

Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive verbs are used to indicate actions that a person does to his or her self and end with the letters -se. Think of this suffix as a representation of the idea "oneself". For example:

afeitarse	<i>to shave oneself</i>	lavarse	<i>to wash oneself</i>
bañarse	<i>to bathe oneself</i>	peinarse	<i>to comb oneself</i>
cepillarse	<i>to brush oneself</i>	secarse	<i>to dry oneself</i>
ducharse	<i>to shower oneself</i>	vestirse	<i>to dress oneself</i>

Although there are certain actions that are only done to oneself (like getting one's hair cut or nails trimmed), just about any verb can be reflexive. In fact, some verbs are reflexive as often as not. For instance:

arreglar - to fix	Paco arregla el coche.	<i>Paco fixes the car.</i>
arreglarse - to fix up	Ana fixes herself up	<i>Ana se arregla.</i>
levantar - raise	Yo levanto la bandera.	<i>I raise the flag.</i>
levantarse - get up	Yo me levanto a las seis.	<i>I get myself up at 6:00.</i>
mirar - look	Tú miras la tele mucho.	<i>You watch tv a lot.</i>
mirarse - look at self	Tú te miras.	<i>You look at yourself.</i>

Although the -se is attached to the end of the infinitive, a reflexive verb is conjugated just like any other, as indicated below. The essential difference is that the -se suffix, turns into an Indirect Object pronoun and is placed before the verb, as illustrated below.

Indirect Object Pronouns		Conjugation	
me (me)	nos (us)	me lavo	nos lavamos
te (you)	os (y'all)	te lavas	os laváis
se (him/her)	se (them)	se lava	se lavan

Often verbs are used reflexively to indicate a focus or emphasis on oneself, though this is technically unnecessary. For example.

Compro el chicle.	<i>I buy gum.</i>
Me compro el chicle.	<i>I buy gum for myself.</i>
Tomas una aspirina.	<i>You take an aspirin.</i>
Te tomas una aspirina.	<i>You take an aspirin [yourself].</i>

In the second example above, "tomas" indicates physically reaching out and taking an aspirin with your fingers, while "te tomas" indicates putting it in your mouth and swallowing, presumably because you have a headache.

If a compound verb (verb combination) is reflexive, the indirect object pronoun is either placed before the verb or added to the end of the infinitive. In either case, the phrase has the same meaning. For example:

Yo me debo bañar.	<i>I should bathe.</i>
Yo debo bañarme.	<i>I should bathe.</i>
Maya se quiere esconder.	<i>Maya wants to hide.</i>
Maya quiere esconderse.	<i>Maya wants to hide.</i>
Nosotros nos tenemos que preparar.	<i>We have to get ready.</i>
Nosotros tenemos que prepararnos.	<i>We have to get ready.</i>

Plural reflexive verb conjugations indicate that a certain group of people are doing something to themselves OR each other. Examples:

Nos miramos.	<i>We watch ourselves/each other.</i>
Se escuchan.	<i>They listen to themselves/each other.</i>
Os habláis.	<i>Y'all speak to yourselves/each other.</i>

In the third example above, "os habláis" may indicate that you and a friend have a conversation or that each of you is speaking to yourself, which may mean that you are crazy. One way to clarify things is to add "uno al otro" (one person to another) like this.

Os habláis, uno al otro.	<i>Y'all speak to yourselves, one to another.</i>
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Other interesting problems may arise and require clarification to avoid misunderstanding. For instance, "El niño se moja," literally means "The boy wets himself." You might clarify the statement by making this adjustment:

El niño se moja.	<i>The boy wets (pees on) himself.</i>
El niño se moja <u>en la lluvia</u> .	<i>The boy gets wet <u>in the rain</u>.</i>

Quiz

Translate the sentences below using reflexive verbs.

- I always bathe in the morning.
- We brush our teeth every day.
- Gabriel washes his face with soap.
- You use two towels to dry off.
- Boys never comb their hair!
- Do you guys get dressed up for a picnic?
- They need to wash up.
- I prefer to brush my hair.
- We are going to shave first.
- Do y'all talk to each other much?