

A **copular verb**, also called a **linking verb**, is a verb that links the subject of a sentence with the predicate, equating one with the other. Spanish has two main copulative verbs, **ser** and **estar**, both of which correspond to the English *to be*.

Ser

**Ser** is used to describe the essential characteristics of someone or something. These include **nationality, profession, religion, size, shape, and color**.

Conjugating Ser in the Present and Preterite

Subject	Present	Preterite
yo	soy	fui
tú	eres	fuiste
él, ella, usted	es	fue
nosotros	somos	fuimos
vosotros	sois	fuisteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes	son	fueron

Estar

**Estar** is used to describe temporary states or conditions. These include **physical, mental, and emotional states**.

Conjugating Estar in the Present and Preterite

Subject	Present	Preterite
yo	estoy	estuve
tú	estás	estuviste
él, ella, usted	está	estuvo
nosotros	estamos	estuvimos
vosotros	estáis	estuvisteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes	están	estuvieron

When to Use Ser vs. Estar  
Cuando usar Ser vs. Estar

USES OF SER USOS DE SER

1. **Ser** is used to talk about time expressions involving **days, dates, years and hours**.

- Hoy **es** martes. *It is Tuesday today.*
- Ayer **fue** mi cumpleaños. *It was my birthday yesterday.*
- Son **las tres y media**. *It's three thirty.*



2. **Ser** is used to describe the **place** a person is from or the **material** something is made of.

- María **es** de México. *Maria is from Mexico.*
- Los pendientes **son** de plata. *The earrings are made of silver.*

3. **Ser** is used to describe the essential qualities that define a person or thing and that are not likely to change in the near future. These can be names, personality descriptions, physical descriptions, occupations, personal relationships, and religion, among others.

- Él **es** Miguel, **es** amable, **es** alto, **es** ingeniero, **es** mi primo y **es** católico.
- This is Miguel, he is kind, he is tall, he is an engineer, he is my cousin, and he is catholic.*

Notice that the indefinite articles **un, una, unos, and unas** may not be used when talking about occupations with **ser**. They're often only included if extra information following the occupation is given. Compare the following:

- Ella **es** doctora. *She is a doctor.*
- Ella **es** una doctora que tiene vocación por ayudar a sus pacientes.
- She is a doctor who has a vocation to help her patients.*



4. **Ser** is used to describe the **action taken** on something or someone. This structure is also referred to as the passive voice (subject + verb **ser** + past participle + [agent]).

- La sopa **fue** cocinada por la familia Sánchez. *The soup was cooked by the Sánchez family.*

USES OF ESTAR USOS DE ESTAR

1. **Estar** is used in some phrases that deal with **time**. In such expressions the emphasis is on the state of affairs and roughly translates to *How are we looking on time? or Where do we stand for time?*  
¿A qué día **estamos**? *Estamos a día 23 de enero.* *What day is it today? It is January 23rd.*

2. **Estar** is used to express the **physical position or posture** a person or thing is in.  
Mi amiga **está** sentada en el sofá. *My friend is seated on the couch.*

3. **Estar** is used to express the **location** where someone or something is permanently, temporarily, or conceptually.  
El cine **está** en frente del supermercado. *The movie theater is opposite the supermarket.*  
Exception! The location of an **event or party** is described using **ser**, not **estar**.  
La fiesta **es** en mi casa. *The party is at my house.*

4. **Estar** is used to describe ongoing actions or to describe someone or something's state. To express ongoing actions **estar** is followed by a **present participle** (such as **lavando**) and to express someone or something's state **estar** is followed by a **past participle** (such as **muerto**).  
Estoy lavando los platos sucios. *I am washing the dirty dishes.*  
Mi bisabuelo **está** muerto. *My great grandfather is dead.*

Intriguingly, death in Spanish is seen as an ongoing action, not a permanent state, so **estar** is used to talk about being dead.

5. **Estar** is used to describe **physical and mental conditions**. Things that are likely to vary over several hours, days, or even years can fall into this category.  
Estoy muy cansada esta mañana. *I am very tired this morning.*  
Los estudiantes **están** confundidos con la gramática. *The students are very confused with the grammar.*

6. **Estar** is used to describe how a person is **feeling** at a certain moment.  
Ella **está** muy triste hoy. *She is very sad today.*

7. **Estar** is used to describe how food **tastes**.  
Estos churros **están** riquísimos. *These churros are delicious.*

¡Cuidado! When referring to food on a **menu** or the menu's selection of food itself, we use **ser** instead of **estar** because we are instead making reference to food items that are static and don't change. For example:  
La comida de este restaurante **es** deliciosa. *The food in this restaurant is delicious.*

Useful Tips  
Consejos útiles

Meaning Changes With Ser and Estar Phrases

There are some words that can be used with both **ser** and **estar** to form verb phrases, and these take on different meanings depending on the verb. Here are some examples of these types of phrases.

Ser Phrase	English	Estar Phrase	English	Ser Phrase	English	Estar Phrase	English
ser aburrido	to be boring	estar aburrido	to be bored	ser pálido	to be pale-skinned	estar pálido	to be pale
ser bueno	to be good	estar bueno	to be tasty/attractive	ser pesado	to be heavy/to be boring	estar pesado	to be annoying
ser cansado	to be a tiring person	estar cansado	to be tired	ser rico	to be rich	estar rico	to be tasty
ser grave	to be serious	estar grave	to be seriously ill	ser seguro	to be safe	estar seguro	to be certain
ser listo	to be clever	estar listo	to be ready	ser verde	to be green	estar verde	to be unripe
ser malo	to be bad	estar malo	to be ill	ser viejo	to be old	estar viejo	to look old
ser orgulloso	to be conceited or vain	estar orgulloso	to be proud	ser vivo	to be sharp	estar vivo	to be alive
ser moreno	to be dark-skinned	estar moreno	to be tanned				