

# Understanding Portuguese – Why two Verbs for To Be?

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Video URL: <https://youtu.be/TP1LthQTJEA>

The verb *to be* translates into two Portuguese counterparts:

*ser* and *estar*.

We could say that English collapses two concepts into one verb, then leans on compound expressions to add **nuance**.

For example:

He **is** a doctor.

Because this expresses a permanent **identity**,

Portuguese uses *ser*:

**Ele é médico.**

Another example:

He **is** tired.

This describes a temporary **condition**,

so, Portuguese uses *estar*:

**Ele está cansado.**

Now consider this:

He **is** being unreasonable.

The phrase “**is being**” signals a momentary **state**

—European Portuguese, again, uses *estar*:

**Ele *está* a *ser* irracional.**

But in this next example:

“He **is always** unreasonable,”

we’re describing a **consistent** trait,  
a permanent **state** of being.

So, Portuguese uses *ser*:

Ele ***é*** sempre irracional.

Just like: “He **is** a doctor.”

**In general,**

English often relies on progressive forms, modal verbs, or idiomatic turns to express what Portuguese handles with a simple **verb choice**.

This is one reason why learning another language in depth feels challenging:

The process of learning asks us to expand how we think in order to express ourselves more idiomatically.

There are advantages to both languages, of course—and it's **genuinely** fun to learn how to communicate across different paradigms.

Here are few more examples:

**Estou feliz.** → I **am** happy.

This is a temporary state of mind.

The verb **estar** (estou) makes that clear:

**"Estou feliz hoje."** ("I'm happy today.")

But if someone is **happy by nature...**

they'd say: **Sou feliz.**

Which in English might be:

**"I have been** happy."

Here, it's not just a moment  
—it's a way of being.

So, in summary: **Estar** is to be *somewhere, somehow*.

**Ser** is to be *something*, in a more permanent form.

They replace compound statements  
where **To Be** is used in English.

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