CHAPTER 2

SER & ESTAR

A. The uses of ser

- Spanish has two verbs that are equivalent to the English *to be*: **ser** and **estar**. Both verbs are irregular in the present tense. Both have **-oy** in the *yo* form, like ir (**voy**) and **dar** (**doy**).

ser	
soy	somos
eres	sois
es	son

estar	
estoy	estamos
estás	estáis
está	están

- **Ser** is used before most phrases beginning with **de**; for example, in expressing origin:

Soy de los Estados Unidos.	*I'm from the United States.*

and possession:

La cartera **es de Felipe.**	*The wallet is Phillip's.*

and what material something is made of:

La blusa **es de seda.**	*The blouse is (made of) silk.*

- **Ser** is used before adjectives to indicate that the condition expressed by the adjectives does not result from a change. Thus, these adjectives express inherent qualities and characteristics such as nationality, age, physical and moral attributes, personality, religion, and color:

Mis amigas **son** españolas.	*My friends are Spanish.*
El presidente **es** joven.	*The president is young.*
Carlos **es** alto y rubio.	*Carlos is tall and blond.*
Nora **es** inteligente.	*Nora is intelligent.*
Mis primos **son** graciosos.	*My cousins are witty.*
Esos señores **son** protestantes/ judíos/católicos.	*Those men and women are Protestant/Jewish/Catholic.*
Nuestro coche **es** azul.	*Our car is blue.*

- **Ser** is used to link two nouns or pronouns or a noun and a pronoun. Both nouns and pronouns may appear in the sentence or merely be understood. Unlike English, Spanish omits the indefinite article **un/una** with a profession:

El señor Lara **es arquitecto.**	*Mr. Lara is an architect.*
Pilar Suárez **es médica.**	*Pilar Suárez is a doctor.*
Somos ingenieros.	*We're engineers.*

- Ser is used to express time, dates, days of the week, and where an event takes place:

—¿Qué hora **es**? — *What time is it?*
—**Son** las ocho. — *It's eight o'clock.*

—¿Cuál **es** la fecha de hoy? — *What's today's date?*
—**Es** el seis de octubre. — *It's October 6th.*

—¿Qué día **es** hoy? — *What day is today?*
—**Es** miércoles. — *It's Wednesday.*

—¿El baile **es** en la universidad? — *Is the dance at the university?*
—No, **es** en el Hotel Palacio. — *No, it's at the Palacio Hotel.*

The uses of estar

- Estar is used to express location or position, whether it is permanent or temporary:

Santiago **está** en Chile. — *Santiago is in Chile.*
El perro **está** al lado del gato. — *The dog is next to the cat.*
La papelería **está** enfrente de la pastelería. — *The stationery store is opposite the pastry shop.*

- Estar is used before adjectives to indicate that the condition expressed by the adjective results from a change. The condition may be a phase of health, happiness, etc.; a temporary state of being tired, seated, etc.; or the result of an action such as a window being closed. Estar also may indicate that the adjective is the subjective impression of the speaker. Estar is therefore more common with adjectives that describe mental or physical states:

—¿Cómo **está** Inés? — *How's Inés?*
—La pobre **está** enferma. — *The poor girl is (has gotten) sick.*

—¿**Están** levantados los niños? — *Are the children up?*
—No, **están** acostados todavía. — *No, they're still in bed.*

—¿**Están** abiertas las ventanas? — *Are the windows open?*
—No, **están** cerradas. — *No, they are closed.*

—¿No reconoces a Luis? — *Don't you recognize Luis?*
—Apenas. **Está** muy gordo. — *Hardly. He's so fat. (He's gotten very fat./He looks so fat to me.)*

- Estar is used in the formation of the progressive tenses: estar + the gerund. The gerund or -ndo form is equivalent to the -ing form in English:

Están esperando. — *They're waiting.*
Estaba viviendo en París. — *He was living in Paris.*

- Ser and estar are used with the past participle of the verb. Ser + the past participle is passive; it can have an agent phrase introduced by por. Estar + the past participle expresses the result of an action:

La puerta **fue abierta** por la chica. — *The door was opened by the girl.*
La puerta **está abierta**. — *The door is open.*

El trabajo **fue hecho** por él. — *The work was done by him.*
El trabajo **estaba hecho**. — *The work was done.*

Repaso

- The choice of **ser** or **estar** in a sentence is crucial to the meaning. A change in the verb will change the meaning:

Lola **es** delgada.	*Lola is thin. (Lola is a thin person.)*
Lola **está** delgada.	*Lola is thin. (Lola has gotten thin./ Lola looks thin to me.)*
Mario **es** nervioso.	*Mario is nervous. (He is a nervous person.)*
Mario **está** nervioso.	*Mario is feeling nervous. (Mario has gotten nervous/seems nervous to me.)*
Esos profesores **son** aburridos.	*Those professors are boring.*
Esos profesores **están** aburridos.	*Those professors are bored.*
Fernando **es** listo.	*Fernando is clever.*
Fernando **está** listo.	*Fernando is ready.*
La actriz **es** vieja.	*The actress is old.*
La actriz **está** vieja.	*The actress looks old.*
Los hombres **son** vivos.	*The men are sharp/quick.*
Los hombres **están** vivos.	*The men are alive.*
Beatriz **es** pálida.	*Beatriz is pale-complexioned.*
Beatriz **está** pálida.	*Beatriz is pale.*
Es seguro.	*It's safe.*
Está seguro.	*He's sure.*
Paquito **es** bueno.	*Paquito is good (a good boy).*
La torta **está** buena.	*The cake is (tastes) good.*

- Note the difference in meaning between **ser** and **estar** when referring to food:

La carne **es** rica (mala).	*Meat is delicious (awful). (in general)*
La carne **está** rica (mala).	*The meat is/tastes delicious (awful). (specific dish)*

Note: Adjectives used with **ser** and **estar** must agree with the subject in number and gender:

- Commonly used expressions with **ser**:

  ¿Cómo es Ud.?   *What are you like?, What do you look like?*
  ¿Cuál es la fecha de hoy?   *What's today's date?*
  ¿Cuál es su nacionalidad?   *What is your nationality?*
  ¿De dónde es Ud.?   *Where are you from?*
  ¿De qué color es ...?   *What color is ...?*
  ¿De qué origen es Ud.?   *What is your background?*
  es importante/necesario/posible   *it's important/necessary/possible*
  es que   *the fact is that*
  ¿Qué hora es?   *What time is it?*

- Commonly used expressions with **estar**:

  ¿Cómo está Ud.?   *How are you?*
  estar a punto de + *infinitive*   *to be about to*
  estar conforme   *to be in agreement*
  estar de acuerdo (con)   *to agree (with)*
  estar de vacaciones   *to be on vacation*
  estar de vuelta   *to be back*
  estar para + *infinitive*   *to be about to*
  estar por   *to be in favor of*
  estar por + *infinitive*   *to be inclined to*