

I'm not a robot

























and good conversational starter for your Korean friends? Show them your name written in Korean alphabet. They will be impressed! In a Korean dictionary, what would be the word of words? Believe it or not, you already know the answer - the alphabetical order. Wait, aren't the Korean letters graphical symbols, rather than representation of sounds? Nope, that's Chinese, Korean letters represent sounds, and that's why your name, too, can be written in Korean. Unlike in English, where the words in Korean dictionaries are sorted based on their first consonant. What about words starting with a vowel? Here is the trick: there is a special symbol for "zero sound consonant". So, even when a word is pronounced starting with a vowel, it's written with the "zero consonant" symbol first, followed by the sounded vowel. The "zero sound" consonant looks just like the figure zero ("0"). (The similarity is an interesting coincidence. The Korean alphabet was invented in the 16th century, hundreds of years before the Arabic numerals were introduced into Korea.) There is a bit of complication, though, because the same Korean letter "O" signifies the /ng/ sound when it comes at the end of a syllable. A friend of mine once said she figured out how to tell Korean texts from Chinese or Japanese - only Korean has the character O. She is right. Here is an example. This phrase means "How are you?" (Play Sound) If this looks hopelessly complicated, it isn't! Let me walk you through. First of all, what do you notice graphically? Yes, there are aggregates or clusters of letters (5 altogether in this example). Korean is written in "clusters" of letters rather than "strings" of letters as in English. Each cluster is one syllable. Now, let's go one step further. Can you count how many parts (component letters) each cluster has? Do they all have two? Three? As you can see (or will see), the first two clusters in the example have 3 parts each, and the 3rd, 4th and 5th clusters consist of only two parts each. A Korean syllabic cluster has either 2 or 3 letters in it. The basic structure of a cluster is shown in the first part of the example. The second part shows how to pronounce the whole phrase, ah-nyeong-hah-seo-yeo [Play Sound]. This is the most general greeting that you can use in any occasion, at any time of the day. (By the way, if you see more Korean phrases like this, check out the resource article 10 Essential Korean Phrases in Audio File. At the bottom you will find a link to a video of a Korean saying "How are you?" phrase again, you will recognize that the first two are C-V clusters and the last two are V clusters. If you can't see it right away, that's because you are not familiar with the individual Korean letters yet. It's time to show you the full set of Korean consonants and vowels. 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