

Title:

Spanish Grammar Lesson and the Verbs "Ser" and "Estar"

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Summary:

If you want to know how to speak Spanish it is important that you understand this topic of Spanish grammar. Although the verbs ser and estar are equivalent to the verb to be in English, the meanings and uses for ser and estar vary greatly in Spanish. In an effort to clarify the appropriate uses for these two verbs, this lesson explains the uses for each verb, and how they differ.

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Article Body:

The Uses of Ser and Estar

If you want to know how to speak Spanish it is important that you understand this topic of Spanish grammar. Although the verbs ser and estar are equivalent to the verb to be in English, the meanings and uses for ser and estar vary greatly in Spanish. In an effort to clarify the appropriate uses for these two verbs, this lesson explains the uses for each verb, and how they differ.

Ser (to be)

Before we explain the different uses for ser, let's review the conjugations for ser in the present and imperfect tenses.

Present Tense:

Yo soy (I am)

nosotros somos (we are)

tú eres (you are)

ellos son (they are)

él es (he is)

ellas son (they are)

ella es (she is)

ustedes son (they are)

usted es (you are)

Imperfect Tense:

Yo era (I used to be, was)
were)

nosotros éramos (we used to be,

tú eras (you used to be, were)
were)

ellos eran (they used to be,

él era (he was)
be, were)

ellas eran (they used to

ella era (she used to be, were)
were)

ustedes eran (you used to be,

usted era (you used to be, were)

Uses for Ser:

The most important factor that should be understood about ser is that it embodies the aspect of the verb to be that it is definite, permanent, unchangeable, or inherent. Because of this, in Spanish ser is used to describe persons, professions, personality aspects, time, and nationalities.

Each particular use for ser is explained below:

a. To express a person, place, or thing's physical trait, personality,

nationality, profession, or inherent condition.

Physical traits of people and objects:

Jorge es alto. (Jorge is tall.)

Doris era flaca. (Doris was skinny.)

La madre de Juan es bonita. (Juanita's mother is pretty.)

La catedral es grande y vieja. (The cathedral is big and old.)

Lima es una ciudad Peruana. (Lima is a Peruvian city.)

La manzana es roja. (The apple is red.)

Don Julio ya no es joven. Es anciano.

(Mr. Julio is no longer young. He is a senior citizen.)

Nationality/Citizenship:

Yo soy Colombiana. (I am Colombian.)

Tomasina era Dominicana. (Tomasina was Dominican/was a Dominican citizen.)

Él es hispano. (He is latino.)

Personality traits:

Juan y Carla son inteligentes. (Juan and Carla are intelligent.)

Los muchachos eran tímidos. (The boys were timid.)

Mariana era humilde. (Mariana was humble.)

Tú eres honesta. (You are honest.)

Professions:

Tulia es una doctora famosa. (Tulia is a famous doctor.)

Mi abuelo era alcalde. (My grandfather was mayor.)

Ellos son profesores. (They are professors.)

Somos choferes. (We are drivers.)

Éramos choferes, pero ahora somos gerentes.

(We were drivers, but now we are managers.)

b. Ser is also used to express possession or the origin of an item. With this particular use, the verb ser is usually followed by de (of).

For example:

Este reloj es de Inglaterra. (This watch is from England.)

El cuaderno es de Raquel. (The notebook is Raquel's.)

La computadora de Roberto es de Alemania. (Roberto's computer is from Germany.)

c. Ser is always used to express the time. For example:

¿Qué hora es? (What time is it?)

Son las siete y cuarto. (It is seven fifteen.)

d. Ser is also used for common impersonal expressions in Spanish related to time.

For example:

Es tarde. (It is late.)

Es temprano. (It is early.)

Es de noche. (It is night.)

Estar (to be)

In Spanish, the verb estar is used to express what is more temporary, and

changeable compared to ser.

Let's review the conjugations for estar in the present and imperfect tenses:

Present Tense:

Yo estoy (I am)	nosotros estamos (we are)
tú estás (you are)	ellos están (they are)
él está (he is)	ellas están (they are)
ella está (she is)	ustedes están (they are)
usted está (you are)	

Imperfect Tense:

Yo estaba (I used to be, was) used to be, were)	nosotros estábamos (we used to be, were)
tú estabas (you used to be, were) used to be, were)	ellos estaban (they used to be, were)
él estaba (he was) (they used to be, were)	ellas estaban
ella estaba (she used to be, were) used to be, were)	ustedes estaban (you used to be, were)
usted estaba (you used to be, were)	

Uses for Estar:

Compared to the permanence expressed in *ser*, *estar* is used to express situations, aspects, and traits that may change at any time.

Each particular use for *estar* is explained below:

- a. To express feelings or emotions for a particular moment.

Juan Carlos está feliz hoy. (Juan Carlos is happy today.)

Yo estoy satisfecha con mi trabajo. (I am satisfied with my job.)

Marta estaba triste cuando hablé con ella. (Marta was sad when I spoke with her.)

*It should be noted that in the above examples, the use of *estar* stresses the temporal nature of the emotions described. However, if one wants to describe a person's nature as being happy, or sad, the verb *ser* is then used; because it reflects a more permanent personality trait.

For example, the above example could change from:

Juan Carlos está feliz hoy. (Juan Carlos is happy today.)

to:

Juan Carlos es una persona feliz. (Juan Carlos is a happy person.)

b. To express a temporary or accidental aspect of a person, place, or thing that can change.

This includes one's state of health.

El café está frío. (The coffee is cold.)

Marcos está en el parque. (Marcos is in the park.)

Mi cuaderno está en la escuela. (My notebook is at school.)

Milagros está enferma. (Milagros is sick.)

¿Cómo está usted? (How are you?)

c. To express location.

¿Dónde está el museo? (Where is the museum?)

El museo está en la Calle Federal. (The museum is on Federal Street.)

¿Dónde está el banco? (Where is the bank?)

El banco está lejos de aquí. (The bank is far from here.)

Now that we have examined the different uses for ser and estar, let's try a few exercises.

Translate the following into Spanish. The answers follow the exercise.

1. Pablo is intelligent.
2. The water is hot.
3. Where are the children?
4. We were good students.
5. It is twelve noon.
6. We are very happy today.
7. They are Mexican.
8. They are in Mexico.
9. She is in the hospital.
10. The hospital is in San Diego.

1. Pablo es inteligente.
2. El agua está caliente.
3. ¿Dónde están los niños?
4. Éramos estudiantes buenos.
5. Son las doce del medio día.
6. Estamos contentos hoy.
7. Ellos son Mexicanos.
8. Ellos están en México.
9. Ella está en el hospital.
10. El hospital está en San Diego.

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