

# Lesson 1

Congratulations on your decision to start learning the Korean script! You will see that being able to read Korean will baffle your friends and enrich your life. Also, you will no longer be an analphabet when travelling to Korea.

Even though Korean may look just like Chinese or Japanese to the untrained eye, it is actually much easier, because the characters are a combination of just 24 letters and a few simple variations, rather than a few thousand more or less random drawings. So even going at a relaxed pace of 4 letters per lesson, you will have learned everything you need to read Korean after just a few lessons, while the Japanese or Chinese scripts take years to master!

Let's start!

The first Korean letter you should learn is Bieup:

ㅂ

This is a consonant and it's pronounced as p or b.

Of course you can't read anything with just this one consonant, so here's a vowel to go with it:

ㅏ

This is the vowel a as in father.

Now, in order to combine them into a Korean character, all you have to do is to try to fit them into an imaginary little square box. This is done by writing the letter ㅏ right next to ㅂ, like this:

ㅂㅏ

Can you guess how this character is pronounced?

It's pronounced "ba" and it's the Korean word for a bar. Easy, isn't it?

Now, the next important letter is Nieun:

ㄴ

This is a regular n. Listen to Nieun. Can you guess how to write na now?

ㄴㅏ

Every character represents one syllable, so if you wanted to write baba for example, you would need two characters, one for each ba.

Now it's time for a little exercise. Try to read and understand the following word. As before, hover over it in order to see the solution (you might need to allow Javascript)

**바나나**

Every Korean syllable has to start with a consonant. That makes it easy to identify the beginning and end of syllables, but what about syllables that start with a vowel, such as the beginning of the famous Korean greeting "annyong haseyo"? Those syllables need a placeholder consonant that isn't pronounced. Since its influence on the pronunciation of the syllable is zero, it is written like a zero, too. (That's how you can remember it anyway)

ㅇ

It is called Ieung. So the syllable a would actually be written as **아**.

Here are some words for practise:

**아바** name of a popular band

**아바나** capital of Cuba

One more thing for today: it is possible to have syllables that end in a consonant. This typically occurs when there is a cluster of two consonants in the middle of a word: one consonant then forms the end of one syllable and the other forms the beginning of the next syllable. Fitting two consonants and a vowel into a little square box is a little more tricky, but not impossible. In most cases you write the first consonant + vowel next to each other as before and then put the final consonant below the two. For example, this is the syllable **반**, which has no meaning of its own:

**반**

Time for another exercise. Can you read the following? It's a name.

**안나** personal name

Did you manage to read that? If so, I can promise you that you have everything it takes to be able to read Korean fluently. This was in fact the hardest lesson of all, because you didn't have any previous knowledge. The next lessons will build on what you learned here and you will find them easier, also because you will be able to practise reading much more once you know a few more letters. If you don't feel overwhelmed right now, you can already continue with the next lesson, where you will learn a few more letters and many more words. Otherwise, please come back to it later.

*Source: [www.learnlangs.com](http://www.learnlangs.com)*