

Hangul



In South Korea, students do not have to learn their ABC's unless they are learning a foreign language. Instead, they learn their own alphabet, which is called Hangul (pronounced han-gool with a short a).

Hangul is an interesting story. You see, Korea is a very old country, thousands of years old in fact. For a long time, people spoke the language without being able to read or write it. There *was* no real way to write it. Then, because of Korea's early ties with China, the educated and the religious began to use Chinese writing. If you have ever seen Chinese writing, it is VERY complex. It requires learning thousands of symbols, each of which is way more complicated than even English cursive writing. Who had time to learn all of that when you were farming, hunting, fishing, or working all day? Usually only the rich could be educated to write then, and most Koreans couldn't read or write. That is, until their great King Sejong came along.

He invented the alphabet in the 1440's, about 50 years before Columbus set sail. He began putting symbols and rules to the language's written form. Although Korean was once only a spoken language, it now had an alphabet of its own, so people could learn to read and write. What's more, the symbols were actually quite simple! Instead of having symbols that basically meant words, which required a lot of them to be learned, he developed a series of consonants and vowels, which represented phonemes. It's actually not that different from our alphabet, once you get the hang of it.

There are only a few consonants. Several of them make different sounds, depending on where they are in a syllable. This seems strange at first, until you remember that our G can make a G or a J sound, and our C can make a K or an S sound. Like English, they also have blends.

Consonants:			
ㅂ = B or P	ㅃ = B or P (Strong)	ㅍ = P	
ㄷ = D or T	ㄸ = D or T (Strong)	ㅌ = T	
ㄱ = G or K	ㄲ = G or K (Strong)	ㅋ = K	
ㅅ = Sh or S	ㅆ = Sh or S (Strong)	ㅈ = J	ㅊ = Ch
ㄴ = N	ㅁ = M	ㄹ = R or L	
ㅇ = -ng or nothing	ㅎ = H		
Consonant Blends:			
ㄱㅅ gs, ㄴㅈ nj, ㄴㅎ nh, ㄹㅇ lg, ㄹㅁ lm, ㄹㅂ lb, ㄹㅅ ls, ㄹㅇ lt, ㄹㅍ lp, ㄹㅎ lh, ㅂㅅ bs			

Vowels are interesting, too, because most of them make a slightly different sound if you combine two vowels. It's sort of a special compound vowel. Usually the extra sound makes a W or a Y sound. There are several combinations.

Vowels and Compound Vowels:		
ㅏ = aw	ㅑ = yaw (like yaw)	
ㅓ = a (like ah)	ㅕ = ya (like yah)	
ㅗ = o (long o)	ㅛ = yo (long o)	
ㅜ = oo (like zoo)	ㅠ = yoo	
ㅓ = e (long e)	ㅡ + ㅣ = ㅟ ui	
ㅡ = eu (like hook)		
ㅏ + ㅣ = ㅘ = a (like ay)	ㅕ + ㅡ = ㅙ yay (yay-ee)	
ㅓ + ㅣ = ㅚ = e (like eh)	ㅕ + ㅡ = ㅜ ye (yeh)	
ㅗ + ㅓ = ㅜㅓ wa	ㅓ = ay	ㅗ + ㅕ = ㅜㅕ way
ㅜ + ㅣ = ㅜㅣ we	ㅜ + ㅕ = ㅜㅕ weh	ㅜ + ㅓ = ㅜㅓ wo

Another way that Korean varies from English is how it's written. We write from left to right, spelling each sound as they go in a word. Although they did write top to bottom originally, today they write left to right, just like English. However, they write by making syllables and stacking them into words. Imagine if you had to write cookbook as cook-book, or constitution as con-sti-tu-tion. They also have something called a badchim, which is sort of like a bottom character. We never write our letters on top of each other. To write their syllables, they stack them up, and there are only a couple ways to do them: consonant vowel, or consonant-vowel-consonant. Let's look at a quick example, so you can see how letters are stacked in syllables:

한글 = Hanguk			
한	HA	글	G
	N		EU
			L



Another example to look at is my name, made phonetically in Korean. Notice how the syllables are different than in English, where my name would only be two syllables. They don't have a way to do the D+R+EW sound in one syllable, so it has to be broken into two. Also note that the circle character is silent in the first syllable of my name written in Korean.

앤드 루= Anduru (Andrew)					
앤	A	드	D	루	R
	N		EU		OO

This is a quick look at the modern version of Hangul. It has changed a little since being made, but really not as much as English has in the same time period. Today, people still celebrate their alphabet on Hangul Day, and King Sejong is depicted on Korean currency and his life is celebrated during the year.

Korea is a country of over 50 million people, and there are many Koreans living around the world. Their culture, their companies, and their brands are spreading. Some day you might want to learn another language. How about Korean? It is pretty fun and different, isn't it?



Hangul

Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. When did Hangul get created?
 - A. In the 1400s
 - B. In the 1500s
 - C. In the 1600s
 - D. In the 1700s

2. What kind of person created Hangul?
 - A. A farmer
 - B. A monk
 - C. A King
 - D. An ambassador

3. Which of these was not a problem with using Chinese characters for Korean?
 - A. There were so many to learn!
 - B. Only the rich and powerful had time to learn.
 - C. Regular people didn't have a good chance to learn them.
 - D. They looked prettier.

4. TRUE OR FALSE: There are over 50 million Koreans in the world.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. TRUE OR FALSE: Korean is written in syllables instead of by word like English.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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