

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. This includes **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 and Estar


USES OF SER

1. **Ser** is used to talk about time expressions involving **days, dates, years and hours**.  
**Hoy es martes.** *Today is Tuesday.*  
**Ayer fue mi cumpleaños.** *It was my birthday yesterday.*  
**Son las tres.** *It's three o'clock.*


2. **Ser** is used to describe the **place** a person is from or the **material** something is made of.  
**Maria 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 traits, physical qualities, occupations, personal relationships, and religion**, among others.  
**Miguel es amable, alto y guapo.** *Miguel is kind, tall, and handsome.*

- Note that the **indefinite articles** **un, una, unos, and unas** are often not 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 de ayudar a sus pacientes.**  
*She is a doctor who has a calling to help her patients.*


4. **Ser** is used in the **passive voice** to describe an **action affecting** something or someone.  
**La sopa fue cocinada por la familia Sánchez.** *The soup was cooked by the Sanchez family.*

USES OF 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** of a person or object.  
**Mi amiga está sentada en el sofá.** *My friend is seated on the couch.*

3. **Estar** is used to express **location**.  
**El cine está enfrente del supermercado.** *The movie theater is opposite the supermarket.*

Watch out! 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 with a **present participle** (such as **lavando**) to describe ongoing actions or with a **past participle** (such as **muerto**) to describe someone or something's state.  
**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'm very tired this morning.*  
**Los estudiantes están confundidos con la gramática.** *The students are confused by 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.*

Useful Tips

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 have pale skin	estar pálido	to look pale
ser bueno	to be good	estar bueno	to be tasty or attractive	ser pesado	to be heavy or boring	estar pesado	to be annoying
ser cansado	to be annoying or tiring	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	estar orgulloso	to be proud	ser vivo	to be sharp	estar vivo	to be alive
ser moreno	to have dark/tan skin	estar moreno	to be tanned				