



Ser & Estar

Basic categories and uses

JCW
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Adapted from: Butt, J & Benjamin, C (1998), *A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish*, London: Edward Arnold.



Introduction

In very general terms:

- **Ser** denotes *nature* or *identity*
- **Estar** denotes *condition*, *state* or *place*



General Examples

- **Soy** español
- **Es** de Francia

But:

- **Estoy** en Londres
- **Está** muy callado hoy



Ser + identity & nature

Adjectives / adjectival phrases referring to:

- Origin
- Identity
- Nature



Ser + noun / noun phrase

Nouns / noun phrases include:

- Professions
- Time
- Characteristics of situations

Ser + reaction

Examples:

- Me **es** difícil
- Todo le **era** distinto

- Above uses of **ser** can also be substituted for **resultar** or **parecer**

Estar + state (not nature/identity)

- **Estar** is used with adjectives which indicate:
 - Mood
 - Physical condition / health
 - Non-characteristic features
 - Temporary employment / state

Ser or *Estar*?

- With categories that express **state** or **location**, there are several important exceptions to the general rule:
- General rule: **Estar** – state & location

But...

Location: *Estar* + objects

- If you refer to the location of an object, place, country etc, **estar** must be used:
- ¿Dónde **están** mis llaves?
- ¿Dónde **está** tu libro?
- Madrid **está** en España

Location: **Ser** + events

- If '*to be*' is used to mean '*to take place*' or '*to happen*', **ser** must be used:
- ¿Dónde **es** la conferencia?
- ¿Dónde **es** la fiesta?

Ser indicating *state*

- Ser is also used to indicate state with *certain adjectives only*:
- Soy **feliz**
- Es muy **pobre**
- Son **ricos**
- Somos **culpables**

Estar indicating **state**

...but Estar *usually* indicates state:

- **Estoy deprimido**
- **Está contenta**
- **Están animados hoy etc...**