
2 (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.

GHANA

(Ga-na)

GUYANA

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:

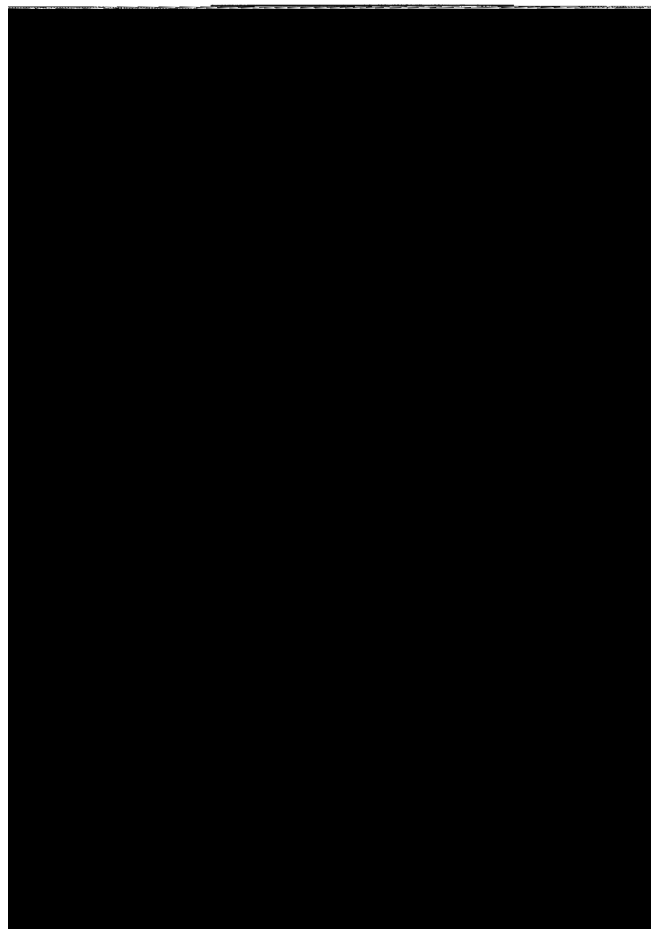
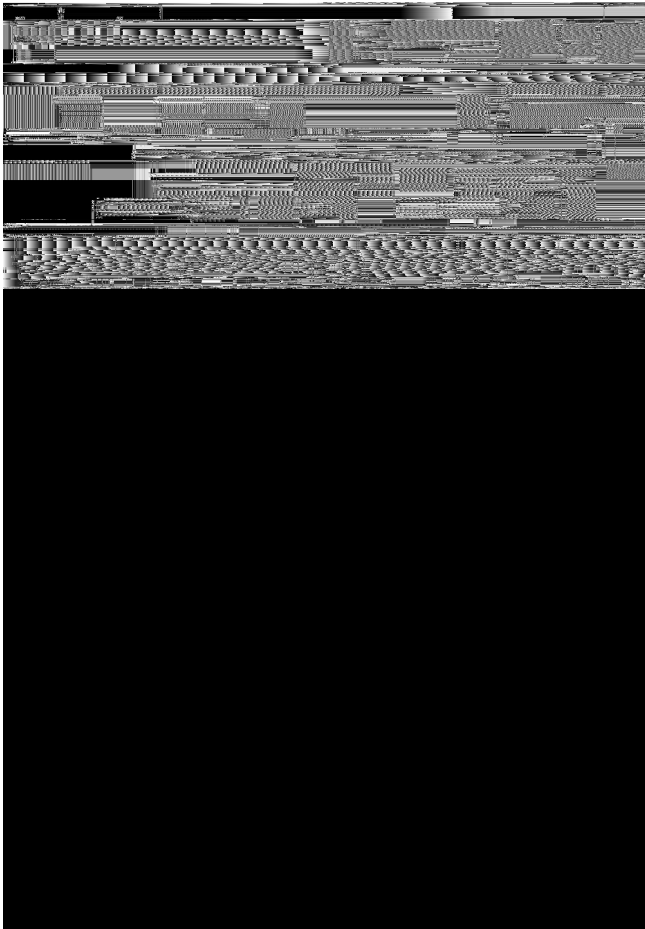
(Hong Kong

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).

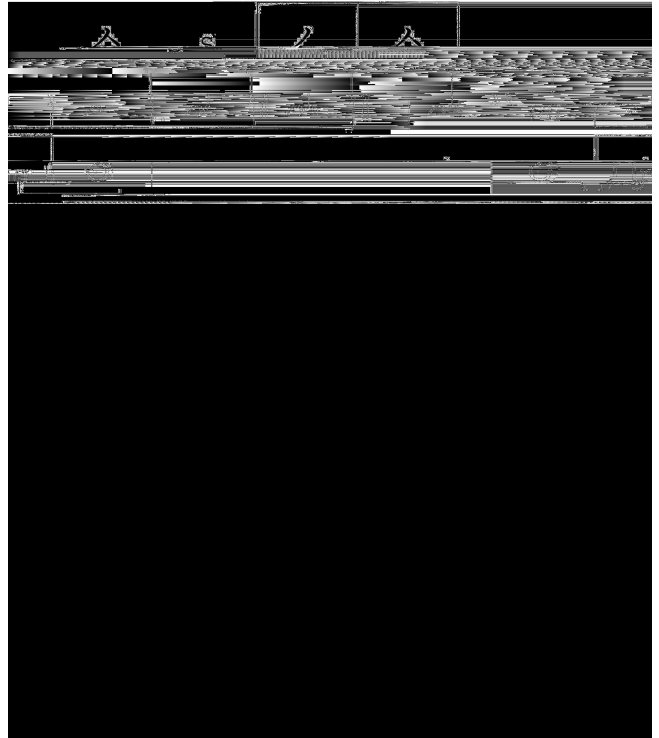
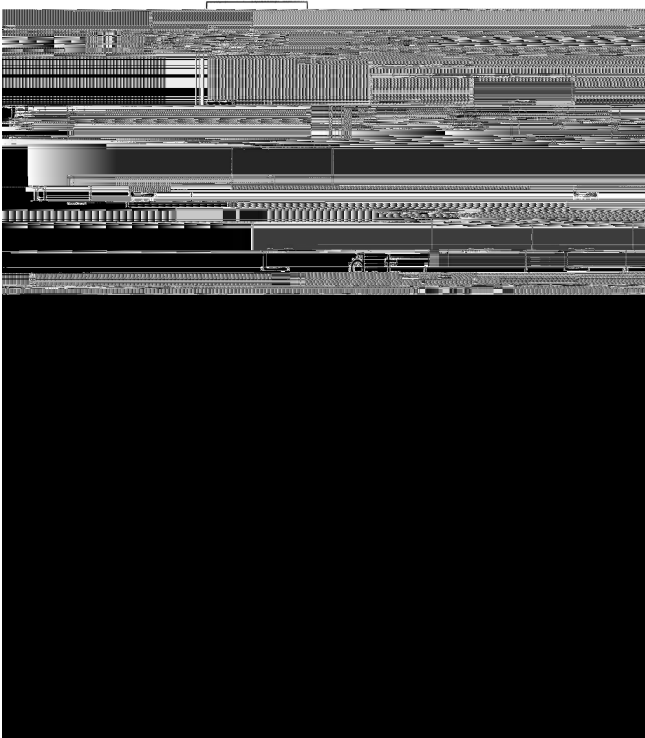


Note the following points on pronunciation.

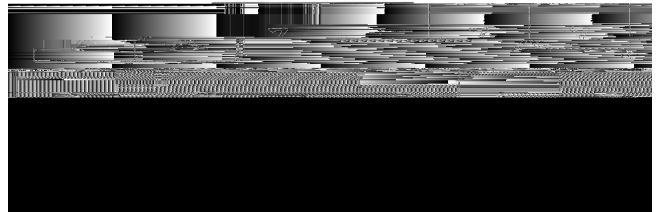
1. (ae) and (e): the distinction between and is being lost in standard spoken Korean.
2. (yae) and (ye): the distinction between and is likewise being lost in standard spoken Korean.
3. (wae), (oe) and (we): as a result of loss of distinction between and , standard spoken Korean does not normally distinguish between , and . We have learnt already (see Page 6) that the distinction between (oe) and (we) does not obtain in standard spoken Korean.
4. (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.



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



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.

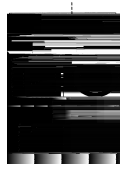
vertical	
horizontal	
mixed	

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*

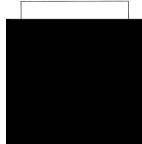


Further Examples:

si ha se ye seo hi

Horizontal Vowel

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

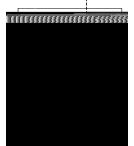


Further Examples:

yo tto eu u ryo hyu

Mixed Vowel

Example: Gwa-(il) = *fruits*



Further Examples:

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:

