable we would write: ㄱㅏ (kan)

ㅂ = b

ㅑ = eo

ㅂ = b

ㅑ is vertically aligned, so if we make a syllable we would write: ㅂㅑ (beob)

ㅈ = j

ㅜ = u

ㅜ is horizontally aligned, so if we make a syllable we would write: ㅈㅜ (ju)

ㅎ = h

ㅛ = o

ㅛ is horizontally aligned, so if we make a syllable we would write: ㅎㅛ (ho)

The following tables show all of the letters presented in this lesson, and how they match up to create syllables.

The first table only shows syllables created *without* the use of a final consonant. By factoring in the use of a final consonant, many more varieties of syllables can be created, and those will be presented a little bit lower.

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	비	바	버	브	부	보
ㅈ	지	자	저	즈	주	조
ㄷ	디	다	더	드	두	도
ㄱ	기	가	거	그	구	고
ㅅ	시	사	서	스	수	소
ㅁ	미	마	머	므	무	모
ㄴ	니	나	너	느	누	노
ㅇ	히	하	허	흐	후	호
ㄹ	리	라	러	르	루	로

When looking at this table, it is important to note how each vowel pairs up with a consonant. I am showing you this table (and the ones that follow) to allow you to get familiar with the structure of a Korean syllable. Note that these constructions are not necessarily words, and that it usually takes more than one syllable to make a word.

The following nine tables are similar to the table presented above. However, in each table, one specific consonant is being used as the final consonant of the syllable. Again, I am showing you these tables to allow you to familiarize yourself with the variety of constructions that *could* be made with the letters you learned today. You should specifically look for the patterns that exist for every letter. You do not, by any means, need to memorize any of these constructions – as that will come naturally as you progress through your study of Korean.

Final Consonant: ㅂ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	ㅂㅂ	ㅂㅏ	ㅂㅑ	ㅂㅡ	ㅂㅓ	ㅂㅕ
ㅈ	ㅂㅈ	ㅂㅈㅏ	ㅂㅈㅑ	ㅂㅈㅡ	ㅂㅈㅓ	ㅂㅈㅕ
ㄷ	ㅂㄷ	ㅂㄷㅏ	ㅂㄷㅑ	ㅂㄷㅡ	ㅂㄷㅓ	ㅂㄷㅕ
ㄱ	ㅂㄱ	ㅂㄱㅏ	ㅂㄱㅑ	ㅂㄱㅡ	ㅂㄱㅓ	ㅂㄱㅕ
ㅅ	ㅂㅅ	ㅂㅅㅏ	ㅂㅅㅑ	ㅂㅅㅡ	ㅂㅅㅓ	ㅂㅅㅕ
ㅁ	ㅂㅁ	ㅂㅁㅏ	ㅂㅁㅑ	ㅂㅁㅡ	ㅂㅁㅓ	ㅂㅁㅕ
ㄴ	ㅂㄴ	ㅂㄴㅏ	ㅂㄴㅑ	ㅂㄴㅡ	ㅂㄴㅓ	ㅂㄴㅕ
ㅇ	ㅂㅇ	ㅂㅇㅏ	ㅂㅇㅑ	ㅂㅇㅡ	ㅂㅇㅓ	ㅂㅇㅕ
ㄹ	ㅂㄹ	ㅂㄹㅏ	ㅂㄹㅑ	ㅂㄹㅡ	ㅂㄹㅓ	ㅂㄹㅕ

Final Consonant: ㅈ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	빳	봣	벳	븳	븳	봳
ㅅ	죳	죳	죳	죳	죳	죳
ㄷ	뎳	뎳	뎳	뎳	뎳	뎳
ㄱ	긳	긳	긳	긳	긳	긳
ㅌ	쇳	쇳	쇳	쇳	쇳	쇳
ㅁ	밳	밳	밳	밳	밳	밳
ㄴ	넳	넳	넳	넳	넳	넳
ㅇ	혳	혳	혳	혳	혳	혳
ㄹ	랳	랳	랳	랳	랳	랳

Final Consonant: ㅊ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	빻	봻	벻	븻	븻	봻
ㅅ	죻	죻	죻	죻	죻	죻
ㄷ	뎻	뎻	뎻	뎻	뎻	뎻
ㄱ	긻	긻	긻	긻	긻	긻
ㅌ	쇻	쇻	쇻	쇻	쇻	쇻
ㅁ	밻	밻	밻	밻	밻	밻
ㄴ	넻	넻	넻	넻	넻	넻
ㅇ	혻	혻	혻	혻	혻	혻
ㄹ	랻	랻	랻	랻	랻	랻

Final Consonant: ㅋ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	빻	봻	벻	븻	븻	봻
ㅅ	죻	죻	죻	죻	죻	죻
ㄷ	뎻	뎻	뎻	뎻	뎻	뎻
ㄱ	긻	긻	긻	긻	긻	긻
ㅌ	쇻	쇻	쇻	쇻	쇻	쇻
ㅁ	밻	밻	밻	밻	밻	밻
ㄴ	넻	넻	넻	넻	넻	넻
ㅇ	혻	혻	혻	혻	혻	혻
ㄹ	랻	랻	랻	랻	랻	랻

Final Consonant: ㅅ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	빳	봣	봵	븳	븵	븷
ㅈ	죳	죣	죵	줳	줵	줷
ㄷ	뎳	뎣	뎵	뎡	뎢	뎣
ㄱ	긳	긣	긵	긡	긢	긣
ㅆ	쇳	쇣	쇵	슳	습	슷
ㅁ	밳	밣	밵	뭳	뭵	뭷
ㄴ	넳	넣	넵	눳	눵	눷
ㅎ	혳	혣	혵	혡	혢	혣
ㄹ	뢳	뢣	뢵	롳	롵	롷

Final Consonant: ㅁ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	븰	봰	봲	븸	븺	븻
ㅈ	죰	죲	죳	줸	줺	줻
ㄷ	뎰	뎲	뎳	뎡	뎢	뎣
ㄱ	기	긲	긳	긡	긢	긣
ㅆ	쇰	쇲	쇳	슸	슺	슻
ㅁ	배	밲	밳	뭸	뭺	뭻
ㄴ	넰	넲	넳	눸	눺	눻
ㅎ	혰	혲	혳	혡	혢	혣
ㄹ	뢰	뢲	뢳	롸	롺	롻

Final Consonant: ㄴ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	븨	봨	봴	븸	븺	븻
ㅈ	죨	죴	죶	줸	줺	줻
ㄷ	뎨	뎴	뎵	뎡	뎢	뎣
ㄱ	긨	긴	긵	긡	긢	긣
ㅆ	쇨	쇴	쇶	슸	슺	슻
ㅁ	밨	밴	밵	뭸	뭺	뭻
ㄴ	넨	넴	넵	눸	눺	눻
ㅎ	혨	혴	혶	혡	혢	혣
ㄹ	뢨	뢴	뢵	롸	롺	롻

Final Consonant: ㅎ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	빙	방	병	붕	붕	붕
ㅈ	징	장	정	증	중	중
ㄷ	딩	당	딩	등	둥	둥
ㄱ	깁	강	깁	궁	궁	궁
ㅅ	십	상	십	승	송	송
ㅁ	밍	망	밍	몽	몽	몽
ㄴ	닝	낭	닝	능	농	농
ㅇ	힉	항	힉	흥	홍	홍
ㄹ	링	랑	링	룽	룽	룽

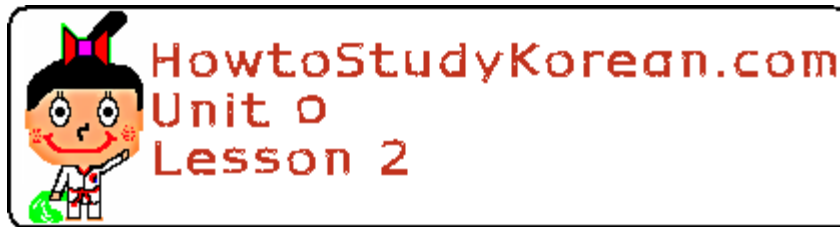
Final Consonant: ㄹ

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅂ	빌	발	벌	블	블	블
ㅈ	질	잘	질	즐	줄	줄
ㄷ	딜	달	딜	دل	둘	둘
ㄱ	길	갈	걸	글	글	글
ㅅ	실	살	설	슬	솔	솔
ㅁ	밀	말	멜	믈	몰	몰
ㄴ	닐	날	널	늘	놀	놀
ㅇ	힐	할	헐	흘	홀	홀
ㄹ	릴	랄	렐	를	롤	롤

That's it for this lesson! Hopefully you aren't too confused.
In the next lesson, we will start looking at some more letters!

At this point I suggest you practice making as many blocks as possible on your own. Study everything I just taught you for a few days, and make sure you understand everything. Before we move on, you should be able to:

1. Recognize the vowels and consonants that were taught in today's lesson
2. Be able to make syllables by putting together formations of vowels and consonants



In our previous lesson, we studied the most basic letters in the Korean alphabet. There are still some more letters that you will need to wrap your head around before we go any further. Thankfully, now that you know the basics for making syllables, the rest is just a matter of learning more letters of the alphabet.

The first new letter that you will learn is confusing at first but, again, is something you need memorize before you go any further. Our new letter is: ㅇ

In the previous lesson, you learned that Korean syllables are always written in one of the following ways:



You also learned that number 2 is *always* a vowel and the other numbers are always consonants. This means that Number 1 is always a consonant (as well as Number 3, if there is one). But does that mean that every syllable *must* start with a consonant? *Sort of.*

When the letter ‘ㅇ’ is placed at Number 1 in the syllable it is silent, and the first sound that is made is the vowel in the Number 2 position. Some examples:

- 안 = an
- 운 = un
- 온 = on
- 업 = eob

Using this silent letter, we are able to follow the rule that you learned earlier “Number 2 is ALWAYS a vowel”

What makes the letter ‘ㅇ’ slightly more tricky is that it makes another sound when placed as Number 3. When placed as Number 3, it has the sound of ‘ng’ as in “walkiNG”. Some examples:

- 강 = kang
- 방 = bang
- 깁 = king
- 공 = kong

The letter ㅇ can be placed as both Number 1 and 3:

- 양 = ang

In addition to that letter, there are some more letters that need to be learned. Luckily, each of the following letters is very similar in appearance and sound to the letters you have already learned. Unfortunately, this usually adds to the confusion for English speakers, because it is very hard to distinguish between two different letters.

I'll present them in sets:

ㄱ set	
ㄱ	is the letter you already learned (k)
ㄲ	is a new letter. It is two ㄱ's placed side by side. It sounds very similar to the original 'ㄱ' but it is more forced at the beginning of the pronunciation. It is Romanized as 'kk'
ㅋ	is also a new letter, this also sounds very similar to the original 'ㄱ' and is Romanized as 'k'

ㅂ set	
ㅂ	is the letter you already learned (b)
ㅃ	is a new letter. It is two ㅂ's placed side by side. It sounds very similar to the original 'ㅂ' but it is more forced at the beginning of the pronunciation. It is Romanized as 'bb'
ㅍ	is also a new letter, this also sounds very similar to the original 'ㅂ' but is Romanized as 'p.' It is closer to a 'p' in English, but, even in English, B and P are VERY similar (say box and pox and try distinguishing the two)

ㅈ set	
ㅈ	is the letter you already learned (j)
ㅉ	is a new letter. It is two ㅈ's placed side by side. It sounds very similar to the original 'ㅈ' but it is more forced at the beginning of the pronunciation. It is Romanized as 'jj'
ㅊ	is also a new letter, this also sounds very similar to the original 'ㅈ' but is Romanized as 'ch.' It is closer to a 'ch' in English, but, even in English, J and CH are VERY similar (say char and jar and try distinguishing the two)

ㄷ set	
ㄷ	is the letter you already learned (d)
ㄸ	is a new letter. It is two ㄷ's placed side by side. It sounds very similar to the original 'ㄷ' but it is more forced at the beginning of the pronunciation. It is Romanized as 'dd'
ㅌ	is also a new letter, this also sounds very similar to the original 'ㄷ' but is Romanized as 't' It is closer to a 't' in English, but, even in English, T and D are VERY similar (say task and dask and try distinguishing the two)

ㅅ set	
ㅅ	is the letter we already learned (s)
ㅆ	is a new letter. It is two ㅅ's placed side by side. It sounds very similar to the original 'ㅅ' but it is more forced at the beginning of the pronunciation. It is Romanized as 'ss'

As I said earlier, in one way, those new letters are very simple, because they are just building on the letters in which you already know. On the other hand, they add confusion because the new letters sound very similar to the previous ones.

All of the new letters can form syllables just like the letters you learned in Lesson 1. For example:

ㅌ = dd

ㅏ = a

ㅇ = ng

ㅏ is vertically aligned, so if we make a syllable we would write: 땅 (ddang)

ㅌ = t

ㅑ = o

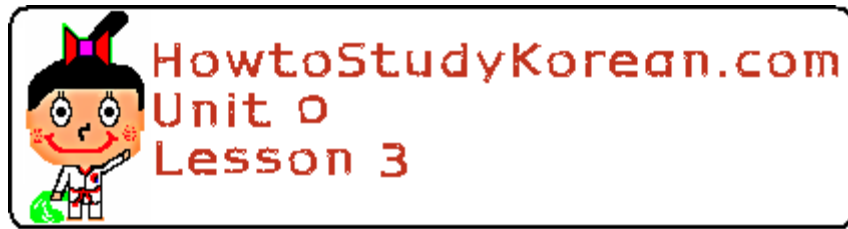
ㅇ = ng

ㅑ is horizontally aligned, so if we make a syllable we would write: 통 The following table, just like the tables presented in the previous lesson will show you how to match up the letters you learned in this lesson to form syllables.

This first table shows you all of these new letters (plus the letters from Lesson 1) without the use of a final consonant.

Again, while it is important to familiarize yourself with construction patterns of these syllables, you do not need to memorize any of them. All of the following can be found in words.

	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ
ㅌ	비	바	머	브	부	보
ㅈ	지	자	저	즈	주	조
ㅊ	디	다	더	드	두	도
ㅋ	기	가	거	그	구	고
ㅍ	시	사	서	스	수	소
ㅍ	미	마	머	므	무	모
ㄴ	니	나	너	느	누	노
ㅎ	히	하	허	흐	후	호
ㄹ	리	라	러	르	루	로
ㅇ	이	아	어	으	우	오
ㄱ	끼	까	꺼	끄	꾸	꼬
ㅋ	키	카	커	크	쿠	코
ㅃ	삐	빠	빼	쁘	뿌	뽀
ㅆ	피	파	퍼	프	푸	포
ㅉ	찌	차	쳐	츠	추	초
ㅊ	띠	따	떠	뜨	투	토
ㅌ	티	타	터	트	투	토
ㅍ	씨	싸	써	쓰	쑤	쏘



In the previous lesson, you learned some more letters in the Korean alphabet. You also saw some crazy tables that presented some Korean syllables that we made by matching up Korean consonants and vowels.

In this final lesson of Unit 0, you will learn the remaining vowels that you will need to be able to read Korean. Most of these letters are called “diphthongs” – which is just a fancy way of saying that there are two vowels in one. After learning these final letters, you will be able to apply these letters to words and start learning simple sentences and grammatical formations.

Luckily, all of the letters you will learn in this lesson are based off vowels that you have already studied. You should remember these letters from before:

ㅏ = a
ㅑ = eo
ㅓ = u
ㅕ = o

There are four more vowels that can be made by adding one extra line to each of the previous vowels. By adding this extra line, a ‘Y’ sound gets added to each vowel:

ㅗ = ya
ㅛ = yeo
ㅜ = yu
ㅠ = yo

If we were to make some syllables with these new vowels, they would look like this:

약 = yak
역 = yeok
육 = yuk
욕 = yok

Two more common vowels are:

ㅘ = ae (a combination of ㅏ and ㅑ)
ㅙ = e (a combination of ㅑ and ㅓ)

Though these two vowels have different Romanizations, they sound identical to one another. They both sound like “eigh” in “weigh”

If we were to make syllables with these new letters, they would look like this:

ㅘ = bae (sounds like bay)
ㅙ = be (also sounds like bay)

The remaining vowels to study are all composed of adding two vowels together to make a sound. The pronunciation for each of these is simply the sound of putting the two vowels together. For example:

ㅏ + ㅣ = ㅝ = wi (example: 쥐)

ㅏ + ㅑ = ㅞ = wo (example: 원)

ㅓ + ㅣ = ㅚ = oe (sounds like “way”) (example: 외국 = waygook)

ㅓ + ㅓ = ㅘ = wa (example: 완)

ㅡ + ㅣ = ㅢ = ui (의)

ㅑ + ㅣ = ㅟ = ye (예)

In addition, there are 3 more of these types of vowels, but they are much less common than the any of the letters already taught. Of course, you should know these letters, but worry more about the other letters first.

ㅚ = wae (the most common of the three, it is most commonly seen in the word 왜 (meaning why))

ㅟ = yae

ㅢ = we (probably the most uncommon letter in Korean. I know 10000 words in Korean, and this letter is only in 3 of the words that I know. Most commonly in the word 웨딩 (meaning wedding)).

In this lesson, you learned 14 more vowels that you can use on top of the 6 other vowels and 19 consonants you learned previously. The following table will show you all of the Korean consonants and vowels, and how they can pair up to form syllables without the use of a third consonant.

Keep in mind that, as you move towards the right of this table (specifically the bottom right), the constructions become less and less common. Also keep in mind that (almost) every one of the examples shown below could also be matched up with a final consonant. Only a crazy man would want to see all of those possibilities.

Again, the whole point of showing you this table is just so you can be familiar with formation of syllables – and in no way to I recommend memorizing them.

In addition to everything you have learned in these first three lessons, it is also possible for a syllable to have four letters: one vowel and three consonants. This additional consonant gets added as the third consonant in a syllable. Using the same description and image that you learned in Lesson 1, these syllables essentially look like this:



If the vowel being used in these cases is horizontally aligned (ㅡ, ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ), the syllable looks like the structure on the left. If the vowel being used is vertically aligned (ㅣ, ㅓ, ㅗ, ㅛ, ㅜ), the syllable looks like the structure on the right. In either case though, notice that the third consonant simply gets placed beside the second consonant. While technically possible to use more complicated vowels (ㅓ, ㅑ, ㅓ, etc...) I can't think of any words that actually have syllables with a third consonant and a complicated vowel. The only reason I say "technically possible" is because the computer allows me to type these syllables. So, while technically possible, they are either not used or *very* rarely used. Most of the time, when a word has a fourth letter, the vowels are one of the following: ㅣ, ㅡ, ㅓ, ㅗ, ㅑ, ㅓ.

Four of the most common examples of this fourth letter in use for a beginner are:

- 앉다 = to sit
- 읽다 = to read
- 없다 = to not have
- 닭 = chicken
- 긁다 = to scratch

Pronouncing syllables that contain this fourth letter is slightly more complicated. The pronunciation of these syllables with this fourth letter is different depending on if the upcoming syllable starts with a vowel or a consonant. Explaining this is beyond the scope of this lesson, but will be discussed in the Pronunciation Lesson of this Unit (I haven't included this lesson in this PDF because the whole lesson is based on audio clips. To see that lesson, visit www.howtostudykorean.com and go to the Lesson called "Pronunciation Tips" in Unit 0).

Also note that this "fourth letter" does not refer to the complicated vowels (ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅓ, ㅓ, ㅓ, etc...). These letters should be thought of as one letter. Therefore, if you see the syllable: "관" – there are only three letters: ㄱ + ㅗ + ㅓ. The "fourth letter" refers to the addition of a third *consonant*.

Also, the "double" consonants you learned in the previous lesson (ㅃ, ㅆ, ㅈ, ㅊ) should also be thought of as one letter. Therefore, if you see the syllable: "왔" – there are only three letters: ㅇ + ㅓ + ㅃ. A fourth letter will never be added on to a double consonant.

That's it! You're finished! Congratulations, you can now read Korean!

Why not try making some more syllables now that you know all of the letters in the Korean alphabet. The more you practice, the faster you will be able to recognize the letters later on.

In the meantime, because you don't know any words, but you do know how to read, here is a small list of words in Korean that are actually English words. They are all words that have made their way into the Korean language because of the influence of English. Try to see if you can read each one:

호텔 = hotel

소파 = sofa (notice Korean has no 'f' sound)

텔레비전 = television

라디오 = radio

스위치 = switch

게임 = game

쇼핑 = shopping

오렌지 = orange

팀 = team

택시 = taxi

피자 = pizza

햄버거 = hamburger

샤워 = shower

카드 = card

Keep in mind, Korean sound structure is vastly different from English, so sometimes these Korean words sound weird compared to their English counterpart. Eventually you will come to terms with the Korean pronunciation, it just takes practice.