PART 1

Whole books have been written about the two important Spanish verbs: ser and estar. This will be the subject of our discussion for the next few lessons. Soon, you will have a very good understanding of how these two verbs are used.

Ser and estar can both be translated as "to be." Here is the English verb, fully conjugated:

**to be**

I am
you are
he/she is
we are
you-all are
they are

Notice that these two sentences can have different meanings in English.

**The apple is green.**
(Meaning the apple is not ripe.)

**The apple is green.**
(Meaning the color of the apple is green.)

In the first case, our example speaks of the **condition** of the apple. The apple is green because it has not yet ripened. When the condition of the apple changes, that is, when it has ripened, it will no longer be green, it will be ripe.

In the second case, our example speaks of the **essential characteristics** of the apple. The apple is green in color. This particular apple remains green even after it has ripened.

In English, the verb "to be" can be used to tell **how** something is (the condition) and **what** something is (the essence).

**How** is the apple?
It is unripe.

**What** color is the apple?
It is green.

In Spanish, a different verb is used to express "to be" depending on whether the speaker intends to address a condition or an essential quality.

**La manzana está verde.**
The apple is green. (condition)

**La manzana es verde.**
The apple is green. (essence)

Note how the adjective "verde" actually changes meaning, depending upon whether it is used with ser or estar.

**La manzana está verde.**
(condition: verde = unripe)

**La manzana es verde.**
(essential characteristic: verde = color green)

To address condition, use estar. Estar is an irregular verb. It does not follow the standard rules of conjugation for regular -ar verbs. Therefore, you must memorize it.

**estar**

estoy
estás
está
estamos
estáis
están

To address an essential quality, use ser. Ser is also irregular and must be memorized.

**ser**

soy
eres
es
somos
sois
son

If you are talking about **what** something is, use ser; if you are talking about **how** something is, use estar.

What is she like?
She is quiet.
Use ser:
**Ella es callada.**

How is she acting?
She is being quiet.
Use estar:
**Ella está callada.**

PART 2

In the previous lesson you learned the fundamental difference between ser and estar - essence or condition. The examples used the verbs in conjunction with adjectives to clearly illustrate this point. In practice, ser and estar are not always used with adjectives, nor is it always easy for the non-native speaker to choose between the two verbs. Therefore, it is extremely useful to learn some concrete rules for deciding when to use ser or estar. This lesson examines some common uses for the verb ser.

Ser is used to express the hour, day, and date.

¿Qué hora **es**?
What time is it?

**Son** las dos.
It's two o'clock.

¿Qué día **es** hoy?
What day is today?

Hoy **es** lunes.
Today's Monday.

¿Qué fecha **es** hoy?
What's the date today?

**Es** el cinco de mayo.
It's May fifth.

Ser is used to express place of origin.

¿De dónde **eres** tú?
Where are you from?

**Soy** de Colombia.
I'm from Colombia.

Ser is used to express occupation.

¿Cuál **es** tu trabajo?
What do you do?

**Soy** carpintero
I'm a carpenter.

Ser is used to express nationality.

¿**Es** ella puertorriqueña?
Is she Puerto Rican?

No, **es** guatemalteca.
No, she's Guatemalan.

Ser is used to express religious or political affiliation.

¿**Son** los García bautistas?
Are the Garcias Baptists?

No, **son** católicos.
No, they're Catholics.

¿**Es** el gobierno socialista?
Is the government socialist?

No, **es** comunista.
No, it's communist.

Ser is used to express the material something is made of.

¿De qué material **es** la mesa?
What's the table made of?

**Es** de madera.
It's made of wood.

Ser is used to express possession.

¿De quién **es** la pluma?
Whose pen is it?

**Es** de Emilio.
It's Emilio's.

Ser is used to express the relationship of one person to another.

¿Quién **es** Rogelio?
Who is Roger?

**Es** el esposo de Marta.
He's Martha's husband.

Ser is used with certain impersonal expressions.

**Es** importante practicar cada día.
It's important to practice every day.

**Es** necesario hablar mucho.
It's necessary to speak a lot.

Ser is used to tell where an event is taking place.

La película **es** en el cine.
The movie is at the theatre.

La fiesta **es** en el club Fantástico.
The party is in the Fantastic Club.

Ser is used with adjectives to express inherent, or essential qualities.

Miguel **es** un hombre sincero.
Mike is a sincere man.

También **es** guapo.
He's also handsome.

Let's review. Ser is used to express:

1. the hour, day, and date
2. place of origin
3. occupation
4. nationality
5. religious or political affiliation
6. the material something is made of
7. possession
8. relationship of one person to another
9. certain impersonal expressions
10. where an event is taking place
11. essential qualities

PART 3

In the previous two lessons you learned the fundamental difference between ser and estar - essence or condition ("what" something is v. "how" something is), as well as some common uses for the verb ser. This lesson examines the other Spanish verb for "to be": estar.

Estar is used to express geographic or physical locations.

¿Dónde **estás**?
Where are you?

**Estoy** en el laboratorio.
I'm in the laboratory.

¿Dónde **está** Chile?
Where's Chile?

Chile **está** en América del Sur.
Chile is in South America.

**Note:** The one exception to this rule is that ser is used to tell where an event is taking place. (La fiesta es en mi casa.)

Estar is used with adjectives to express a state or condition ("how" something is).

¿Cómo **está** la sopa?
How's the soup?

La sopa **está** fría.
The soup is cold.

¿Cómo **estás** tú?
How are you?

**Estoy** muy bien, gracias.
I am very well, thanks.

Estar is used with many idiomatic expressions. These are just a few.

**estar de acuerdo**

to be in agreement

**estar de pie**

to be standing

**estar en camino**

to be on the way

**estar en las nubes**

to daydream

Estar is used with the progressive tenses. You will learn more about this usage later. We present it now simply because it is an important use of the verb estar.

¿Qué **estás** comiendo?
What are you eating?

**Estoy** comiendo arroz y frijoles.
I am eating rice and beans.

Let's review. Estar is used to express:

1. geographic or physical location
2. state or condition
3. many idiomatic expressions
4. progressive tenses

PART 4

n the previous three lessons you learned the fundamental difference between ser and estar -- essence or condition, as well as some common uses for each verb. This lesson presents the two verbs side by side, with the emphasis on contrasting their uses. In the process, much -- but not all -- of the previous three lessons will be reviewed. The practice exercises and the test cover material from all four lessons (Ser and Estar Parts I-IV).

When the verb "to be" is followed by a noun, the verb ser is always used. In this instance, it might be helpful to think of the verb as equivalent to an "equal" sign, such as a = b. This type of sentence is always referring to essential characteristics, since the verb is "linking" what comes before the verb to what comes after the verb.

John is a doctor.
John = doctor.

Juan **es** médico.

When the verb "to be" is followed by an adjective, the verb used depends upon the meaning. When referring to an essential characteristic, use ser. When referring to a state or condition, use estar.

**La sopa está fría.**
The soup is cold.

**Los elefantes son grandes.**
The elephants are big.

When the verb "to be" is followed by an adjective, the verb can actually change the meaning of the adjective.

**El profesor está aburrido.**
The professor is bored.

**El profesor es aburrido.**
The professor is boring.

Let's distinguish between origin, location, and "to take place." To describe origin, or where something is from, use ser. To describe location, or where something is located right now, use estar. To tell where an event is taking place, use ser.

Mónica **es** de España. (origin)
Mónica **está** en Venezuela. (location)
La fiesta **es** en la casa de Mónica. (taking place)

Let's review.

1. When a noun follows the verb, use ser
2. When an adjective follows the verb, decide between "essence" and "condition"
3. To tell where something is from, use ser
4. To tell where something is located right now, use estar
5. To tell where an event is taking place, use ser