

2 한글 (1)

IN THIS UNIT ...

- Reading and writing Hangeul
- More about pronunciation

HANGEUL – THE KOREAN ALPHABET

When you finish studying the next two units you should know how to read and write words using Hangeul – slowly at first, but getting faster and more accurate all the time. Meanwhile, as you go through this unit, always remember that Hangeul is a highly consistent, phonetic script, and that most people find it easy to learn and interesting to use.



1 Hangeul: Introduction

One of the most exciting and important events in modern Korean history was the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

When the 150 countries in the 1988 Seoul Olympics marched into the Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremony, they did so in alphabetical order – Korean alphabetical order. Look at the examples of countries' names written in Hangeul and see if you can read them using the guide below.

ㄱ	g, k	ㅏ	a
ㄴ	n	ㅓ	[], ng
ㅇ	i	ㅕ	m
ㅂ	b, p	ㅜ	j
ㄷ	r, l	ㅡ	u
ㄹ	eu	ㅗ	o
ㅅ	s	ㅛ	t
ㅈ	e	ㅋ	k
ㅊ	ae	ㅌ	d, t
ㅎ	h		

Note that when written at the beginning of a syllable, ㅇ is a 'dummy' – it has no phonetic value at all. When written at the end of a syllable, however, it is pronounced 'ng'.

가나 GHANA

(Ga-na)

가이아나 GUYANA

(Ga-i-a-na)

감비아 THE GAMBIA

(Gam-bi-a)

나이지리아 NIGERIA

(Na-i-ji-ri-a)

루마니아 ROMANIA

(Ru-ma-ni-a)

브라질 BRAZIL

(Beu-ra-jil)

오스트레일리아 AUSTRALIA

(O-seu-teu-re-il-li-a)

캐나다 CANADA

(Kae-na-da)

타일랜드 THAILAND

(Ta-il-laen-deu)

홍콩 CHINESE HONG KONG

(Hong-kong)

Looking at these examples can tell us a lot about the way Hangeul is written. Firstly, notice how it is written in syllables, not in single, individually-spaced letters as in English. For example, if we were to write Chinese *Hong Kong* according to the individually-spaced letter style of the English alphabet, it would look like: ㅎ ㄱ ㅍ ㄱ ㅍ (*Hong Kong*), whereas in the Hangeul system it is actually written: **홍콩**. On the other hand, if we were to write *Hong Kong* in Hangeul letters but according to the conventions of written English, it would look like this: $\begin{matrix} \text{H} & \text{K} \\ \text{ㅇ} & \text{ㅇ} \\ \text{ng} & \text{ng} \end{matrix}$.

The shaping of Hangeul was influenced by culture as well as linguistics. Hangeul was originally devised to complement the use of Chinese characters, and in Chinese a single character represented a single syllable. So the Hangeul characters were not written in their individual spaces, but were grouped in syllables. If you want to know more about this, read the Cultural Notes on Page 13.

Secondly, each Hangeul syllable consists of a vowel with optional surrounding consonants. Look again at the example of *Hong Kong*. Both syllables have a central vowel, with front and rear consonants.

	Front Consonant	Vowel	Rear Consonant
1st Syllable	H	o	ng
2nd Syllable	K	o	ng

In this case, both front and rear consonants are present, but this is not always the case. For example, the Korean word for *child* is a-i. Although it has only two letters, both are vowels, and so the word is written in two syllables.

	Front Consonant	Vowel	Rear Consonant
1st Syllable	-	a	-
2nd Syllable	-	i	-

Thirdly, note from the examples at the beginning of this unit that where there is no initial consonant, the letter ㅇ indicates this. For example, look at the examples of *Guyana* and *Nigeria*.

가 이 아 나 나 이 지 리 아
 Ga- i- a- na Na- i- ji- ri- a

The reason for this is again related to the fact that Hangeul is written in syllables. If a syllable has no initial consonant then we indicate that by inserting an initial *zero* consonant. Thus when we write the Korean word for *child* (a-i) it comes out as: **아ㅣ이ㅣ**.

If you are not clear at this stage on the terminology *consonant*, *vowel*, and *syllable*, it might be wise to stop and consult a suitable reference book.

Yet another characteristic of Hangeul almost too obvious to be worth pointing out is that it transcribes the Korean language, and so when it transcribes foreign sounds it transcribes them as the Korean ear hears them. Thus in the examples above, some vowel sounds might appear different from those that the native English speaker might expect.

One particular point of difference is that the Korean language doesn't have many clusters of consonants. Thus, in a foreign-language transcriptions, clusters of consonants are made to look and sound 'less foreign' by inserting the vowel *eu* between consonants. In this process *st-* becomes *seu-t-*, and *str-* becomes *seu-teu-r-* and so on. Note, for example, how *Australia* is written in Hangeul.

오 스 트 레 일 리 아
 O- seu- teu- re- il- li- a

2 Writing Hangeul

The vowels

For most people the easiest way to learn Hangeul is through practice in writing while reading aloud. It might be helpful to use a squared paper – such as graph paper.

The table below shows the prescribed stroke order for writing all the Hangeul vowels, listed in Korean alphabetical order. Check the romanisation pronunciation given in Unit 1 (see Page 6).

ㅏ	a	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ
ㅙ	ae	ㅙ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅓ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅠ
ㅛ	ya	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅓ	
ㅙ	yae	ㅙ	ㅛ	ㅠ	ㅠ	ㅓ	ㅓ	ㅓ	ㅓ
ㅓ	eo	ㅡ	ㅓ			ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅓ	ㅓ
ㅕ	e	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ		ㅓ	ㅓ	ㅓ	ㅓ
ㅛ	yeo	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅛ		ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅓ	
ㅕ	ye	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅛ	ㅕ	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅓ	
ㅏ	o	ㅏ	ㅑ			ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅓ	
ㅑ	wa	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅡ	ㅓ		
ㅙ	wae	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅡ	ㅓ		
		ㅙ							

Note the following points on pronunciation.

1. ㅙ (ae) and ㅕ (e): the distinction between ㅙ and ㅕ is being lost in standard spoken Korean.
2. ㅙ (yae) and ㅕ (ye): the distinction between ㅙ and ㅕ is likewise being lost in standard spoken Korean.
3. ㅙ (wae), ㅓ (oe) and ㅕ (we): as a result of loss of distinction between ㅙ and ㅕ, standard spoken Korean does not normally distinguish between ㅙ, ㅓ and ㅕ. We have learnt already (see Page 6) that the distinction between ㅓ (oe) and ㅕ (we) does not obtain in standard spoken Korean.
4. ㅓ (ui) can be pronounced ui, i or e, depending on context. We'll learn more about this in a later unit.

The consonants

The nineteen consonants are shown below with their stroke order.

ㄱ	g, k	ㄱ	ㅅ	s	ノ	ㅅ		
ㅋ	kk	ㄱ	ㅅㅅ	ㅅㅅ	ノ	ㅅ	ㅅㅅ	ㅅㅅ
ㄴ	n	ㄴ	ㅇ	[], ng	ㅇ			
ㄷ	d, t	ㄷ	ㅈ	j	ㄷ	ㅈ	ㅈ	
ㅌ	tt	ㄷ	ㅈㅈ	ㅈㅈ	ㄷ	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈㅈ
ㄹ	r, l	ㄱ	ㅊ	ch	ㄷ	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈ
ㅁ	m	ㅁ	ㅋ	k	ㄱ	ㅋ		
ㅂ	b, p	ㅁ	ㅌ	t	ㄷ	ㅈ	ㅈ	
ㅃ	pp	ㅁ	ㅊ	p	ㄷ	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈ
		ㅁ	ㅊ	ㅊ	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈ
			ㅎ	h	ㄷ	ㅈ	ㅎ	

Note that ㅈ, ㅊ and ㅊ can also be written as ㅈ, ㅊ and ㅊ. In this case their prescribed stroke order will be as follows.

ㅈ	j	ㅈ	ㅈ		
ㅊ	jj	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈ	ㅈ
ㅊ	ch	ㄷ	ㅈ		

Writing Hangeul in syllables

Each Hangeul vowel letter consists of a basic long vertical or horizontal stroke, from which other shorter strokes are drawn. On the basis of their shapes, we can group all the Hangeul vowel letters into three groups as follows.

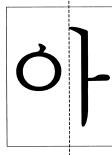
vertical	ㅣ	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ
horizontal	ㅡ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ		
mixed	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ			

The grouping is important because when consonant and vowel letters are placed together to form a Hangeul syllable, their proportions within the writing square vary according to the shape of the vowel. The basic principle is this: a Hangeul syllable always begins with a consonant letter. When the vowel in the given syllable is vertical,

it is written to the right of the syllable-initial consonant, and when it is horizontal, it is written below the consonant. If the vowel is a mixed one, it is written in such a way as to fit under and to the right of the consonant. It is important to observe this principle, otherwise your writing could appear very unnatural and difficult to read. Let us look at some examples.

Vertical Vowel

Example: a-(i) = *child*

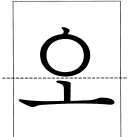


Further Examples:

시 하 세 예 서 히
si ha se ye seo hi

Horizontal Vowel

Example:
O-(seu-teu-re-il-li-a)
= *Australia*



Further Examples:

요 또 으 우 료 휴
yo tto eu u ryo hyu

Mixed Vowel

Example: Gwa-(il) = *fruits*



Further Examples:

위 의 쇠 뒤 뒹 궤
wo ui swae dwi mwo gwe

A Hangeul syllable can have up to two consonants *after* the vowel. The position for the syllable-final consonant(s) is the lower portion of the writing-square, below the combination of the syllable-initial consonant and the vowel. Here are some examples.

Vertical with a Final Consonant

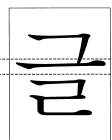


Example: Han-(geul)

Further Examples:

인 상 반 갑 앓 창
in sang ban gap anj chanh

Horizontal with a Final Consonant



Example: (Han)-geul

Further Examples:

들 늦 습 을 존 슨
deul neuj seup ol jon seun

Mixed with a Final Consonant



Example:
Gwaen-(cha-na-yo)
= *It's OK.*

Further Examples:

괘 윈 될 권 웬 윈
gwal oen doel gwon wen win

3 Cultural Notes: Hangeul

The Korean alphabet is known as Hangeul (literally: *Korean Writing*). The background to its invention is in itself an interesting story, and is also important for understanding its principles. Understanding why something was designed helps us understand how it actually works.

Hangeul was first developed early in the 15th century under the active guidance of King Sejong (reigned 1418–1450). This was at a time when the written language of Korea was Chinese. Chinese writing possessed immense prestige as the instrument of a sophisticated system of government, and had been adopted and adapted from China over hundreds of years: to abandon it would have been unthinkable. Hangeul was designed, as far as modern scholars can tell, not to replace Chinese characters but to complement them.

Chinese characters needed to be complemented because there were areas where they were ineffective – the most important of these being the simple and accurate representation of the sounds of the Korean language: native Korean place names, personal names, onomatopoeia, and song transcriptions, etc. For many centuries, these areas had been represented by an elaborate tradition of using Chinese characters for their phonetic values. But for reasons that are still not entirely clear, this system had largely fallen into disuse by Sejong's time. Moreover, the acquisition of Chinese character literacy was not open to all, or even to many. This resulted in people without an inability to read Chinese being beyond the effective reach of government.

By now the Korean language contained many Chinese words with Koreanised pronunciation. Language used in government, law and administration was full of these words. If people could not be taught to read and write Chinese characters, they could at least be helped to understand them when heard, if a simple phonetic script to represent Chinese characters could be developed. Thus it was an important function of Hangeul to give people who were illiterate in Chinese a simple phonetic script with which they could pronounce words and, upon pronouncing them, grasp their meaning.

This was why when Hangeul was first unveiled in 1446 after many years of study and deliberation it was called not 'Han-geul' (which is a modern name) but 'Hun-min-jeong-eum' – *Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People*. In support of this purpose, the script was simply written, almost completely phonetic, and easy to remember. Interestingly, however, what has arrested the attention of countless scholars since then is the astounding ease with which this simplicity is capable of rendering clearly, and unambiguously, something as intricate as the sound system of the Korean language.

However, while the traditional Korean social order survived (with its systems of education and government so firmly founded on Neo-Confucian principles), Hangeul was barely used. But, as the old order fell into final decay late last century and a strong push for modernisation began, Hangeul came into its own as a very effective instrument of modern mass literacy. The Korean language had, of course, evolved a good deal over a time span of five hundred years, but the principles of Hangeul were so clear, simple and well conceived that they could be adapted readily to modern needs. In fact the Hangeul symbols in use today, both in the Republic of Korea and in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, are surprisingly identical to those first developed under Sejong.

For students of Korean, the existence of Hangeul, a simple and effective means of writing Korean, makes transcription of Korean into European alphabet letters superfluous. Thus, although a number of systems of Hangeul romanisation exist, for language students they are only really useful as transitory aids. There is really no substitution for being able to read the Hangeul script itself, and students are strongly encouraged to devote attention to this from the outset. Hangeul is essentially phonetic, very consistent, simple to master and innately appealing in its ingenious simplicity.