

“To be” in Spanish: Ser vs. Estar

There are two verbs (both irregular) used to express “to be” in Spanish: ser and estar. The following list characterizes some of the principal differences in usage between the two:

Ser

“What is something or someone?”
“What is someone or something like?”
“When is it?”
“Where are you from?”

1. Used to define the identity of someone or something. (Profession, religion, nationality, identification, definition)
El hombre es médico.
Esto es un libro.
2. A characteristic of something (semi-permanent; not likely to change)
La silla es roja.
Paco es gordo.
Ellas son ricas.
Yo soy casado.
3. Time (year, month, day, hour)
Hoy es lunes.
Son las cuatro (4:00).
4. Origin, possession, composition (what something is made of)
Yo soy de Guatemala.
La mesa es de madera.
5. Location of an event (*only* events)
La fiesta es en la casa de Juan.

Conjugation of “ser” (to be)

soy	somos
eres	sois
es	son

Estar

“How are you?”
“Where is it?”
“How have you changed?”
“What is the state or condition?”

1. A condition of something; something that is expected to change.
Yo estoy enfermo.
Paco está muy contento.
Tú estás muy bonita. (You look great today.)
2. Location of everything except events.
Madrid está en España.
¿Dónde está el baño?
3. Present progressive tense (I am working, etc.)
Estoy trabajando.
Ellas están comiendo.
(The “-ing” form is created by adding -ando to -ar verbs and -iendo to -er/-ir verbs)
4. A temporary substitution (not the real identity)
Estoy de profesor hoy. (I am “the acting” professor today)
5. Used to show that something has changed recently from the expected norm (still denotes a condition).
María está alta. (María has recently become tall).
El Señor Rodríguez está pelado. (Mr. Rodríguez has recently become bald.)

Conjugation of “estar” (to be)

estoy	estamos
estás	estáis
está	están

For more practice on this concept, please visit:

http://www.colby.edu/~bknelson/exercises/ser_estar.html

<http://www.studyspanish.com/tutorial.htm> (exercises 15-18)

<http://www.conjuguemos.com> (Spanish, Grammar, exercises 29-33)