GCSE Spanish: when to use SER and ESTAR

SER and ESTAR are two of the most commonly used verbs in Spanish at any level, but they are also two of the most difficult. As you will know, the differences between these verbs are often extremely subtle. They often present situations where only a native speaker caould instinctively tell which one to use. However, there are many rules of thumb to help with your general use of these verbs, and it is extremely important that you learn these thoroughly. It is GUARANTEED that you will have to use both of these verbs several times across your exams, so get practising!

**SER** - indicative present tense

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Yo* | ***soy*** | I am |
| *Tú* | ***eres*** | you are (sing.) |
| *El/Ella* | ***es*** | he/she is |
| *Nosotros* | ***somos*** | we are |
| *Vosotros* | ***sois*** | you are (pl.) |
| *Ellos/Ellas* | ***son*** | they are |

1. The most common use of *ser* is in basic sentences is simply to **connect or equate nouns and pronouns to form sentences.**

For example:

He wants **to be** a Police Officer.

*Quiere* ***ser*** *un policía.*

or

The pizza **is** homemade.

*La pizza* ***es*** *casera.*

1. You will know to use *ser* instead of *estar* if you are describing characteristics or qualities that can be identified as being **inherent, permanent or essential,**such as **nationality, age, physical descriptors, personality descriptors, colours and materials, and shape and size.**

For example:

The block of flats **is** very tall.

*El bloque residencial* ***es*** *muy alto.*

or

**We are** from Argentina.

***Somos*** *de Argentina.*

1. *Ser* is used when talking about **possession**.

For example:

**It’s** my computer.

***Es*** *mi ordenador.*

 or

 You **are** his daughter.

 ***Eres*** *su hija.*

1. If you are discussing **when or where an event takes place**, you can use *ser. Ser* is also used when **telling the time.**

For example:

The award ceremony **is** in two hours.

*El asignación de premios* ***es***en dos horas.

 or

 **It’s** eleven o’clock.

 ***Son*** *las once.*

1. If you are talking about **how much something costs** using ‘to be’, you use *ser.*

For example:

**It’s** six pounds, boss.

***Son*** *seis libras, jefe.*

**ESTAR** - indicative present tense

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Yo* | ***estoy*** | I am |
| *Tú* | ***estás*** | you are (sing.) |
| *El/Ella* | ***está*** | he/she is |
| *Nosotros* | ***estamos*** | we are |
| *Vosotros* | ***estáis*** | you are (pl.) |
| *Ellos/Ellas* | ***están*** | they are |

1. The most common use of *estar* is when describing **states and conditions, including moods and feelings.** If *ser* can be said to describe permanent things, *estar* can be said to describe **temporary things.**

For example:

My colleague **is** ill today.

*Mi compa****ñ****ero* ***está*** *enfermo hoy.*

or

Excuse me, but my food **is** cold.

*Disculpe, pero mi comida* ***está*** *fría.*

1. Another very common instance that requires *estar* is when talking about **location**. This can be confusing because describing where events ‘are’, in the sense of taking place, can be done with *ser* – e.g. the meeting **is** in the office = *el reunión* ***es*** *en la oficina.*  However, otherwise **describing the locations of places, objects and people, always uses *estar****.*

For example:

Where **are** the scissors?

¿*Dónde* ***están*** *las tijeras?*

or

**I am** in Lanzarote at the moment.

***Estoy*** *en Lanzarote por el momento.*

1. *Estar* is used when talking about **being in agreement/disagreement.**

For example:

**We agree** with you.

***Estamos de acuerdo*** *contigo.*