

SER AND ESTAR: PART I

Whole books have been written about the two important Spanish verbs: ser and estar. This will be the subject of our discussion for the next few lessons. Soon, you will have a very good understanding of how these two verbs are used.

Ser and estar can both be translated as “to be.” Here is the English verb, fully conjugated:

TO BE
I am
you are
he/she is
we are
you-all are
they are

Notice that these two sentences can have different meanings in English.

The apple is green.
(Meaning the apple is not ripe.)



Picture 2. Ripen apple

The apple is green.
(Meaning the color of the apple is green.)



Title 1. Green apple

In the first case, our example speaks of the **condition** of the apple. The apple is green because it has not yet ripened. When the condition of the apple changes, that is, when it has ripened, it will no longer be green, it will be ripe.

In the second case, our example speaks of the **essential characteristics** of the apple. The apple is green in color. This particular apple remains green even after it has ripened.

In English, the verb “to be” can be used to tell **how** something is (the condition) and **what** something is (the essence).

How is the apple?
It is unripe.

What color is the apple?
It is green.

In Spanish, a different verb is used to express “to be” depending on whether the speaker intends to address a condition or an essential quality.

La manzana está verde.
The apple is green. (condition)

La manzana es verde.
The apple is green. (essence)

Note how the adjective “verde” actually changes meaning, depending upon whether it is used with ser or estar.

La manzana está verde.
(condition: verde = unripe)

La manzana es verde.
(essential characteristic: verde = color green)

To address condition, use estar. Estar is an irregular verb. It does not follow the standard rules of conjugation for regular -ar verbs. Therefore, you must memorize it.

ESTAR

estoy

estás

está

estamos

estáis

están

To address an essential quality, use ser. Ser is also irregular and must be memorized.

SER

Soy

Eres

Es

Somos

Sois

Son

If you are talking about **what** something is, use ser; if you are talking about **how** something is, use estar.

What is she like?

She is quiet.

Use ser:

Ella es callada.

How is she acting?

She is being quiet.

Use estar:

Ella está callada.

QUIZ

A. Choose the correct translation.

1. He is bored.

Él es aburrido.

Él está aburrido.

2. He is boring.

Él es aburrido.

Él está aburrido.

3. She is happy. (temperament)

Ella es alegre.

Ella está alegre.

4. She is happy. (feeling happy)

Ella es alegre.

Ella está alegre.

5. They are tired.

Ellos son cansados.

Ellos están cansados.

6. John is sick.

Juan es enfermo.

Juan está enfermo.

7. John is sickly.

Juan es enfermo.

Juan está enfermo.

8. The boys are big.

Los chicos son grandes.

Los chicos están grandes.

9. The boys are big for their age.

Los chicos son grandes.

Los chicos están grandes.

10. Maria is amusing.

María es divertida.

María está divertida.

11. Santiago is lively.

Arsenio es vivo.

Arsenio está vivo.

12. Santiago is alive.

Arsenio es vivo.

Arsenio está vivo.

13. My sister is very quiet.

Mi hermana es muy callada.

Mi hermana está muy callada.

14. My sister is being very quiet.

Mi hermana es muy callada.

Mi hermana está muy callada.

15. The apple is unripe.

La manzana es verde.

La manzana está verde.

16. The apple is green (color).

La manzana es verde.

La manzana está verde.

17. The soup (here) is (always) delicious.

La sopa es deliciosa.

La sopa está deliciosa.

18. The soup is delicious (tonight).

La sopa es deliciosa.

La sopa está deliciosa.

B. Suggested writing exercise: Write six sentences using the verbs *ser* and *estar*.