Ser and estar Ser y estar

Spanish has two verbs for to be. ser says what something is. estar says where it is and how it is. Learn both sets of forms first; page 2 shows when to use which. On this sheet **ser is pink** and **estar is orange**.

The present

	ser I am, you are...	estar I am, you are...
yo I	soy	estoy
tú you	eres	estás
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	es	está
nosotros we	somos	estamos
vosotros you all · Spain only	sois	estáis
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	son	están

Four ways to say you

usted takes the él, ella form: usted **es**, usted **está**.

ustedes takes the ellos form: ustedes **son**, ustedes **están**.

vosotros is Spain only: vosotros **sois**, vosotros **estáis**. Latin America says ustedes.

vos in Argentina, Uruguay and parts of Central America: vos **sos**, vos **estás**. Same meaning as tú.

ser is irregular all the way through. estar is a regular -ar verb apart from **estoy** and the accents: **estás**, **está**, **están**.

The two pasts

	yo I	tú you	él he, she, you (polite)	nosotros we	vosotros you all	ellos they, you all
ser preterite: was	fui	fuiste	fue	fuimos	fuisteis	fueron
estar preterite: was	estuve	estuviste	estuvo	estuvimos	estuvisteis	estuvieron
ser imperfect: was	era	eras	era	éramos	erais	eran
estar imperfect: was	estaba	estabas	estaba	estábamos	estabais	estaban

Which past? **Estuve** en Madrid dos semanas: a stay with an end, the preterite. **Estaba** en casa cuando llamaste: the scene, the imperfect. The Spanish past tenses guide has a whole sheet on it.

ser and ir share a preterite: **Fue** genial, it was great. **Fui** a Madrid, I went to Madrid. The rest of the sentence tells you which verb it is.

estar + -ndo: what's going on right now

estoy + comiendo = I'm eating — hablar: hablando · comer: comiendo · vivir: viviendo

Estoy comiendo.
I'm eating.

Está lloviendo.
It's raining.

Estamos esperando.
We're waiting.

Estoy leyendo un libro.
I'm reading a book.

Los niños **están durmiendo**.
The kids are asleep.

Estaba pensando en ti.
I was thinking about you.

How to build it: -ar verbs take -ando, -er and -ir verbs take -iendo. After a vowel it's -yendo: leyendo. -ir verbs like dormir and pedir change their stem: durmiendo, pidiendo.

Less than in English: for plans, Spanish uses the plain present. Mañana trabajo, I'm working tomorrow.

Ser or estar? ¿Ser o estar?

ser: what something is

Who or what
identity

Soy Ana.
I'm Ana.

¿Qué **es** esto?
What's this?

Jobs
no un or una before the job

Es médica.
She's a doctor.

Somos profesores.
We're teachers.

Where from
ser de

Soy de México.
I'm from Mexico.

¿De dónde **eres**?
Where are you from?

What it's made of
ser de

El anillo **es** de oro.
The ring is gold.

Es de algodón.
It's cotton.

Time and dates
the clock, the day

Son las tres.
It's three o'clock.

Hoy **es** lunes.
Today is Monday.

Where an event is
a party, a match, a class

La fiesta **es** en mi casa.
The party is at my house.

¿Dónde **es** el concierto?
Where's the concert?

Whose it is
ser de, ser mío

Es mío.
It's mine.

El coche **es** de mi madre.
The car is my mum's.

What it's like
looks, character, size

Es alto y simpático.
He's tall and friendly.

Tu casa **es** preciosa.
Your house is lovely.

estar: where it is, and how it is

Where it is
people, things, places

Estoy en casa.
I'm at home.

¿Dónde **está** el baño?
Where's the toilet?

El banco **está** en la esquina.
The bank is on the corner.

How you are
moods, feelings, health

¿**Estás** bien?
Are you OK?

Estoy nerviosa.
I'm nervous.

Estamos muy contentos.
We're really happy.

After a change
how something has ended up

La puerta **está** abierta.
The door is open.

La tienda **está** cerrada.
The shop is shut.

Está roto.
It's broken.

Going on now
estar + -ndo

Estoy trabajando.
I'm working.

Están hablando de ti.
They're talking about you.

¿Qué **estáis haciendo**?
What are you all doing?

The shortcut that breaks

You may have heard: ser is permanent, estar is temporary. It works often, but not always.

Está muerto.
He's dead.
Nothing is more permanent, and it's estar: a state he has ended up in.

Es joven.
She's young.
That won't last, and it's ser: it's what she is like.

Madrid **está** en España.
Madrid is in Spain.
Madrid isn't going anywhere, and it's estar: where something is.

A better rule of thumb: ask whether you're saying what something is, or how it is. ser: what kind of thing, who, what it's like. estar: where it is, and the state it's in right now or has ended up in.

Places: a thing or an event? where a thing or a person is takes estar: El estadio **está** en el centro. Where an event happens takes ser: El partido **es** en el estadio.

Words that change Cambian de sentido

Some adjectives mean one thing with ser and another with estar. ser says what the person or thing is like. estar says how it is right now: how it tastes, how someone feels, whether it's ready. The ending still agrees: listo for a man, lista for a woman.

listo

ser: clever

Es muy lista.
She's really clever.

estar: ready

¿**Estás** listo?
Are you ready?

aburrido

ser: boring

La película **es** aburrida.
The film is boring.

estar: bored

Estoy aburrido.
I'm bored.

malo

ser: bad

Este café **es** malo.
This coffee is bad.

estar: ill, or gone off

La leche **está** mala.
The milk has gone off.

Estoy malo, I'm ill, is common in Spain; enfermo works everywhere.

rico

ser: rich

Son muy ricos.
They're very rich.

estar: tasty

La paella **está** rica.
The paella is delicious.

verde

ser: green

Mi coche **es** verde.
My car is green.

estar: not ripe yet

Los tomates **están** verdes.
The tomatoes aren't ripe yet.

bueno

ser: good

Es muy buena persona.
She's a really good person.

estar: tasty

La sopa **está** buena.
The soup is good.

Said about a person, **está** bueno or **está** buena usually means attractive. Casual.

orgulloso

ser: proud, too proud

Es muy orgulloso.
He's very proud. He never says sorry.

estar: proud of someone

Estoy orgullosa de ti.
I'm proud of you.

vivo

ser: sharp, street-smart

Es muy vivo.
He's really sharp.

estar: alive

¡**Está** vivo!
He's alive!

seguro

ser: safe

El barrio **es** seguro.
The area is safe.

estar: sure

¿**Estás** seguro?
Are you sure?

cansado

ser: tiring

El viaje **es** muy cansado.
The journey is really tiring.

estar: tired

Estamos cansados.
We're tired.

ser cansado is heard in some regions; agotador, exhausting, works everywhere.

Food is a good test: estar rico, estar bueno and estar malo are about how this plate tastes today. That's why **Está** riquísimo is what you say at the table.

From shows En las series

4 · lines you'll hear every day

¿Qué tal **estás**?
How are you?
estar: how you are right now

Es que no tengo tiempo.
The thing is, I don't have time.
Es que starts an excuse or a reason

Está bien.
It's fine. OK.
agreeing, or saying all is well

Estoy de acuerdo.
I agree.
estar de acuerdo, to agree

¿Dónde **estás**?
Where are you?
half the phone calls in any show

Es tarde.
It's late.
time is ser. You're late yourself: llegas tarde

Está claro.
It's clear. Obviously.
a fact everyone can see

Estoy harta.
I'm fed up.
harto for a man, harta for a woman

Es lo que hay.
It is what it is.
word for word, it's what there is

Estamos a 5 de mayo.
It's the 5th of May.
estar a for the date; Hoy **es** 5 de mayo works too

¿A cuántos **estamos**?
What's the date today?
the question for the line above

Ya **está**.
That's it. Done.
when something is finished or sorted

¡**Estás** loco!
You're mad!
loco takes estar: **está** loco, he's crazy

Era broma.
It was a joke. Just kidding.
also **Es** broma

No **es** para tanto.
It's not a big deal.
calming someone down

Eso **es**.
That's it. Exactly.
when someone gets it right

Estoy embarazada.
I'm pregnant.
not embarrassed: that's me da vergüenza

Estoy en ello.
I'm on it.
Latin America also says **Estoy** en eso

¿Cómo es? or ¿Cómo está? Two questions that look alike

¿Cómo **es** tu novio?
What's your boyfriend like?
ser: what he's like as a person

¿Cómo **está** tu madre?
How's your mum?
estar: how she is right now

Spain and Latin America

ser and estar work the same way everywhere. The small differences are in the words around them:

angry
Está enfadado in Spain, **está** enojado in most of Latin America.

ill
Estoy malo is common in Spain; **estoy** enfermo works everywhere.

you all
vosotros **sois**, vosotros **estáis** in Spain; ustedes **son**, ustedes **están** everywhere.

vos
vos **sos** for tú **eres** in Argentina, Uruguay and parts of Central America; estar stays vos **estás**.

Practice Práctica

5 · twenty lines · answers at the bottom

How: fill each gap with the right form of ser or estar. Say the line out loud, then check the answers in small print at the bottom.

1 Mi hermana _____ médica.
My sister is a doctor.

2 ¿Dónde _____ las llaves?
Where are the keys?

3 Nosotros _____ de Colombia.
We're from Colombia.

4 _____ muy cansada. Me voy a dormir.
I'm really tired. I'm off to bed.

5 La fiesta _____ en casa de Luis.
The party is at Luis's.

6 _____ las nueve y media.
It's half past nine.

7 ¿ _____ lista, Marta? Nos vamos.
Are you ready, Marta? We're going.

8 ¿De quién _____ este libro?
Whose book is this?

9 _____ lloviendo. Llévate un paraguas.
It's raining. Take an umbrella.

10 La mesa _____ de madera.
The table is made of wood.

11 Sevilla _____ en el sur de España.
Seville is in the south of Spain.

12 Cuando _____ niña, vivía en Lima.
When I was a little girl, I lived in Lima.

13 La boda _____ el sábado pasado.
The wedding was last Saturday.

14 _____ las tres cuando llegué a casa.
It was three when I got home.

15 Te llamé, pero no _____ en casa.
I called you, but you weren't at home.

16 Mis padres _____ de vacaciones.
My parents are on holiday.

17 Yo _____ estudiante y trabajo en un bar.
I'm a student and I work in a bar.

18 Vosotros _____ muy callados hoy.
You're all very quiet today.

19 _____ la una de la tarde.
It's one in the afternoon.

20 ¿Qué _____ haciendo, Ana?
What are you doing, Ana?

Answers

1 **es** a job
2 **están** where things are
3 **somos** where from
4 **Estoy** how you feel
5 **es** where an event is
6 **Son** time, and plural
7 **Estás** listo with estar is ready
8 **es** whose it is
9 **Está** estar + -ndo
10 **es** what it's made of
11 **está** where, even for ever
12 **era** what you were, back then
13 **fue** an event, and over
14 **Eran** clock time in the past
15 **estabas** where, as the scene
16 **están** estar de vacaciones
17 **soy** what you are
18 **estáis** how you are today
19 **Es** la una is singular
20 **estás** estar + -ndo

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.