

## SER and ESTAR

**Pattern: *Ser* and *Estar* both mean “to be,” but they have fundamental differences.**

### The Basics

*Ser* is generally used to describe **what** a noun is (**essential characteristics**).

*Estar* is generally used to describe **how** a noun is (**condition**).

### Example

It is useful to have two ways of saying “to be.” Consider this English sentence:

The tomato is green.

This sentence could mean one of two things:

1. The tomato is of a variety that produces tomatoes that are green in color.
2. The tomato is not ripe.

This situation is avoided in Spanish because if the verb *Ser* is used, we know that the speaker means that it is a green variety of tomato. On the other hand, if the verb *estar* is used, we can safely say that the tomato is simply not ripe. Here are the two sentences in Spanish:

*El tomate es verde.*

The tomato is green in color.

*El tomate está verde.*

The tomato is unripe.

### Conjugation

To further complicate matters, *ser* and *estar* are both irregular verbs.

In the case of *ser*, you must simply memorize the different forms. Here are the present tense conjugations of *ser*:

#### *Ser*

*soy*

*somos*

*eres*

*sois*

*es*

*son*

In the case of *estar*, it only has two small catches: it has an irregular *yo* form and the *tú*, *él*, and *ellos* forms need an accent for phonetic reasons (and to make sure they aren't confused with the demonstratives). Here are the present tense conjugations of *estar*:

#### *Estar*

*estoy*

*estamos*

*estás*

*estáis*

*está*

*están*

## Ser: Uses

### USE

Essential characteristics

Telling time

Origin / nationality

Occupation / religion

Composition (made of)

Possession / ownership

Relationships

Impersonal expressions

Location of events

### EXAMPLE

*Yo soy inteligente.*

I **am** intelligent.

*Son las dos y veinte de la tarde.*

It **is** 2:20 PM.

*Carlos es guatemalteco.*

Carlos **is** Guatemalan.

*Nosotros somos carpinteros.*

We **are** carpinters.

*La mesa es de madera.*

The table **is** (made of) wood.

*La chaqueta amarilla es mía.*

The yellow jacket **is** mine.

*Jorge es el esposo de Juana.*

Jorge **is** Juana's husband.

*Es importante respirar todos los días.*

It **is** important to breathe every day.

*La reunión es en la sala de conferencia.*

The meeting **is** in the conference room.

## Estar: Uses

### USE

Condition

Progressive actions

Idiomatic expressions

Physical location

### EXAMPLE

*Mis hermanos están enfermos.*

My brothers **are** sick.

*Tú estás tocando el piano.*

You **are** playing the piano.

*Estamos de acuerdo.*

We agree. (We **are** in agreement)

*¿Dónde está Raúl?*

Where **is** Raul?

- Note: The use of *ser* or *estar* can change the meaning of a sentence. Here are some examples:

Patricia **es** aburrida.

Patricia is boring.

Patricia **está** aburrida.

Patricia is bored.

Roberto **es** guapo.

Roberto is handsome.

Roberto **está** guapo.

Roberto looks handsome.

Los niños **son** listos.

The children are bright / smart.

Los niños **están** listos.

The children are ready.

As you can see, the use of *ser* implies what the subject is, and the use of *estar* implies how the subject currently is or currently seems to be.