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## A Guide to the Differences Between the Spanish Verbs Ser and Estar



Adrian in [Basic Grammar](#)



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To be or to be. That is the question. In this post, we explain the difference between the two Spanish verbs for “to be” – Ser vs Estar. People get confused by these and there’s really no reason to be.

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### Ser vs Estar: Spanish Lesson #3



Let's get right to it.

## What is the difference between Ser and Estar?

There are two verbs that mean "to be" in Spanish, **ser** and **estar**.

- Ser is used in a simple way, to talk about WHAT something is (permanent state). To describe characteristics that are an essential part of the thing we're talking about.
- Estar is used to talk about HOW something is, so we use it for conditions, locations, emotions, and actions (temporary states).

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# SER

Date

Occupation

Characteristic

Time

Origin

Relation

# ESTAR

Position

Location

Action

Condition

Emotion

In a little more detail...

## Uses of Ser

More specifically, **Ser** is used for these situations:

1. The hour, day, and date.
2. Place of origin.
3. Occupation.
4. Nationality.
5. Religious or political affiliation.
6. The material something is made of.
7. Possession.
8. Relationship of one person to another.
9. Where an event is taking place.
10. Essential qualities (what makes this thing, this thing?).

## Uses of Estar

On the other hand, **Estar** is used for:

1. Geographic or physical location.
2. State or condition (like emotions).
3. Many idiomatic expressions.
4. Progressive tenses (-ing).



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## Ser vs Estar: A Mountain of Examples

Ultimately, the best way to understand the difference between **Ser** and **Estar** is to see a TON of example situations and which verb to use.

So we present to you just that: a mountain of detailed examples.

### Situation 1: Talking about a person

#### SER

María **is** a happy person.

María **es** una persona muy alegre.

Being happy is a part of María's personality, so it's a constant, is part of WHAT María is, so we use **ser**.

#### ESTAR

María **is** in a good mood.

María **está** de buen humor.

One's mood always changes throughout the day, and we experience different emotions in one day, so, we use Estar because we are talking about a condition.

### Situation 2: Talking about the location of an event

#### SER

The soccer game **is** in the Stadium.

El juego de fútbol **es** en el estadio.

Here we are referring to where the event is taking place.

#### ESTAR

The Stadium **is** downtown.

El estadio **está** en el centro de la ciudad.

Here we are referring to the physical location of the stadium (which sounds permanent, but we use Estar for locations).

### Situation 3: Describing a relationship between two people

#### SER

Carlos and Gabriela **are** spouses.

Carlos y Gabriela **son** esposos.

In this case, we are describing their relationship to each other.

#### ESTAR

Carlos and Gabriela **are** married.

Carlos y Gabriela **están** casados.

Here, we talk about their marital status, which is a condition or a state.

### Situation 4: Describing appearance

**SER**

She **is** very pretty.  
Ella **es** muy bonita.

I am giving the subject a permanent characteristic.

**ESTAR**

She **is** very beautiful tonight.  
Ella **está** muy hermosa esta noche.

I am giving the subject a non-permanent characteristic. Maybe she's not usually this pretty :(

**Situation 5: Location****SER**

We **are** from NYC.  
Nosotros **somos** de NYC.

I am giving the subject an origin (permanent).

**ESTAR**

We **are** on a journey to Australia.  
Nosotros **estamos** en un viaje por Australia.

I am giving the subject a current location (non permanent).

**Situation 6: Marital status****SER**

She **is** a mother.  
Ella **es** una madre.

I am giving the subject a permanent characteristic.

**ESTAR**

She **is** married.  
Ella **está** casada.

I am giving the subject a non permanent characteristic (hopefully it is though!).

**Situation 7: Talking about fruits****SER**

The apple **is** green. (color of the fruit)  
La manzana **es** verde.

Here we give a characteristic of the fruit. It's not green just for a moment, that's part of what it is.

**ESTAR**

The apple **is** green. (it's not ripe)  
La manzana **está** verde.

The apple is only temporarily green in this case, because it's not ripe.

**Situation 8: Locality and nationality****SER**

I **am** from Colombia.  
Yo **soy** de Colombia.

We are talking about a characteristic, where I am from. The country or nationality.

**ESTAR**

I **am** in Spain.  
Yo **estoy** en España.

We are talking about a condition. I am in a place (country) at the current moment.

**Situation 9: Food.****SER**

The soup **is** tasty at that restaurant.  
En **ese** restaurante la sopa es muy sabrosa.

We are giving a characteristic to the soup from that restaurant specifically.

**ESTAR**

The soup **is** cold.  
La sopa **está** fría.

We are talking about the state of the soup, which in this case is cold.

**Situation 10: Describing people using temperature words.****SER**

She **is** cold. (Her personality)  
Ella **es** fría.

In this case when you use the verb SER and the adjective COLD the sentence takes a figurative connotation meaning that she has a cold personality, without feelings.

**ESTAR**

She **is** cold. (Her body temperature)  
Ella **está** fría.

In this case when you use verb ESTAR and the adjective COLD the sentence takes the literal meaning of the word cold related to very low temperature. Her body is cold.

**Situation 11: Talking about dead people.****SER**

Santiago **is** a dead man.  
Santiago **es** hombre muerto.

Somebody very dangerous has threatened Santiago's life. He's not actually dead yet but probably he will be soon. In this case you should use SER, and the complement "hombre muerto"

**ESTAR**

John Lennon **is** dead.  
John Lennon **está** muerto.

We have learnt that SER is used for permanent situations and ESTAR for transitory situations, that is generally the rule. But rules usually have exceptions and this one of those. Being dead is a permanent state. But the right verb to use is ESTAR. You cannot say "John Lennon es muerto"

**Situation 12: Talking about being young.****SER**

My grandpa **is** young, he's only 45.  
Mi abuelo **es** joven, apenas tiene 45 años.

In this case you use verb SER when you want to say that the person is actually young.

**ESTAR**

My grandfather **is** young for his age.  
Mi abuelo **está** joven para su edad.

In this case you use ESTAR when you want to say that the person looks younger than his/her age.

**Situation 13: Exercises.****SER**

Renata **is** a very athletic person.  
Renata **es** una persona muy deportiva.

This is part of who Renata is as a person, not a temporary state, so we use SER.

**ESTAR**

Renata is very tired of doing exercises.  
Renata **está** muy cansada de hacer ejercicio.

In this example we are talking about what Renata feels about what she is doing or what she was doing.

**Situation 14: Talking about Paula.****SER**

Paula **is** beautiful.  
Paula **es** hermosa.

In this example we're talking only about Paula's permanent beauty.

**ESTAR**

Paula **is** beautiful today.  
Paula **está** hermosa hoy.

In this example we talk about describing in a particular moment in Paula's beauty.

**Situation 15: Places.****SER**

Edward **is** from Venezuela.  
Edward **es** de Venezuela.

Edward is from Venezuela, meaning that's a permanent part of who he is.

**ESTAR**

Edward **is** in Barcelona.  
Edward **está** en Barcelona.

Edward is in Barcelona right now, but he won't always be. It's not part of him.

**Situation 16: To identify a person.****SER**

Who **is** the teacher?  
¿Quién **es** la profesora?

We are asking about a person's profession, when we use Ser, as it's considered a part of who they are.

**ESTAR**

Where **is** the teacher?  
¿Dónde **está** la profesora?

This is the standard way to ask where someone is (which is temporary).

**Situation 17: Permanent or temporary states of an object.****SER**

The ice **is** cold.  
El hielo **es** frío.

The ice is always cold because if it weren't cold, it wouldn't be ice. Coldness is part of what it is.

**ESTAR**

The water **is** cold.  
El agua **está** fría.

In the case of the water it depends if it is on the fridge or under the sun. The state can change, it is temporary.

**Situation 18: To describe an object.****SER**

The seatbelts **are** important.  
Los cinturones de seguridad **son** importantes.

This is stating a quality of the seatbelt: that it's important. It's never not important, so this is a characteristic of the seatbelt and thus we use SER.

**ESTAR**

The seatbelts **are** in the car.  
Los cinturones de seguridad **están** en el carro.

Here we're talking about where the seatbelt is. We use ESTAR for locations.

**Situation 19: Permanent state regarding a profession and a place of work.****SER**

I **am** an astronaut.  
**Soy** un astronauta.

We use SER for professions because they are considered a "part of" who the person is.

**ESTAR**

I **am** in space.  
**Estoy** en el espacio.

In this case, we're talking about where the astronaut is at that time.

**Situation 20: Talking about a place or a specific characteristic.****SER**

I **am** a sleepy person.  
Yo **soy** una persona dormilona.

Here we are talking about a permanent characteristic of the person, so we use SER.

**ESTAR**

I **am** in bed.  
**Estoy** en cama.

Again, locations always use SER. You're not always in bed.

**Situation 21: Using attributes or adjectives and status****SER**

The apple **is** red.  
La manzana **es** roja.

The adjective is used to point out a specific feature about something that makes it unique or stand out from the rest.

**ESTAR**

The apple **is** ripe.

La manzana **está** madura.

Here, we use the verb “estar” to indicate the status of something.

**Situation 22: Permanent or temporary state of being.****SER**

I **am** a happy person.

Yo **soy** una persona feliz.

This is a permanent state of being. Part of someone’s personality. It is just the way that person is most of the time.

**ESTAR**

I **am** happy.

Yo **estoy** feliz.

This is a specific mood for a shorter period of time. It is temporary, so the state of happiness could change anytime.

**Situation 23: Watching the soccer game.****SER**

This team **is** very good.

Este equipo **es** muy bueno.

We have to use this verb to explain the quality of the team in the sentence.

**ESTAR**

I **am** watching the soccer game at the stadium.

Yo **estoy** viendo el juego de fútbol en el estadio.

It’s referring to an action that is developing in one place, at a determined time, it’s temporary.

**Situation 24: The boys are eating.****SER**

It **is** pizza what they are having now.

Es pizza lo que **ellos** comen ahora.

Here we’re explaining what kind of food is it.

**ESTAR**

They **are** having pizza in the park.

Ellos **están** comiendo pizza en el parque.

Here we’re explaining what they are doing. We always use ESTAR for “-ing” situations.

**Situation 25: At a party.****SER**

This **is** a retro party.

Esta fiesta **es** retro.

We have to use SER to describe what kind party it is.

**ESTAR**

This party **is** really fun.

Esta fiesta **está** realmente divertida.

We have to use ESTAR to describe the moment.

**Situation 26: Talking about your mother.****SER**

She **is** my mom.

Ella **es** mi madre.

Shows a mom and son or daughter relationship and this relationship won’t change in time.

**ESTAR**

My mom **is** sad.

Mi mamá **está** triste.

Shows the mood that the mom is right now.

**Situation 27: Talking about Javier.**



**SER**

Javier **is** catholic.  
 Javier **es** católico.

Shows Javier's religious beliefs.

**ESTAR**

Javier **is** at the church.  
 Javier **está** en la iglesia.

ESTAR is for locations. I hope you've got this by now!

**Situation 28: Colombia.****SER**

Colombia **is** a big country.  
 Colombia **es** un país grande.

Here we are talking about an un-changing characteristic of Colombia. It's not going to change sizes anytime soon.

**ESTAR**

Colombia **is** progressing.  
 Colombia **está** progresando.

Here we are talking about the current state of the country.

**Situation 29: The restaurant.****SER**

He **is** a waiter.  
 Él **es** mesero.

We use SER because is a characteristic of the person.

**ESTAR**

The waiter **is** writing the order.  
 El mesonero **está** escribiendo la orden.

Here we're referring to an action in progress.

**Situation 30: Talking about his girlfriend.****SER**

She **is** a fighter.  
 Ella **es** peleona.

We use SER because is a characteristic of the person. It's something that can't change easily.

**ESTAR**

My girlfriend **is** fighting with me.  
 Mi novia **está** peleando conmigo.

We use ESTAR in the second sentence because the situation can change in a moment, it's not something that will be happening forever.

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(PS, make sure to read our beginners guide to Ser vs Estar in the past tense [here](#))

## Ser vs Estar Practice Quiz

Fill the blanks using correctly SER or ESTAR according to each image:



1.- Antonio \_\_\_\_\_ ingeniero.



2.- Ellos \_\_\_\_\_ en el centro comercial.



3.- Joaquín y Camila \_\_\_\_\_ corriendo.



4.- El edificio \_\_\_\_\_ alto.



5.- Brasil \_\_\_\_\_ grande.



6.- Andrés y Joana \_\_\_\_\_ novios.



### Key

1. es.
2. están.
3. están.
4. es.
5. es.
6. son.
7. está.
8. está.

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