

## Ser & Estar Usage

The verbs SER and ESTAR are about being. For example:

*Yo quiero ser capitán.*  
I want to be captain.

*Yo prefiero estar en casa.*  
I prefer to be at home.

*Yo estoy desesperado pero yo no soy estúpido!*  
I am desperate, but I am not stupid!

The first thing one might ask is why there are two different ways to discuss being. Why do we say *yo soy* and *yo estoy*? Why won't one verb do the trick?

The answer is quite simple: they actually imply different things. The verb SER is used to describe the **characteristics** of a noun, while ESTAR is used to describe the **conditions** or **location** of a noun. For example:

*Yo soy inteligente.*  
I am smart.

*Tú eres alta.*  
You are tall.

*José es guapo.*  
José is handsome.

*Nosotros somos estudiantes.*  
We are students.

*Ana y tú sois de L.A.*  
Ana and you are from L.A.

*Las niñas son pequeñas.*  
The girls are small.

*Yo estoy en el baño.*  
I am in the bathroom

*Tú estás enferma.*  
You are sick.

*Juan está loco.*  
Juan is crazy.

*Adán y yo estamos tristes.*  
Adán and I are sad.

*Vosotras estáis animadas.*  
Y'all are excited.

*Las sillas están rotas.*  
The chairs are broken.

*¡ojoo!*

Notice that all the sentences in the left column use forms of the verb SER and are about characteristics of the people or things mentioned...

while all the sentences on the right column use forms of the verb ESTAR and are about conditions or locations of the people or things mentioned.

So, the verbs are not interchangeable. You have to use the right verb and figure out the right conjugation! This can be hard for the brain to do all at once, so you must be very methodical in using SER and ESTAR until you get the hang of it... which can take months or years of practice.

Notice that we can chart SER and ESTAR as we do other verbs, but they do not follow the same rules of conjugation; that is, you cannot simply drop the AR or ER suffix and add the standard endings. Ser and Estar have unique endings that must be memorized. The charts below can help you do that.

SER		ESTAR	
WHO OR WHAT YOU ARE (characteristics)		HOW OR WHERE YOU ARE (conditions • location)	
soy	somos	estoy	estamos
eres	sois	estás	estáis
es	son	está	están
• physical appearance • race or nationality • personality or nature • favorites or preferences • labels or identity • existence		• physical condition • mental condition • spiritual condition • social condition • location of person/thing • action in progress	

Also notice that below each T-chart is a list of qualifiers to help you determine when it is appropriate to use one verb or the other.

As you quiz, below, refer to this chart and:

1. determine which verb is appropriate
2. find the pronoun in the sentence
3. write the correct verb form in the blank

## WARNING:

Use of SER and ESTAR can get a little dicey, depending on connotation. For example, both of these sentences below are correct... but why?

Ana es bonita. ...implies that Ana is characteristically pretty. She's pretty, no matter what.

Ana está bonita. ...implies that Ana is pretty as a condition. Maybe she's wearing nice clothes that make her pretty.

So, at the heart of it all is this: are we speaking of a noun's characteristics (SER) or its conditions (ESTAR).

## QUIZ

Translate the sentences below, then fill in the blanks as instructed in the section above.

1. ¡Yo \_\_\_\_\_ el ganador!

7. Yo \_\_\_\_\_ en mi coche.

2. Nosotros \_\_\_\_\_ en paz.

8. Ruvim y Vladi \_\_\_\_\_ rusos.

3. Bernardo \_\_\_\_\_ simpático.

9. Conchita \_\_\_\_\_ enfadada.

4. Tú \_\_\_\_\_ mi persona favorita.

10. Mariana y tú \_\_\_\_\_ caminando.

5. Tita y Marcos \_\_\_\_\_ enamorados.

11. Gabi y yo \_\_\_\_\_ novios.

6. Carmen \_\_\_\_\_ la capitana del equipo.

12. ¿Por qué \_\_\_\_\_ tú deprimida?