

한국어

KOREAN FOR SOCIAL LIFE

Cold Approach Breakers

한국어 · 먼저 말 걸기

Real ways to walk up and start something — honest, situational, and playful. None of it works over a phone; all of it needs the person in front of you.

LESSON 5 OF 6

1 Just Say It 직진

The most disarming thing you can do is be honest. “Can I talk to you for a sec?” — said with a smile — beats any clever line. You don't need a reason to walk over; you are the reason.

KOREAN	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
저기, 말 걸어도 돼요?	<i>jeogi, mal georeodo dwaeyo?</i>	Hey, can I talk to you?	The honest, direct open
저기 <i>jeogi</i> hey/excuse me 말 <i>mal</i> a word 걸어도 <i>georeodo</i> even if (I) speak 돼요 <i>dwaeyo</i> is it okay?			
눈길이 가세요	<i>nungiri gaseoyo</i>	You caught my eye	Warm, not creepy
눈길이 <i>nungiri</i> (my) gaze 가세요 <i>gaseoyo</i> went (to you)			
말할까 말까 고민했는데	<i>malhalkka malkka gominhaenneunde</i>	I almost didn't come over	Disarming honesty
말할까 <i>malhalkka</i> should I speak 말까 <i>malkka</i> or not 고민했는데 <i>gominhaenneunde</i> (I) was torn			
웃는 게 예뻐요	<i>unneun ge yeppeoyo</i>	You have a lovely smile	A real compliment
웃는 <i>unneun</i> smiling 게 <i>ge</i> the (way) 예뻐요 <i>yeppeoyo</i> is pretty			
작업 거는 거 아니고요	<i>jageop geoneun geo anigoyo</i>	I'm not hitting on you, but...	Playful — you kind of are
작업 <i>jageop</i> hitting on 거는 <i>geoneun</i> doing 거 <i>geo</i> thing 아니고요 <i>anigoyo</i> it's not (but)			
일 분만 시간 돼요?	<i>il bunman sigan dwaeyo?</i>	Got a minute?	Low-pressure ask
일 <i>il</i> one 분만 <i>bunman</i> just a minute 시간 <i>sigan</i> time 돼요 <i>dwaeyo</i> is it okay?			
저는 ...예요. 그쪽은?	<i>jeoneun ...yeyo. geujjogeun?</i>	I'm ..., and you?	Trade names early
저는 <i>jeoneun</i> I'm 예요 <i>yeyo</i> (it) is 그쪽은 <i>geujjogeun</i> and you?			

CONFIDENCE IS THE LINE

The words barely matter — how you say them does. Relaxed shoulders, a real smile, an unhurried voice. Say your opener like you already expect it to go well.

2 Read the Room 분위기

Look around — the room hands you an opener for free. The drink in their hand, the song playing, how packed it is. Notice one thing out loud and you've already started talking.

KOREAN	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
여기 분위기 좋네요	<i>yeogi bunwigi jonneyo</i>	Nice place, right?	A shared observation
여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 분위기 <i>bunwigi</i> atmosphere 좋네요 <i>jonneyo</i> is nice			
항상 이렇게 붐벼요?	<i>hangsang ireoke bumbyeoyo?</i>	Is it always this busy?	
항상 <i>hangsang</i> always 이렇게 <i>ireoke</i> this 붐벼요 <i>bumbyeoyo</i> is it crowded?			
뭐 마셔요?	<i>mwo masyeoyo?</i>	What are you drinking?	Light and curious
뭐 <i>mwo</i> what 마셔요 <i>masyeoyo</i> (do you) drink			
그거 맛있어 보여요, 뭐예요?	<i>geugeo masisseo boyeoyo, mwoyeyo?</i>	That looks good — what is it?	Point at their dish
그거 <i>geugeo</i> that 맛있어 <i>masisseo</i> tasty 보여요 <i>boyeoyo</i> looks 뭐예요 <i>mwoyeyo</i> what is it?			
노래 좋네요	<i>norae jonneyo</i>	Good music, huh	
노래 <i>norae</i> music/song 좋네요 <i>jonneyo</i> is nice			
여기 처음이에요?	<i>yeogi cheoeumieyo?</i>	First time here?	
여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 처음이에요 <i>cheoeumieyo</i> is it (your) first time?			
자주 와요?	<i>jaju wayo?</i>	Do you come here often?	
자주 <i>jaju</i> often 와요 <i>wayo</i> (do you) come			

3 By the Venue 상황별

Every place has its own natural way in. A bar has a drink, a queue has the wait, a bookshop has the book. Use what's already in front of you both and the approach feels obvious, not random.

KOREAN	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
한 잔 사도 돼요?	<i>han jan sado dwaeyo?</i>	Can I buy you a drink?	At a bar
<p>한 <i>han</i> one 잔 <i>jan</i> glass 사도 <i>sado</i> even if (I) buy 돼요 <i>dwaeyo</i> is it okay?</p>			
여기 자리 있어요?	<i>yeogi jari isseoyo?</i>	Is this seat taken?	Café or bar
<p>여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 자리 <i>jari</i> seat 있어요 <i>isseoyo</i> is there?</p>			
줄 진짜 길다	<i>jul jinjja gilda</i>	This line is brutal	In a queue
<p>줄 <i>jul</i> line 진짜 <i>jinjja</i> really 길다 <i>gilda</i> is long</p>			
그 책 재밌어요?	<i>geu chaek jaemisseoyo?</i>	Is that book any good?	Bookshop
<p>그 <i>geu</i> that 책 <i>chaek</i> book 재밌어요 <i>jaemisseoyo</i> is it fun/good?</p>			
이거 쓰세요?	<i>igeo sseuseyo?</i>	Are you using this?	At the gym
<p>이거 <i>igeo</i> this 쓰세요 <i>sseuseyo</i> are (you) using?</p>			
다들 어떻게 알아요?	<i>dadeul eotteoke arayo?</i>	How do you all know each other?	At a party
<p>다들 <i>dadeul</i> everyone 어떻게 <i>eotteoke</i> how 알아요 <i>arayo</i> (do you) know?</p>			
옆에 앉아도 돼요?	<i>yeope anjado dwaeyo?</i>	Mind if I sit here?	
<p>옆에 <i>yeope</i> next to (you) 앉아도 <i>anjado</i> even if (I) sit 돼요 <i>dwaeyo</i> is it okay?</p>			

LET THE PLACE DO THE WORK

You don't need a clever line — you need the thing that's already in front of both of you. Name it, ask about it, react warmly to the answer. A room you share becomes a conversation.

4 Make Them Smile 가볍게

A little playfulness lowers the stakes for both of you. Tease lightly, make a tiny bet, claim you two “match” — give them something fun to push back on, not just a question to answer.

KOREAN	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
이것 좀 정해줘요	<i>igeot jom jeonghaejwoyo</i>	You've got to settle something	Pulls them in
<p>이것 <i>igeot</i> this 좀 <i>jom</i> a little 정해줘요 <i>jeonghaejwoyo</i> decide (for me)</p>			
인기 많죠?	<i>inkki manchyo?</i>	You must be popular, huh	Teasing compliment
<p>인기 <i>inkki</i> popularity 많죠 <i>manchyo</i> you have a lot, right?</p>			
취향 좋다, 우리 똑같네요	<i>chwihyang jota, uri ttokganneyo</i>	Good taste — we match	Find a tiny thing in common
<p>취향 <i>chwihyang</i> taste 좋다 <i>jota</i> is good 우리 <i>uri</i> we 똑같네요 <i>ttokganneyo</i> are the same</p>			
구경시켜 줄래요?	<i>gugyeongsikyeo jullaeyo?</i>	Show me around?	Playful and bold
<p>구경시켜 <i>gugyeongsikyeo</i> show (me) around 줄래요 <i>jullaeyo</i> will you (for me)?</p>			
솔직히 여기 괜찮아요?	<i>soljikhi yeogi gwaenchanayo?</i>	Honestly — is this place worth it?	Casts them as the expert
<p>솔직히 <i>soljikhi</i> honestly 여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 괜찮아요 <i>gwaenchanayo</i> is it good?</p>			
말 안 걸면 후회할 것 같아서	<i>mal an geolmyeon huhoehal geot gataseo</i>	I'd regret not saying hi	Charming and true
<p>말 <i>mal</i> a word 안 걸면 <i>an geolmyeon</i> if (I) don't speak 후회할 것 <i>huhoehal geot</i> (I'd) regret it 같아서 <i>gataseo</i> it seems</p>			
여기 사람 아니죠?	<i>yeogi saram anijyo?</i>	You're not local either, right?	
<p>여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 사람 <i>saram</i> person (local) 아니죠 <i>anijyo</i> you're not, right?</p>			

5 Keep It Going 이어가기

You got the opener out — now don't let the silence land. Have one easy follow-up ready: their name, where they're from, a soft invite. Curiosity is what keeps it alive.

KOREAN	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	NOTE
이름이 뭐예요?	<i>ireumi mwoyeyo?</i>	What's your name?	
이름이 <i>ireumi</i> (your) name 뭐예요 <i>mwoyeyo</i> what is it?			
이 근처 살아요?	<i>i geuncheo sarayo?</i>	Do you live around here?	
이 <i>i</i> this 근처 <i>geuncheo</i> nearby 살아요 <i>sarayo</i> (do you) live?			
무슨 일 해요?	<i>museun il haeyo?</i>	What do you do?	
무슨 <i>museun</i> what kind of 일 <i>il</i> work 해요 <i>haeyo</i> (do you) do?			
이따 뭐 해요?	<i>itta mwo haeyo?</i>	Got plans later?	Soft test for time together
이따 <i>itta</i> later 뭐 <i>mwo</i> what 해요 <i>haeyo</i> (are you) doing?			
다음에 커피 한잔 해요	<i>daeume keopi hanjan haeyo</i>	Coffee sometime?	The light invite
다음에 <i>daeume</i> next time 커피 <i>keopi</i> coffee 한잔 <i>hanjan</i> a cup 해요 <i>haeyo</i> let's have			
카톡 알려줄래요?	<i>katok allyeojullaeyo?</i>	Can I get your KakaoTalk?	The exchange
카톡 <i>katok</i> KakaoTalk 알려줄래요 <i>allyeojullaeyo</i> will you tell (me)?			
또 보고 싶어요	<i>tto bogo sipeoyo</i>	I'd love to see you again	
또 <i>tto</i> again 보고 <i>bogo</i> see (you) 싶어요 <i>sipeoyo</i> (I) want to			

YOU

저기, 말 걸어도 돼요 ?

jeogi, mal georeodo dwaeyo?

Hey, can I say hi?

HER

네, 그럼요.

ne, geureomyo.

Sure, go ahead.

YOU

여기 분위기 좋네요. 자주 와요 ?

yeogi bunwigi jonneyo. jaju wayo?

Nice place. Come here often?

HER

가끔요.

gakkeumyo.

Sometimes.

YOU

그럼 다음에 커피 한잔 해요.

geureom daeume keopi hanjan haeyo.

Then let's grab a coffee sometime.

★ One-Breath Openers 한마디

When nerves hit, short wins. Each of these is two or three words — impossible to fumble. Say it, smile, and let their reply carry the rest.

KOREAN	SOUNDS LIKE	ENGLISH	WHEN TO DROP IT
저기요 !	<i>jeogiyo!</i>	Excuse me!	The all-purpose tap on the shoulder
잠깐만요	<i>jamkkanmanyō</i>	One sec	Softens whatever comes next
한 잔 살게요	<i>han jan salgeyo</i>	Drink?	At a bar, with a smile
한 <i>han</i> one 잔 <i>jan</i> glass 살게요 <i>salgeyo</i> (I'll) buy			
여기 자리 있어요 ?	<i>yeogi jari isseoyo?</i>	Seat taken?	At a bar or café
여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 자리 <i>jari</i> seat 있어요 <i>isseoyo</i> is there?			
여기 좋네요	<i>yeogi jonneyo</i>	Nice place	A shared observation
여기 <i>yeogi</i> here 좋네요 <i>jonneyo</i> is nice			
뭐가 맛있어요 ?	<i>mwoga masisseoyo?</i>	What's good?	Casts them as the local expert
뭐가 <i>mwoga</i> what 맛있어요 <i>masisseoyo</i> is delicious?			

DELIVERY BEATS VOCABULARY

A two-word question with a relaxed smile lands better than a perfect sentence said nervously. Keep your shoulders down and your tone light.