

### **Ser and Estar**

- If you understand the difference between a *state (Estar)* and a *characteristic (Ser)*, most of the other rules are hardly necessary—they are simply extensions of the *state* or *characteristic* distinction.
- *Estar* usually deals with the specific or the immediate. *Ser* deals with generalities.
- The words *temporary*, *permanent*, and *changeable*, cause confusion—don't use them. *Nothing* is permanent! In every instance, **focus upon what the speaker is trying to express**: a *state* or a *characteristic*.

**Estar** (to be) is used to express the **state** of something. Notice that **sta** is used in *estar* and in **state**.

**Estar** is used to:

1. express a *state* (which results from an action or circumstances.)
  - Estoy cansado.** I am tired.
  - Estamos ocupados.** We are busy.
  - Dolores está casada.** Dolores is married.
  - Juan está muerto.** Juan is dead.
2. emphasize that the *state* of something is *particularly* good, bad, or different.
  - La sopa está rica.** The soup is (especially) good.
  - ¡Estás muy alto!** You are very tall! (Taller than I expected!)
  - ¡María está muy bonita hoy!** María is (especially) pretty today.
3. express the *location or position of an object* (Where it is **standing**, even if it's **stationary**.)
  - El libro está en la mesa.** The book is on the table.
  - ¿Dónde están los niños?** Where are the children?
  - San Francisco está en California.** San Francisco is in California.

**Ser** (to be) expresses **characteristics**. If the speaker wishes to describe a basic quality or characteristics of the subject's existence, *ser* is used. All of these reflect reality as the speaker sees it, with *no emphasis on change*.

**Ser** is used to express:

1. Basic *characteristics in a description*. (The speaker does not wish to emphasize a change)
  - La sopa es rica.** Soup (in general) is good.
  - Eres muy alto.** You are very tall. (No change expressed)
  - El señor Salas es rico.** Mr. Salas is rich.
  - Mi hermana es joven.** My sister is young.
2. origin or possession. (Obviously not a state)
  - Las gafas son de Carmen.** The glasses are Carmen's.
  - Ricardo es de Cuba.** Richard is from Cuba.
  - José es panameño.** José is Panamanian
3. location of events. (Events don't *stand* anywhere.)
  - La fiesta es en mi casa.** The party is in my house.
  - El partido de fútbol es en Chicago.** The soccer game is in Chicago.
4. times and dates. (They change, but not as the result of any action.)
  - Es la una.** It is one o'clock.
  - Es el tres de marzo.** It is March 3.
5. the link between a subject and a descriptive noun or pronoun. (*Ser* is an *equal sign*.)
  - Alonso es mi amigo.** Alonso is my friend.
  - ¿Quién es la abogada?** Who is the lawyer?

## Going deeper. What's so hard about *ser* and *estar*?

The most important words in determining which to use are “**state or characteristic?**” Asking this question is the quickest and most reliable way to determine which to use. But it does get a bit more complicated. Here are the mistakes that people make with more complex uses:

### 1. Location of an event/Location of a person or object

Location of a **physical object** is always indicated by *estar*. Even if it's a **stationary** object. It tells where something is **standing**.

*La catedral **está** en Sevilla.*

*Ciudad Juárez **está** en México.*

Location of an **event** is always indicated by *ser*. *Ser* talks about the existence of something. An event *exists* in a location, then stops existing.

*La reunión **es** en Milwaukee.*

*El baile **es** en el gimnasio.*

### 2. Death and marriage

Death and marriage are **states** resulting from an event: Think marital and health **status**.

*Mi tía **está** casada con un hombre antipático.*

*Mis abuelos **están** muertos.*

Singleness, however, is considered a characteristic--no change in state has occurred.

*Mi tío **es** soltero.*

### 3. General vs. particular

Characteristics deal with things in general. For instance, *churros* (in general) are good—clearly a characteristic. But to compliment *particular* churros, you say the **state** of the *churros* you're eating is good. Their **state** is due to the excellent preparation of ingredients, the good timing of the cook, and the fact that they are still fresh, and have just the right amount of cinnamon.

*Los churros **son** ricos. (In general)*

*¡Los churros **están** ricos! (Particular churros)*

A friend may or may not be handsome *in general*. But at a *particular moment*, such as prom night, he may look *particularly* good. If you're saying he's handsome *in general*, you'd say:

*“Carlos, ¡eres muy guapo!”, or “¡Qué guapo eres!”*

But to say he looks *particularly* handsome, you'd say:

*“Carlos, ¡estás muy guapo!”, or “¡Qué guapo estás!”*

### 4. To emphasize a change.

This has nothing to do with whether something *can* change. (Everything can and will change.) It has to do with whether or not the speaker wishes to *express* change. You can say:

*La casa es azul.*

The house is blue. The speaker indicates that a general characteristic of the house is blueness.

But if you say:

*¡La casa **está** azul!*

it's because you're pointing out a **change** in the color.

### For example...

You're walking downtown with a hispanic friend, who recognizes a little girl (about three feet tall) she used to babysit and shouts “¡Ana, ¡qué grande **estás**!” Is the girl big? No, that would be a *characteristic*, would have been expressed with *ser*, and would be untrue to say about a three-foot tall person! The friend is indicating that the girl has grown a lot since the last time she'd seen her, and emphasizes the change by using *estar*.

## ***Ser and Estar***

Spanish has two words for “to be” which depend  
On which kind of being you’re trying to say  
To say “I am” “you are” “he is”  
*Ser* is characteristics, *estar* is for states  
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Characteristic or state is usually all you need to ask  
To decide *ser* or *estar* really fast  
A state is the way something is at a specific instant  
Characteristic’s the way something generally is  
Choose *ser* or *estar* based on the emphasis

Location may not seem like a **state**  
Of a thing like a building that does not move  
But *estar* is used for where any *thing* is **standing**  
**Stationary** or out on the loose  
Events don’t stand anywhere, use *ser*!

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