

**Singing the Basics Intermediate Spanish**  
**TEACHER GUIDE, LYRIC AND ACTIVITY BOOK**  
**TODD HAWKINS, ©2000, 2009, 2015**

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## The Approach to Grammar Used in These Songs

The songs on *Singing the Basics Intermediate Spanish* are a continuation of what I tried to do with the beginning songs—to give students an easy and foolproof way to memorize some of the foundations of Spanish vocabulary and grammar. In these intermediate songs I also hope to offer to teachers and students what may be a different approach to teaching grammatical issues. I believe that embracing this approach will multiply the effectiveness of the songs beyond the aid they give in memorization. It is also possible that students may not actually comprehend some aspects of some songs unless the approach and some of the lyrics are explained.

You will notice as you learn the songs that some of them attempt to crystallize decisions that students must make (*ser/estar, por/para, preterite/imperfect*) down to the most concise verbiage possible. Many of these songs attempt to focus students' attention primarily on the basic principles involved in a decision, then show how the list of seemingly unconnected rules that traditionally comprise grammatical explanations fit together logically as extensions of a basic principle. The hope is that by turning away from rote memorization of long lists, students can make quick choices based upon the principles at the "heart" of each issue. These concise-yet-complete grammatical explanations are ideal for "pop-up" grammar in a TPRS classroom.

Equally important, students learning this approach will be encouraged to focus more on *meaning* than upon abstract grammatical concepts. It should always be our goal, even as we teach the mechanics of grammar, to increase our students' ability to communicate. Grammar explanations do not have to be a distraction from the meaning of what one may wish to communicate. It makes me feel more comfortable when my explanations reinforce in my students' minds (at least in theory) the habit of focusing on meaning. A focus on meaning in grammar builds flexibility with the language. In my view, students who grasp the *logic* of the language rather than relying on rote memorization of lists of rules are more able to make decisions in situations for which they have not been specifically prepared.

I have therefore included grammatical explanation sheets for each of these issues. The fundamental principle is stated at the top of the page, and the rules that follow are presented in such a way as to show how each rule fits in logically with and helps to clarify the meaning of the principle. These explanation sheets furnish examples of the principles given in the songs, since some of the songs (because they would have ended up too long) include no examples.

My approach has evolved largely as a result of my frustration, first as a student, then as a teacher, with the traditional grammatical explanations that I have tried to use over the years. But there have been role models along the way in my "less is more" approach to grammar. Nancy Mills, my mentor teacher in the first three years of my career, shared a very concise approach to understanding and presenting subjunctive, which serves as a model of both brevity and logic. Diana Frantzen wrote an article in *Hispania* (Mar. 1995) that crystallized the preterite/imperfect decision very well. Her article is not only the model for my preterite/imperfect song, but it also encouraged me to find more concise and logical ways to present other grammatical choices. As for the other songs, I am using approaches that have evolved for me over the past few years—I do not presume to be the only one to use the terminology and approach, but have arrived at them independently.

I must also encourage teachers to attend a workshop by the originator of TPRS, Blaine Ray; or by Susan Gross, or Carol Gaab, among other national presenters. There is no better approach to teaching foreign language (including grammar) than those based upon comprehensible input, and TPRS is an excellent system CI-based instruction. My website has links to presenters, bloggers, and researchers, along with my own opinions and observations.

## Visit [MentalNoteMusic.com](http://MentalNoteMusic.com)

### FREE MUSIC FOR STUDENTS

These songs are longer and more dense than my previous songs, since the grammar is more complex. You may find that you can't devote enough class time to the songs for the students to memorize them. Since the songs are memorization aids, they are hardly worth doing at all if they are not done enough to permit memorization. So, if you believe in the power of music to aid in long-term retention, you will probably have to eliminate some activities to make the songs effective. I recommend dropping activities that do not result in long-term retention! I found "going over" homework tremendously wasteful—my students tended to make the same mistakes in a follow-up assignment that they had just corrected in the first one. I've found that if you are able to convert all of your homework assignments to online ones (I love Quia.com and Conjuguemos.com), you don't have to waste time going over homework in class. (It's still drilling, which doesn't generally result in real-world proficiency, however.) This leaves more time for singing, communicative activities, and comprehensible input.

Another solution is to get my music into your students' devices. Feel free to refer your students to [mentalnotemedia.com/purchase-mp3s/](http://mentalnotemedia.com/purchase-mp3s/) so that they may download the songs.

### WEBSITE, OTHER MODERN STUFF

Browse to [mentalnotemusic.com](http://mentalnotemusic.com) for free information for teachers, and for more quality educational products. If you like my music, refer your friends to the website as well—including parents of elementary-aged children, and elementary teachers. I have produced four CDs (that have nothing to do with Spanish) by Thom Miller that are phenomenal learning tools for elementary students.

You'll also find a blog, information about up-coming projects, links to the top CI/TPRS gurus, and more.

Follow me on Twitter @MentalNoteTodd, and feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, correction, or suggestions that you have. I value your opinions and ideas!

### ANSWER SHEETS AND EDITABLE WORKSHEETS, WITH BONUS SER/ESTAR ACTIVITIES

Since you'll probably want to edit the worksheets in this book, I have labeled them in the book as samples. E-mail me for a document containing editable versions of the worksheets, along with answer keys for each one. I'll also send you several *ser/estar* and preterite/imperfect paragraphs that are less complex than these designed for Spanish IV students. Just e-mail me at [todd@mentalnotemedia.com](mailto:todd@mentalnotemedia.com), and I'll send you the editable documents.

### WORKSHOPS?

As I was typing up some of this stuff, I was thinking, "this would be so much easier to explain in-person". Some ideas—especially my approaches to *ser* and *estar* and the object pronouns—have resulted in dramatic improvement in student achievement. My perspective on comprehensible input and TPRS could help quite a few people too. If you'd like, let me know, and we can work out terms and customize a perfect workshop for whatever group you want.

### TO COPY OR NOT TO COPY

Feel free to copy anything from this book for use in your classroom. Please do not copy, or allow other teachers to copy, the book or the CD to avoid a purchase. You have permission as well to use any of these songs in a public setting—school programs, workshops, professional development meetings, etc. Please do not post or copy songs for students unless you feel that financial circumstances would prevent students from being able to afford a download.

## Backward Verbs

Don't be fooled by backward verbs  
The verbs that work like *gustar*  
Just remember what the subject is  
And what the objects are

*Me gusta el café*  
Means "coffee pleases me"  
Me does not seem indirect  
But that the way it's gotta be

*Le gustan los CDs*  
Means "CDs please him"  
CDs are the subject, not *le*  
Make *gusta* plural add an "n"

Don't be fooled by backward verbs  
The verbs that work like *gustar*  
Just remember what the subject is  
And what the objects are

*Le encantan los cafés*  
Cafés enchant him  
*Les molesta el TV*  
The TV bothers them

And if you need to clarify  
Don't forget to add an "a"  
*A Luis le gusta escribir*  
*A Juan le gusta Panamá*

## Blind Date Challenge

A game show has sent you on a blind date. As in *The Newlywed Game*, during the game, you will guess what your date's responses will be to questions about his or her views of dating and the opposite sex. You will gain points each time you correctly predict your partner's answer to a question.

The questions will be based on the "backward verbs" (verbs that work like *gustar*) on your vocabulary list. For example: *En una cita, ¿qué te da vergüenza? A tus padres, ¿qué les enfada?*

To prepare for the *Blind Date Challenge*, you will have a 15 minute "date" to get to know your partner, in which you ask each other questions about what bothers them, is important to them, surprises them, worries them, etc. on a date, or about the person that they're dating. Don't forget to find out about the opinions of your "date's" family regarding the people they date.

You may speak no English during the ten minutes. Each occurrence of English will result in a loss of 1 point even before the game starts.

Besides matching your partner's answers, both answers must be in grammatically correct complete sentences to be valid.

### FOR THE TEACHER: SETUP AND PLAY

Put class into teams of two—preferably male and female—but you can have students pretend, if necessary, hopefully without embarrassing anyone. All students participate in the "date" simultaneously. After the "date" is over, choose half of the teams to play in the first game. Place partners opposite each other in two lines at a distance from each other so they can't communicate with one another. Use folded index cards (standing on desks in an inverted "v" shape) with numbers corresponding to the "couple number" to help quickly and easily move the couples to their positions and to keep track of the score.

Ask questions of the "females" using the "backward verbs" from your vocabulary list. Students can use paper, marker boards, etc. to record their answers. The females write their answers, and the males write what they think the females are going to write. Have the female read and show her answer first, then reveal that of the male. If the answers match, and are grammatically correct, the team is awarded a point. Questions are then asked of the males, and females guess what the males are going to say.

After a few rounds (depending on how much time you have), have a playoff among the teams tied for the lead. Then allow the other half of the class to play.

## False Cognates

False cognates are words  
That don't mean what you think  
Though they look like English  
They're not what they seem

Realize is *darse cuenta*  
*Realizar* is to make real  
Actually is *realmente*  
*Actualmente* means currently

*Tener vergüenza* is to be embarrassed  
*Embarazada* means with child (pregnant)  
Don't use *suceso*, use *éxito*  
for success, *suceso* is event, that's right!

False cognates are words  
That don't mean what you think  
Though they look like English  
They're not what they seem

## Reflexives

Most any verb can be reflexive  
If the do-er and the done-to are the same  
If you wanna say “self” or each other  
Then reflexive is the way

You can wash your car or wash yourself  
Talk to yourself or someone else  
You can shave your dog or shave your head  
You can dress the kids or just get dressed

*Él se lava or él lava el carro*  
*Tú te hablas o tú hablas con otro*  
*Se afeita o afeita al perro*  
*Visto al niño o yo me visto*

Some verbs just don't seem reflexive  
These verbs you've gotta learn one-by-one  
It doesn't seem like the action is reflected  
Like saying goodbye or having fun

*Enamorarse* is to fall in love  
*Divertirse* is to have some fun  
*Arrepentirse* is to change your mind  
*Despedirse* is to say goodbye

To brag is *jactarse*  
To complain is *quejarse*  
To take a risk or dare is *atreverse*  
To look like someone else is *parecerse*

Most any verb can be reflexive  
If the do-er and the done-to are the same  
Though some just don't seem reflexive  
You've gotta know 'em anyway!

## Getting a Handle on Backward Verbs and Pronouns

**Once students have learned about reflexive, direct, and indirect pronouns, along with the verbs that work like *gustar*, they often get so confused that they are unable to use any of them. Here is a step by step way to keep everything straight.**

First, you have to understand the following concepts:

1. What's a subject? Answers *who* or *what* before the verb.  
*Un anuncio me persuadió.* (A commercial persuaded me.)  
*What* persuaded me? A commercial. *Un anuncio* is the subject.

2. What's a direct object? Answers *who* or *what* after the verb.  
*Un anuncio me persuadió.* (A commercial persuaded me.)  
A commercial persuaded *who*? Me. *Me* is the direct object.

**What about reflexive pronouns?** Let's simplify the reflexive pronoun; it's usually just like a direct object pronoun that's used when the action reflects back upon the subject (making it both the subject and the direct object). The pronouns are the same as the direct object pronouns—except for the use of *se* to replace the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns when the action is done to the subject of the sentence, just as *self* is used in English. In some cases, like *quejarse*, it's not obvious to an English speaker how the action reflects on the subject. These we just have to memorize as reflexive.

3. What's an indirect object? Answers *to whom* or *for whom* after the verb.  
*Le compré un regalo.* (I bought a gift for him.)  
I bought a gift *for whom*? For him. *Him* is the indirect object. Don't be fooled by the second way in English of stating the same thing: *I bought him a gift.* This makes *him* appear to be a direct object, but obviously it is not.

4. Backward verbs: There's no reason to be spooked by verbs like "*gustar*". If you keep track of what the subject is *in the Spanish sentence*, they conjugate just like other verbs. To English speakers, these verbs seem backward. The trick is to be aware of what the subject is in the Spanish sentence. The only other problem with these expressions is that they use *indirect* pronouns, when it often seems that they should use *direct*.

He likes books. *Le gustan los libros.* (Books please him.)

Your letters cheer her up. *Le animan tus cartas.*

They love the cat. *Les encanta el gato.* (The cat enchants them.)

Carolina lacks glasses. *A Carolina le faltan gafas.* (Glasses are absent to Carolina.)

Don't let the backward verbs make you forget everything you used to know about object pronouns!



## Comprehensible Input for Reflexive Pronouns (and more!)

We have to accept the facts: No matter how good we become at teaching the object pronouns, (including reflexives) from a grammatical standpoint, very few students can actually use them correctly in “real time”—even in fourth year. The trouble is that human brains are programmed to say what “sounds right”, not to sort through grammatical steps to construct sentences. Our students mess up because what “sounds right” to English speakers is to put the word for “it”, “him”, or “her” after the verb.

If we are going to teach students to use these object pronouns in writing and speech, we have to get them to the point where it “sounds right” to use them correctly in Spanish. Infusing students with what “sounds right” in the target language is accomplished by the use of *comprehensible input*.

Unless you consider it acceptable that few fourth year students are able to effectively use the word “it” in a sentence (when you think about it, it does not make sense to treat object pronouns as an advanced skill; it’s difficult to function in a language without them—and five-year-olds have no trouble with them in L1) you must agree that traditional methods fall short in teaching this skill.

I have developed the following progression of comprehensible-input based activities to develop my first-year students’ proficiency in direct object and reflexive pronouns, and have seen incredible results. Because these activities work without requiring any effort from students outside of class, I have found that some of my worst students are actually some of the most gifted at acquiring and using the language—each year, some very low-achievers out-shine “star pupils” at making sentences using object pronouns. And by the way—these activities don’t require any effort from *you* outside of class either!

### **AN OVERVIEW; STEP-BY-STEP**

1. Over the course of two class periods, using very limited vocabulary, familiar classroom objects, a conversation with yourself, and *no explanation*, you demonstrate use of direct-object pronouns “lo/la/los/las” until most students are able to take over half of the conversation, using direct object pronouns correctly, thinking entirely in Spanish.
2. For the next couple of weeks, use the same brief demonstration from-time-to-time to reinforce use of the pronouns, and to bring more students into the comfort zone.
3. Gradually add complexity to the demonstration, including attaching object pronouns to infinitives, and the pronouns *me, te, se, and nos*.
4. Take yourself out of the equation using a communicative card passing activity.
5. Transition to written work. (If this comprehensible-input based approach is used from year-to-year throughout the department, I would leave the transition to written work until second or third year.)

These activities are designed to expose students to, and allow them to interact with, Spanish direct object (and reflexive) pronouns that they comprehend (comprehensible input). If students are immersed long enough in this type of activity, they will use pronouns correctly by instinct, based upon “what sounds right”. “Long enough”, however, will be much longer than the chapter in which object pronouns are taught. These activities produce results when used 10-20 minutes at a time throughout an entire school year. I begin work with my first-year students in the seventh week of school, and by the end of the school year, most are able to use direct object pronouns and reflexive pronouns with ease in real-world situations. Do not teach the grammar as you begin these activities. Don’t even use the term “direct object”. Trust these activities to instill “what sounds right” in the students. If you give the students explanations, notes, and drills, students will not make the connection between these “real time” oral exercises and the drills. Make the students proficient first at *understanding* sentences with object pronouns, then at using them oral-

ly. Only months later (when you finally get to the chapter) should they attempt them in writing. If they are given explanations and notes and drills too soon, they will completely ignore what they learned “sounds right”. They will instead either (most students) ignore what sounds right, *and* their notes and immediately begin to base their Spanish on what sounds right *in English*, or (the best students) slavishly follow the complicated series of steps—which they will immediately forget as soon as the next grammar point is introduced.

### INTRODUCING THE DIRECT OBJECT PRONOUNS

This introductory activity allows most students to figure out how to use “it” and “them” in basic Spanish sentences with *no explanation, and no English*.

On the board (in case students need help with the verbs) write *ves? veo, oyes? oigo, tienes? tengo, quieres? quiero* to help them understand the questions and answers they’re about to hear.

Have the following conversation with yourself (or find a capable accomplice) in front of your students. I use a low voice and an exaggerated high voice and turn my body to differentiate between the two “people” in the conversation. It’s goofy, but it works!

You: ¿Ves los lápices?

Student: Sí, los veo.

You: ¿Los oyes? (tap them together)

Student: Sí, los oigo.

You: ¿Los tienes?

Student: No, no los tengo.

You: ¿Los quieres?

Student: Sí, los quiero.

(Hand over the pencils)

You: ¿Los tienes?

Student: Sí, los tengo.

I know, I should be asking ¿lo ven?, and they should be answering “sí, lo vemos”. Eventually I explain to them that I’m treating this as a conversation between me and one other person. And I know they should speak to me formally (see right), but allowing them to refer to me as “te” as we start out better serves my purposes.

Demonstrate the conversation using a variety of objects (leave out masculine singular the first day) so that students can hear *la, los, and las* used in these basic sentences.

After a few times through, tell students: “if you think you can have this conversation with me, raise your hand”. Continue the demonstration by yourself if necessary. As students begin to volunteer, beginning with volunteers whom you expect to be successful, use classroom and personal objects, and run through the conversation. Encourage unsuccessful students to continue listening to demonstrations, and return to give them opportunities at “redemption”.

You may still have several students who just don’t get it. Have the successful students explain to the rest of the class “what just happened here” and how they figured it out: by cheating off of the question. It’s very satisfying to watch.

Add your own insights to make the explanation complete. Explain that we use pronouns in Spanish as well as English to make sentences shorter. Re-enact the conversation in English and Spanish to reinforce the meaning of the Spanish conversations. Do *not* get into grammar; we just want the direct object pronouns to “sound right” at this point. For most of the students, you will have just taken a big step in that direction.

You can repeat this activity for five-to-ten minutes in the next class or two, until you feel that students are comfortable enough to add the one pronoun that doesn’t match the article: *lo*. before long, you can show students that the same pronouns—*lo/las/los/las*—are used for people, and mix people in with the objects you use. You can mix-in a few new verbs to make the Q&A time more interesting.

After the class responds, “no, no las oigo”, find a confident, strong student and ask “¿quieres oírlas? If that doesn’t go well, don’t explain—find a student who can get it right, then another, etc., until using the object pronouns with infinitives (you can model attached and unattached uses if you wish) comes just as naturally as using them with only one verb. Explain only after many students have picked up on how to use these.

Then, one day, freak students out a bit by pointing at one of them and saying, “te veo”. Then another and another. Cover your eyes and say to one of them “no te veo”. Have fun with it. Then find a strong student and ask “¿me ves?”. You’ll quickly find one who says, “sí, te veo”.

In subsequent classes, with the help of a small mirror, after modeling “me veo”, you can very easily get correct responses to “¿te ves?”. You can very quickly point the mirror at (and withhold it from) individual students, and tell the class “se ve”/“no se ve”, then move to another student and ask, “¿se ve, o no se ve?” and elicit correct responses from the class. Later you can hold a mirror up to a group of people and elicit “se ven”, and eventually “nos vemos”.

At this point, students have grown comfortable with direct-object and reflexive pronouns, *without thinking in English!* So the fact that the pronoun goes in a different place from English doesn’t enter most students’ minds, because they’re only thinking about what sounds right in *Spanish*.

### **TURNING IT OVER TO THE STUDENTS**

A simple, effective, not unpleasant activity that I use a lot is one I call “card-passing”. It’s an activity I developed to help students practice conjugating verbs, but I have since found that it is effective for practicing demonstrative pronouns, possessives, and most recently, object pronouns. It is effective because it simulates real life, each student gets immediate feedback and help if needed, there is peer-pressure to participate, and a lot of practice can be accomplished in a short time. The down side is that the activity requires that students be seated in such a way that cards can be passed around the room in a circuit. I use a two-row horseshoe seating chart, so a card at the end of the back row is easily passed to the end of the front row, and vice-versa on the other end.

Make up flash cards with verbs (you’ll need just over half the amount of verbs as students in your class) that can easily be used with direct objects and reflexives. Distribute cards to every-other person in the circuit. Decide which way the cards will flow, and to begin, each student with a card quizzes the next person downstream. When finished the quizzer gives the card to the quizee and turns back upstream and waits to be quizzed. The former quizee then quizzes the next person downstream using the card she has just received. The former quizzer is quizzed by the upstream person, and when successful receives a card and turns downstream to quiz again.

In each pair, the quizzer (the person with a card) will choose and point to both a subject and a direct object for the quizee to use in a sentence along with the verb on the card. For the quizzing, you’ll have each student with a card point first to the person doing the action, then to the person or thing the action is being done to. Now is the time to talk about subject pronouns and object pronouns. Instruct the students to make a sentence using the verb on the card by first replacing the first person pointed to with a *subject* pronoun, and the person/thing pointed to second with an *object* (direct or reflexive) pronoun. There is no need for the quizzer to speak—*translation* is not what we want. We want the sentence to form as it does in real life, therefore we want the quizee to think in Spanish. The procedure takes some explanation the first couple of times—I demonstrate some subject/object examples with the class without using verbs, allowing students as a group to give me the correct pronouns for the pair of people/things I point to. Of course there’s less explaining if you’ve already used card passing for another topic.

Another important element of card passing is keeping everyone busy by correcting gaps and

backups. Anticipate and eliminate backups by moving backed-up cards ahead to a pair of students who need a card. There's an art to managing the smooth flow of cards, but it's worth the effort to master!

This process of allowing students to acquire object pronouns takes me seven months or so in first-year. It's frustrating to realize that even though students master this simulation of real-life speaking, it's still tough for most to make the transition to written activities. It does not come naturally to them to ask themselves what "sounds right" when doing written drills, so don't expect students to be able to do traditional object pronoun worksheets well at first. But the key is not to go back through the rules of choosing object pronouns and placing them before a conjugated verb or at the end of an infinitive; when you see a mistake, ask the student, "does this sound right to you?". There is no reason to quiz or test over any of this material until after students have acquired the real-world skills *and* have made the successful transition to applying it in writing. I'm considering eliminating written exercises in first-year, because it seems like a step backwards, and there's never enough year left over to get them as confident with written exercises as they are with real-time usage.

Of course, if you're going to spend six months on this but still follow your textbook or scope-and-sequence, you're going to have to borrow time from other topics, which will slow you down a bit. Don't worry if you have to drop it for a couple of weeks now and then when time is needed to devote to other topics—it's amazing how well they remember this stuff. Even after a couple of weeks off of school for winter break, they pick right back up where you left off. Don't worry if it slows your curriculum down—if this approach is adopted in all levels, the overall amount of time devoted in the program to teaching these pronouns will be less than the time that had been devoted to "covering" them (with little to show for it) before. A first-year teacher could skip the written work altogether knowing that students could make the transition to written work in a subsequent year (or never—who needs drills if you know how to use these to communicate?) after adequate oral review and written practice.

### **WHERE DOES THE SONG FIT INTO ALL OF THIS?**

I don't use the song until students are good at using verbs reflexively in the in-class activities. Using verbs reflexively blends in so well with direct object pronouns, that I don't even mention the word "reflexive" until they're good at them. Then I begin making them aware that every time someone is pointed to twice the quizee uses a verb reflexively. I also use the terminology from the song to make them aware of reflexive: a verb is reflexive "when the do-er and the done-to are the same". I try to prepare them for the day when they have to learn the verbs in the second half of the song that "don't seem reflexive". I tell them well-before we start learning them that there will be a type of verb that has *se* attached to the infinitive, and that they will want to freak out, but that they shouldn't, because the pronouns and their placement are the same, as what they are used to, and I stress to them: "you already know how to do reflexive verbs, so don't freak out when we get a new set of verbs that look different."

So when the song is introduced, they already know how to do verse one. I use the song to help them make the transition to verse two: the verbs that "don't seem reflexive".

### **ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

If you'd like more information, including verb lists that I use in my object-pronoun progression, e-mail me and I'll send it to you with additional editable worksheets, answer keys, etc. If you're interested in discussing this approach, e-mail me, and maybe we can set up a phone conversation about this. And if you'd like me to lead a workshop about this or any other topic, maybe we can work that out too!

## Ser and Estar

Spanish has two words for “to be” which depend  
On which kind of being you’re trying to say  
When you say “I am” “you are” “he is”  
*Ser* is characteristics, *estar* is for states  
*Ser* is characteristics, *estar* is for states

Characteristic or state is usually all you need to ask  
To decide *ser* or *estar* really fast  
A state is the way something is at a given instant  
Characteristic’s the way something generally is  
Choose *ser* or *estar* based on the emphasis

Location may not seem like a **state**  
Of a thing like a building that does not move  
But *estar* is used for where any *thing* is **standing**  
**Stationary** or out on the loose  
Events don’t stand anywhere, use *ser*!

Characteristic or state is usually all you need to ask  
To decide *ser* or *estar* really fast  
A state is the way something is at a given instant  
Characteristic’s the way something generally is  
Choose *ser* or *estar* based on the emphasis

# Ser and Estar

## USE A FORM OF SER FOR CHARACTERISTICS.

## USE A FORM OF ESTAR FOR STATES.

If you understand the difference between a state and a characteristic, most of the other rules are hardly necessary. A “state” is the way something is at a given instant. A “characteristic” is the way something generally is.

The words “temporary”, “permanent”, and “changeable”, cause confusion—don’t use them. In every instance, focus instead upon what the speaker is trying to express: a *state* or a *characteristic*; choose “based on the emphasis” in the sentence. Except for number 3, the rules below the line will not usually be necessary. It is helpful to look them over, however, to better understand the way the Spanish-speaking mind deals with states and characteristics.

*Estar* (to be) is used to express the state of something. Notice that *sta* is used in *estar* and in *state*.

*Estar* is used to:

1. express a state of mind, state of health, current **status** of any kind.

<i>Estoy cansado.</i>	I am tired.
<i>Estamos ocupados.</i>	We are busy.
<i>Dolores está casada.</i>	Dolores is married. ( <i>Es casada</i> is also acceptable.)
<i>Juan está muerto.</i>	Juan is dead. ( <i>Es muerto</i> is also acceptable.)

2. emphasize that the **state** of something is particularly good, bad, or different at the moment.

<i>La sopa está rica.</i>	The soup is (especially) good.
<i>¡Estás muy alto!</i>	You are very tall! (Much taller than last time!)
<i>¡María está muy bonita hoy!</i>	María is (especially) pretty today.

3. express the location or position of an object (Where it is **standing**, even if it’s **stationary**.)

<i>El libro está en la mesa.</i>	The book is on the table.
<i>¿Dónde están los niños?</i>	Where are the children?
<i>San Francisco está en California.</i>	San Francisco is in California.

*Ser* (to be) expresses characteristics. If the speaker wishes to describe a basic quality or characteristics of the subject’s existence, *ser* is used. All of these reflect reality as the speaker sees it, with no emphasis on change.

*Ser* is used to express:

1. Basic characteristics in a description. (The speaker does not wish to emphasize a change)

<i>La sopa es rica.</i>	Soup (in general) is good.
<i>Eres muy alto.</i>	You are very tall. (No change expressed)
<i>El señor Salas es rico.</i>	Mr. Salas is rich.
<i>Mi hermana es joven.</i>	My sister is young.

2. origin or possession. (Just another general characteristic of something.)

<i>Las gafas son de Carmen.</i>	The glasses are Carmen’s.
<i>Ricardo es de Cuba.</i>	Richard is from Cuba.
<i>José es panameño.</i>	José is Panamanian

3. location of events. (Events exist in a location, then cease to exist.)

<i>La fiesta es en mi casa.</i>	The party is in my house.
<i>El partido de fútbol es en Chicago.</i>	The soccer game is in Chicago.

4. times and dates. (They change, but not as the result of any action.)

<i>Es la una.</i>	It is one o’clock.
<i>Es el tres de marzo.</i>	It is March 3.

5. the link between a subject and a descriptive noun or pronoun. (*Ser* is an equal sign.)

<i>Alonso es mi amigo.</i>	Alonso is my friend.
<i>¿Quién es la abogada?</i>	Who is the lawyer?

## Going deeper: What's so hard about *ser* and *estar*?

The most important words in determining which to use are “state or characteristic?” Asking this question is the quickest and most reliable way to determine which to use. But it does get a bit more complicated. Here are the mistakes that people make with more complex uses:

### 1. Location of an event/Location of a person or object

Location of a **physical object** is always indicated by *estar*. Even if it's a *stationary* object. It tells where something is *standing*.

*La catedral está en Sevilla.*

*Ciudad Juárez está en México.*

Location of an **event** is always indicated by *ser*. *Ser* talks about the existence of something. An event *exists* in a location, then stops existing.

*La reunión es en Milwaukee.*

*El baile es en el gimnasio.*

### 2. Death and marriage

Death and marriage seem like characteristics and are often used with *ser*, but can be considered **states** resulting from an event: Think marital **status**, or health **status**.

*Mi tía está casada.*

*Mi abuelo está muerto.*

Singleness, however, is considered a characteristic—no change in state has occurred.

*Mi tío es soltero.*

### 3. General vs. particular

Characteristics deal with things in general. For instance, *churros* (in general) are good—clearly a characteristic. But to compliment *particular* *churros*, you say the **state** of the *churros* you're eating is good. Their **state** is due to the excellent preparation of ingredients, the good timing of the cook, and the fact that they are still fresh and warm, and have just the right amount of cinnamon.

*Los churros son ricos.* (In general)

*¡Los churros están ricos!* (Particular *churros*)

A friend may or may not be handsome *in general*. But at a *particular moment*, such as prom night, he may look *particularly* good. If you're saying he's handsome *in general*, you'd say:

*“Carlos, ¡eres muy guapo!”, or “¡Qué guapo eres!”*

But to say he looks *particularly* handsome, you'd say:

*“Carlos, ¡estás muy guapo!”, or “¡Qué guapo estás!”*

### 4. To emphasize a change.

This has nothing to do with whether something *can* change. It has to do with whether or not the speaker wishes to *express* change. You can say:

*La casa es azul.*

The house is blue. The speaker indicates that a general characteristic of the house is blueness.

But if you come home from vacation and your house has been painted blue, you'd say:

*¡La casa está azul!*

because you're not merely giving a characteristic of the house—you're commenting on the change in the color.

### A example based on a personal experience...

You're walking downtown with a hispanic friend, who recognizes a little girl (about three feet tall) she used to babysit and shouts “*Ana, ¡qué grande estás!*” Is the girl big? No, *es pequeña*—being small is a characteristic of the girl. The friend is indicating that the girl has grown a lot since the last time she'd seen her, and emphasizes the change by using *estar*.

## Ser/Estar Practice

Choose between *ser* and *estar* in each blank of the following paragraphs. Remember: in each sentence focus on the whether characteristic or state is emphasized.

This is a sample worksheet; E-mail me at [todd@mentalnotemusic.com](mailto:todd@mentalnotemusic.com) for an editable copy of all worksheets, answer keys, and additional exercises written for lower levels.

### A letter to parents from a teacher:

Estimados Sres. Walker,

Yo \_\_\_\_\_ la profesora de historia de su hijo, Brian. Yo \_\_\_\_\_ confundida sobre su comportamiento de reciente. Brian \_\_\_\_\_ muy inteligente, y sus notas normalmente \_\_\_\_\_ altas. También \_\_\_\_\_ cooperativo y participa muy bien. Desde la semana pasada, Brian \_\_\_\_\_ muy callado. No quiere participar, y la calidad de su trabajo \_\_\_\_\_ mucho peor. Sus amigos \_\_\_\_\_ preocupados también, porque parece que no quiere hablar con ellos.

Creo que el problema \_\_\_\_\_ que tiene una nueva novia. Ella \_\_\_\_\_ una alumna problemática. \_\_\_\_\_ muy bonita, y quiere \_\_\_\_\_ modelo. Su familia \_\_\_\_\_ rica también, y por estas razones ella cree que no \_\_\_\_\_ necesario estudiar. Brian \_\_\_\_\_ completamente enamorado de ella, aunque ella lo trata muy mal. Cuando hay tiempo en la clase para hacer la tarea, Brian siempre \_\_\_\_\_ al lado de ella, haciendo la tarea de geometría por ella—para su próxima clase—mientras ella se maquilla y habla con sus amigas. Yo \_\_\_\_\_ triste que Brian se haya cambiado tanto. Yo sé que el amor \_\_\_\_\_ una situación en que los padres tienen muy poco control, pero por lo menos ahora Uds. \_\_\_\_\_ informados.

¡Buena suerte!

Sra. Imelda Castro

### Directions from a brochure about an annual conference, including information about the city, which has a lot of road construction.

Como todos saben, el congreso \_\_\_\_\_ en El Centro de Congresos de Springfield. Springfield \_\_\_\_\_ un sitio excelente para este Congreso, porque \_\_\_\_\_ entre la playa y las montañas. También \_\_\_\_\_ una ciudad con gente muy amable, y no \_\_\_\_\_ muy cara. Pero este año hay varios inconvenientes. Todas las carreteras y los caminos al norte del Centro de Congresos \_\_\_\_\_ en obra y toda esta parte de la ciudad \_\_\_\_\_ muy desordenada. \_\_\_\_\_ necesario seguir la calle Simpson hasta el supermercado que \_\_\_\_\_ a la derecha, y doblar a la izquierda. Siga la calle Flanders 2 km, y El Centro de Congresos \_\_\_\_\_ a la derecha.

### Manolo and Cristina are going to a concert tonight...

Manolo: ¡Qué guapa \_\_\_\_\_ en ese vestido! Casi tengo arreglado el cortacesped. ¡\_\_\_\_\_ casi como nuevo!

Cristina: ¿(Tú) \_\_\_\_\_ trabajando todavía? ¿Por qué no \_\_\_\_\_ listo?

Manolo: ¿Por qué \_\_\_\_\_ tan nerviosa? Todavía hay tiempo. El concierto \_\_\_\_\_ a las ocho, y ahora \_\_\_\_\_ las seis y media.

Cristina: ¿No recuerdas donde \_\_\_\_\_ el concierto?

Manolo: \_\_\_\_\_ aquí en Shelbyville, ¿no?

Cristina: No, tonto, \_\_\_\_\_ en Springfield. Y todo el centro \_\_\_\_\_ en obra—el tráfico va a \_\_\_\_\_ horrible antes del concierto.

Manolo: ¡Ay, el tráfico! ¡Tenemos que irnos muy pronto!

Cristina: Sí, ¿por qué \_\_\_\_\_ (tú) sentado todavía? (Tú) \_\_\_\_\_ muy sucio. ¡Tienes que ducharte! (Tú); \_\_\_\_\_ tan feo!

Manolo: Bueno, Cristina, no sé si quiero ir contigo—¡(Tú) \_\_\_\_\_ de muy mal humor!



## Por/Para

Learning *por* and *para* can be kind of slow  
But “goal”, “exchange”, or “the way”,  
is most of what you need to know  
*Para* is used when goal is what you’re trying to say  
Not only for “for”, use *por* to show exchange or the way

A destination is a physical goal  
A mental goal’s a deadline  
The intended purpose of an act, or object  
Reflect a goal someone had in mind

But sometimes with *para*, there isn’t a goal  
Like “I work for my dad”  
“For a dad, he doesn’t pay me too much”  
“I’m about to quit, and he’s glad”

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But “goal”, “exchange, or the way”,  
is most of what you need to know  
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Not only for “for”, use *por* to show exchange or the way

The word *por* is used to show exchange  
Thanks, money, time, for something else  
Gallons for miles (per), action for a noun  
Along the way, by, through, or down

The way something’s done, or who it’s done by  
Duration, because of, on behalf (of)  
*Estar* with *por* is “in favor of”  
Don’t say “*porque de*”, unless you want a laugh

## Por and Para

Both *por* and *para* are usually translated as “for” in English. Deciding which to use is usually very simple if you use the following key words:

*Para* usually indicates some sort of **goal**

*Por* usually indicates **exchange** or **the way**.

### HERE ARE THE DETAILS FOR PARA:

*Para* usually indicates a **goal**.

1. Destination or direction:

*Salimos mañana para Guatemala.*

We are leaving tomorrow for Guatemala. (the **goal** is Guatemala)

2. Purpose...

...of an object:

*Esta máquina es para lavar platos.*

This machine is for washing dishes. (the **goal** of the machine is to wash dishes)

...of an act:

*Yo leo el periódico para saber las noticias.*

I read the newspaper (in order) to know the news. (shows the **goal** of the action)

3. Deadline (shows a **goal** date or time, usually translated “by”)

*Tengo que escribir la carta para el lunes.*

I have to write the letter by Monday.

### THE FOLLOWING USES OF PARA DO NOT FIT INTO THE CONCEPT OF “GOAL” AND NEED TO BE MEMORIZED USING THE EXAMPLES IN THE SONG.

Use *para* to express:

1. “employed by” (working for)

*Estas señoras trabajan para el gobierno.*

These women work for the government.

2. “in spite of being...” (usually translated “for”)

*Para un gringo, Wayne baila muy bien.*

For a “gringo”, Wayne dances very well.

3. “to be ready...” Use a form of *estar* + *para* + infinitive.

*Estoy para volver a casa.*

I’m ready (about) to return home.

### HERE ARE THE DETAILS FOR POR:

*Por* usually expresses “**exchange**”, or “**the way**” something is going or being done.

#### EXCHANGE:

1. Payment: *Yo voy a pagar diez dólares por las entradas.*

I am going to pay ten dollars **for** the tickets. (Payment is an **exchange** of one thing for another)

Duration of time: *Alberto va a estudiar por tres horas.*

Alberto is going to study **for** three hours. (Time is given up in **exchange** for the activity)

2. Per: *Rafael gana cuarenta dólares por hora.*

Rafael earns \$40.00 **per** hour.

(Miles per gallon is how many miles you get in **exchange for** the gas used. Miles per hour is

how many miles you get in **exchange** for the time driven. Dollars per hour is the amount of money given in **exchange** for the time worked.)

3. Action for a noun: *Voy **por** más sopa.* I'm going **for** more soup.  
The action is performed in **exchange** for the thing desired: returning home **for** keys, fighting **for** a cause, going **for** help, calling **for** pizza, etc.
4. In place of (for the sake of): *Quiero llevar la maleta **por** mi abuela.*  
I want to carry the suitcase for my grandmother  
(Indicates an **exchange** of people in a role or responsibility.)

#### **THE “WAY” SOMETHING GETS DONE...**

1. *La calle es patrullada **por** la policía.*  
The street is patrolled **by** the police.
2. *Me gusta hablar **por** teléfono con mi hermano.*  
I like to talk **by** telephone with...
3. *Persistencia de la memoria, **por** Salvador Dalí, es mi pintura favorita.*  
Persistence of Memory, **by** Salvador Dalí, is my favorite painting. (*authorship—the book, painting, etc. is done by...*)
4. *John Madden siempre viaja **por** autobús.*  
Usually translated “by” (the “way” he travels)

#### **...OR THE “WAY” IT GOES**

1. (**by** highway, **through** the window, **down** the street, **along** the path, **over** there)  
*No me gusta pasar **por** el cementerio.*
2. I don't like to pass **through** the cemetery.  
*Un pájaro acaba de volar **por** la ventana.*
3. A bird just flew **through** the window.
4. *El cartero siempre maneja muy rápidamente **por** esta calle.*  
The mailman always drives very fast **down** this street.

#### **THESE TWO DO NOT FIT WITH “EXCHANGE” OR “THE WAY”:**

1. Because of: *No oímos el cantante **por** los truenos.* We don't hear the singer **because of** the thunder.  
(*Porque de* doesn't exist!)
2. In favor of: Use *estar + por + infinitive* to express “in favor of” (also translated “for”)  
*Estoy **por** comer en un restaurante cerca de aquí.* I'm in favor of (for) eating in a restaurant near here.

## Por/Para Exercises

### Two friends are planning a party. Fill in each blank with por or para.

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Alejandra: Rosana, ¿tienes los vasos \_\_\_\_\_ los refrescos?  
Rosana: Sí, yo tengo 15, y Francisco acaba de ir \_\_\_\_\_ 10 más. ¿Hay tazas \_\_\_\_\_ el café?  
Alejandra: Sí, están \_\_\_\_\_ allí. ¿Cuánto tenemos que pagar \_\_\_\_\_ la pizza?  
Rosana: Cincuenta dólares—diez dólares \_\_\_\_\_ pizza. Y veinte dólares más \_\_\_\_\_ los bocadillos. Van a llegar \_\_\_\_\_ las siete. ¿Tiene Francisco el estéreo?  
Alejandra: Sí, va a pasar \_\_\_\_\_ su casa \_\_\_\_\_ agarrarlo. Necesitamos música \_\_\_\_\_ bailar. Desgraciadamente tenemos que apagar la música \_\_\_\_\_ las once.  
Rosana: ¿Por qué?  
Alejandra: \_\_\_\_\_ los vecinos. Son simpáticos, pero se enfadan cuando no pueden dormir \_\_\_\_\_ nuestra música. Tengo que llamar a Cintia \_\_\_\_\_ decirle que quiero oír “La Vida Loca” \_\_\_\_\_ Ricky Martin. Ella tiene el CD.  
Rosana: ¿Cuándo sale Anita \_\_\_\_\_ Boston?  
Alejandra: El miércoles. Hicimos la fiesta hoy porque Anita necesita los días siguientes \_\_\_\_\_ empacar. Tiene que estar \_\_\_\_\_ salir \_\_\_\_\_ el martes, porque tiene que trabajar hasta las tres de la tarde el miércoles.  
Rosana: ¿Se muda \_\_\_\_\_ su trabajo nuevo?  
Alejandra: Sí, y también \_\_\_\_\_ sus padres, que viven en Boston. \_\_\_\_\_ una joven, ha vivido en muchas ciudades, y sus padres la extrañan.  
Rosana: Como tiene muchísimo que hacer, quiero hacer algo \_\_\_\_\_ ella.  
Alejandra: Bueno, planificar una fiesta es algo, ¿no?

### Antonio has had a change of plans after school, and left a note for his mother:

Mamá,

Tengo que trabajar esta noche—voy a trabajar \_\_\_\_\_ un amigo que está enfermo. No sé hasta que hora tengo que trabajar, pero voy a volver \_\_\_\_\_ las diez.  
No me gusta trabajar después de clases \_\_\_\_\_ seis horas, pero me necesitan. Además yo necesito dinero \_\_\_\_\_ comprar un regalo \_\_\_\_\_ mi novia porque el sábado es su cumpleaños. Sí necesitas hablarme, ¡puedes llamar \_\_\_\_\_ una pizza, y te la puedo entregar yo! Bueno, estoy \_\_\_\_\_ irme.

Hasta luego, Antonio

## Preterite Forms

-ar preterite is -é, -aste, -ó, -amos, -aron

-er/lir forms are -í, iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron

-ar preterite is -é, -aste, -ó, -amos, -aron

-er/lir forms are -í, iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron

Many verbs that end in *-uir* (not *guir*) change the “i” of the endings third singular and plural to “y”

The same is true of many stems with a vowel on the end like *leer, oír, creer, caer, poseer*

-ar preterite is -é, -aste, -ó, -amos, -aron

-er/lir forms are -í, iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron

-ar preterite is -é, -aste, -ó, -amos, -aron

-er/lir forms are -í, iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron

The only verbs that have a change in the stem

Are *-ir* verbs, you must remember them

Third person stems will have the vowel replaced

By *u* or *i*, just one letter in its space

-ar preterite is -é, -aste, -ó, -amos, -aron

-er/lir forms are -í, iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron

-ar preterite is -é, -aste, -ó, -amos, -aron

-er/lir forms are -í, iste, -ió, -imos, -ieron

Because *i*'s and *e*'s soften *g*'s and *c*'s

Sometimes a spelling change is what you need

Don't let an ending change the way you say

The last letter of the stem—make a consonant change

## Irregular Preterites

Irregular preterites  
have got their own set of stems  
And their own set of endings  
that don't have accent marks on them

*cup, sup, hub*  
*are caber, saber, haber*  
*quis, vin, hic,*  
*are querer, venir, hacer*

*-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -isteis, -ieron*  
*-e, -iste, -o, -imos -isteis, -ieron*

Irregular preterites  
have got their own set of stems  
And their own set of endings  
that don't have accent marks on them

*anduv, tuv, estuv,*  
*andar, tener, estar*  
*traj, dij, traduj,*  
*traer, decir, traducir*

*-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -isteis, -ieron*  
*-e, -iste, -o, -imos, -isteis, -ieron*

Finally now remember for *poder* the stem is *pod*  
They both have a "d",  
The stem rhymes with food

The toughest stem of all, although it's no excuse,  
The stem for *poner*  
Isn't *pon*, it's *pus*

*e, iste, o, imos, isteis, ieron...*

## Preterite/Imperfect

Use the preterite to speak of past events  
As a whole or the beginning or the end  
Imperfect sets the scene for the story being told  
What was going on while preterite events unfolded

Descriptions or repeated actions in the past  
Unless the number of times it happened is expressed  
And states of mind in the background are imperfect  
Non-action verbs are not events unless made manifest

Let me tell you what I mean by that  
A state of mind can be an event  
When expressed with outward evidence  
Or speaking of a specific instance

These non-action verbs are made preterite  
To focus on completion, beginning, or end  
The “special meaning” preterites are explained by this  
Or compressing the verb into a single moment

## Preterite vs. Imperfect Song Explanation

Preterite is used to focus on the totality, beginning, or end, of a past action or state. The imperfect is used for ongoing or repeated action or state in the past (if the number of times the action occurred is expressed, use the preterite).

Once you understand it, this brief definition is all you need to know. Learn how to decide between preterite and imperfect by reading through the following line-by-line explanation of the song.

*“Use the preterite to speak of past events as a whole or the beginning or the end...”*

Preterite is the past tense that you use to say things like “We **went** to the game yesterday,” or “I **saw** that movie with my friends,” or “It **rained** and his suit **became** wrinkled.” These are spoken of as individual actions—the *events* in a sentence. You’re *not* speaking of anything going on *while* these things are happening. You’re just saying that they happened, and that they’re over.

*Imperfect sets the scene for the story being told—what was going on while preterite events unfolded... descriptions...*

Imperfect is usually used to speak of things that are *not* the main events in a sentence or story. It is used in a sentence that sets the scene for a story, like “While **we were going** to the game...”, or “I **was watching** that movie with my friends when...” Descriptions are an excellent example of “scene setting”: “It **was raining** when...”, or “He **was** very tall, and his suit **was** wrinkled...”

*...or repeated actions in the past, unless the number of times it happened is expressed...*

Imperfect is also used for repeated actions, like “I **went** to that barber shop every month when I was a kid...”, or “they **washed** their car every Wednesday.” The only exception to this is when the number of times is expressed, like “I **went** to that barber shop five times...”, or “they **washed** their car seven times...”

*...and states of mind in the background are imperfect. Non-action verbs are not events...*

These lines seem to be unnecessary—*of course* states of mind in the background are imperfect; *every* verb in the background is imperfect. For example: “They **felt** resentful because they **believed** that they were underpaid”, or “they **knew** lots of left-handed dentists.” These mental actions are not events that are *occurring*, but states of mind that are “ongoing” in someone’s head throughout the story. Because of this, mental activity is *normally* imperfect.

*...unless made manifest.*

But sometimes the non-action verb is an event. (Manifest means that the non-action verb becomes concrete or visible.)

*Let me tell you what I mean by that—a state of mind can be an event, when expressed with outward evidence  
Or speaking of a specific instance*

Wanting is a state of mind that is usually not an event, and is therefore usually imperfect. But wanting can be preterite when demonstrated by action: *Su amigo no quiso entrar*. This is stronger than “His



friend didn't want to enter." When *querer* is preterite, it shows that the not wanting is not simply a state of mind, but a specific, visible instance. The best translation in this case is "refused". What would be the best translation for *Su amigo quiso entrar*? What does outward, visible wanting look like? The best translation for *quiso* is usually "tried".

*These non-action verbs are made preterite  
To focus on completion...beginning (see below) ...or end...*

To emphasize that the state of mind is over: When I was young, I thought (*pensé*) that... I loved her (*yo la quise*), but I don't have feelings for her anymore.

*...beginning...*

Or to speak about the beginning of the mental activity in the past, like knowing, being able to, having. Let's return to an earlier example of imperfect: "They knew (*conocían*) lots of left-handed dentists". Knowing people is usually an ongoing state of mind—not an event. Preterite deals with the beginning of the state in the past. What is the beginning of knowing a person? Meeting the person. If we put *conocer* in the preterite, we bring knowing out of the background, and make it manifest by talking about the beginning of the knowing—"They met (*conocieron*) many left-handed dentists." Other verbs have similar meaning changes when used in the preterite. What is the beginning of having? Receiving. What is the beginning of knowing a fact? Learning, or finding out. The beginning of being able to do something? Succeeding in doing it.

*The "special meaning" preterites are explained by this (see chart below)*

*Or compressing the verb into a single moment"*

This is another way of looking at "speaking of a specific instance". The verb *hay* is good example. *Hay* means "there is". There is no action—you're just saying that something already exists. To use it in the past, decide whether you're talking about something's ongoing existence in the past, like: "There was (*había*) a big yellow house next to the playground". But when you use it in the preterite, you compress that state of being into an occurrence or event, like: "There was (*hubo*) a flood in Honduras..."

### Special Meanings

Many teachers find it helpful to put some of these words in a list of verbs that, since they are usually imperfect, are said to have "special meanings" when used in the preterite. This list may be helpful, but it can lead English speakers to become too inflexible in their understanding of these words. If one understands the concept of preterite tense, the logic of the language (see above, and parentheses) eliminates the need for rote memorization of the words in this chart.

	<b>Imperfect</b>	<b>Preterite</b>
Querer	wanted	tried (manifestation of wanting)
No querer	didn't want	refused (manifestation of not wanting)
Podér	was able	succeeded in (beginning of being able)
No poder	was not able	failed in (manifestation of not being able)
Saber	knew (factual information)	found out, learned (beginning of knowing)
Conocer	knew (personally acquainted)	met (beginning of knowing)
Tener	had	received, got (beginning of having)
Haber	there was	there was (an incident)

**Cuando supe lo de O.J.****Write the preterite or imperfect form of each verb above the verbs in parentheses.**

Mi esposa y yo (acampar) \_\_\_\_\_ en Madison, Wisconsin. El sol (brillar) \_\_\_\_\_ y (hacer) \_\_\_\_\_ mucho calor. (Ser) \_\_\_\_\_ las dos de la tarde. Nosotros (ir) \_\_\_\_\_ a nadar, pero el agua (estar) \_\_\_\_\_ muy caliente y muy verde. No (querer) \_\_\_\_\_ nadar. Dimos una caminata en el bosque, pero (haber) \_\_\_\_\_ tantas moscas que (tener) \_\_\_\_\_ que correr rápidamente fuera del bosque para escaparlas. Nosotros (tener) \_\_\_\_\_ más calor y (sudar=to sweat) \_\_\_\_\_ mucho.. Así que (huir=to flee) \_\_\_\_\_ de la naturaleza para buscar aire acondicionado. (Ir) \_\_\_\_\_ a un restaurante—el restaurante más frío de la ciudad. El restaurante (estar) \_\_\_\_\_ en un sótano y (tener) \_\_\_\_\_ el aire acondicionado. Nosotros no (saber) \_\_\_\_\_ si el restaurante (tener) \_\_\_\_\_ buena comida o no, pero no nos (importar) \_\_\_\_\_. Solamente (querer) \_\_\_\_\_ refrescarnos. (Ir) \_\_\_\_\_ a los servicios para lavarnos las caras, y (volver) \_\_\_\_\_ a nuestros asientos. (Pedir) \_\_\_\_\_ bocadillos y bebidas. Yo (beber) \_\_\_\_\_ mi segundo vaso de agua y (esperar) \_\_\_\_\_ mi bocadillo cuando (oír) \_\_\_\_\_ noticias muy extrañas en la televisión. Me (acercarse=to go near) \_\_\_\_\_ al televisor para oír mejor. El reportero (decir) \_\_\_\_\_ algo sobre O.J. Simpson y su antigua (ex) \_\_\_\_\_ esposa, y (haber) \_\_\_\_\_ un vídeo de un Ford Bronco blanco huyendo de un ejército de policías. Yo le (preguntar) \_\_\_\_\_ al camarero que era lo que pasaba. El camarero me (decir) \_\_\_\_\_ que la policía (creer) \_\_\_\_\_ que O.J. Simpson (matar) \_\_\_\_\_ a su antigua esposa y a su amigo. Él (decir) \_\_\_\_\_ “anoche Simpson y un amigo (conducir) \_\_\_\_\_ en el Bronco por tres horas mientras un público en la carretera (gritar) \_\_\_\_\_ y el público en casa (mirar) \_\_\_\_\_ asombrado (astonished).” Yo (volver) \_\_\_\_\_ a la mesa y se lo (decir) \_\_\_\_\_ todo a mi esposa. Nosotros no (creer) \_\_\_\_\_ lo que (oír).

Cuando yo (ser) \_\_\_\_\_ niño O.J. Simpson (ser) \_\_\_\_\_ un héroe. Él (jugar) \_\_\_\_\_ al fútbol todos los domingos. Después de eso, yo siempre lo (ver) \_\_\_\_\_ en anuncios publicitarios para Boys' Clubs de América. En esos días O.J. no (hablar) \_\_\_\_\_ bien. Tenía un ceceo (lisp) horroroso. En otros anuncios (correr) \_\_\_\_\_ por aeropuertos. Yo (disfrutar=to enjoy) \_\_\_\_\_ cuando (hacer) \_\_\_\_\_ el papel de “Nordberg,” en las películas *Naked Gun*. Y mi padre y yo (ver) \_\_\_\_\_ a Simpson hacer entrevistas con jugadores los lunes en *Monday Night Football*.

## Comparatives

El fútbol es bueno, pero el béisbol es mejor  
*Soccer is good, but baseball is better*  
lo aprendí de mi primo mayor  
*I learned it from my older cousin*  
Dicen que soy el mejor jugador de mi equipo  
*They tell me that I'm the best player*  
mejor que el mismo entrenador  
*better than the coach himself*

¿Eres tú tan bueno como yo? ¡No!  
¿Es él tan bueno como yo? ¡No!  
¿Eres tú tan bueno como yo? ¡No!  
No se jacta nadie como yo *Nobody brags like I do*

Nadie es tan guapo como yo  
*Nobody is as handsome as I*  
Nadie tiene tantas novias como yo  
*Nobody has as many girlfriends as I*  
No hay ningún chico tan suave como yo  
*There is no guy as smooth as I*  
Nadie rima tan suavemente como yo  
*Nobody rhymes as smoothly as I*

El peor, no, no, no, no, ¡soy el mejor!  
*The worst...I'm the best!*  
El menor no, no, no, no, soy el mayor  
*The least...I'm the greatest!*  
Nadie mas popular que yo, hago furor  
*Nobody more popular than I, I cause a sensation!*  
¡Cuidado, que no te queme mi calor!  
*Careful, so my heat won't burn you!*

*In my first few years of teaching, I became dissatisfied with the way I approached oral skills. At one point I realized that what usually passes for oral work is actually artificially-assembled written work which is memorized, then quickly forgotten. I saw no evidence that the oral assignments I gave increased students' ability to speak, listen, and react as one needs to in the target language in the real world.*

*I settled upon a scenario-based activity to give authentic oral practice. I have included two such scenarios in this booklet: One dealing with comparatives, and the other dealing with preterites.*

## Oral Presentations

1. Students are given a situation in which they are capable of conversing with their existing vocabulary. A very limited amount of new vocabulary can be added as students request, but the emphasis is on using the vocabulary they have already acquired, and upon acquiring *reaction* skills.

2. Students practice with several different partners and roles within each practice session. On the day the presentation is graded, their role and their partner are chosen randomly. This makes it impossible to script the presentation, and makes the culminating activity a completely authentic conversation.

3. The presentations are graded according to "naturalness". Some aspects of an actual "natural" conversation are: appropriate tone of voice, enthusiasm, correct grammar and vocabulary, lack of American accent, and appropriate reactions to what the partner says. I try to keep artificial criteria, like "use three conjugated verbs" to a minimum. Your challenge is to create a situation in which three conjugated verbs will be used naturally in the scenario. It is also artificial to assign a length to the presentation. If a student asks "how long does this need to be", you should be able to answer with a question; for example: "how long does it take to greet a friend on the street and ask him how to get to his house?"

## Evaluation

My grading system is fairly simple. First, I emphasize the above criteria for a "natural" conversation. I then tell students some specifics that they must do to receive a score of 90: i.e., use appropriate ("natural") formal and informal forms, make no ("unnatural") agreement errors, and make no ("unnatural") vowel pronunciation errors, etc. Grades above a 90 are given according to the degree to which the naturalness of their speech and reactions exceeds my minimal expectations. Stiff, but accurate, presentations receive a low "A", and a higher degree of fluency is rewarded with a higher "A".

Most students, because we have practiced the material so much (10-25 minutes a day, gradually increasing complexity, over a period of about three weeks), receive a score between 85 and 94.

Students whose presentation is very poor receive a grade between 70 and 80. I do not give lower grades because I feel that these students should be rewarded for their effort in practicing during class, since there is little that they can do to prepare for this conversation outside of class. Very few students fail to participate constructively, but those who do may merit a failing grade.

In my classes, there is one presentation per six-week grading period, and it is worth 15% of the students' grade. The graded conversation is done during a test; I sit in the doorway, and call students up, have them present in the hallway, and grade the conversation and watch for cheaters on the test simultaneously. It's a pain, but it works!

## Logistics

A horseshoe seating chart can facilitate practice, because it creates a large work space in the center of the classroom. I usually place students (sitting or standing) in four lines. Students in line A pair up with the students in line B, and C pairs up with D. When I want the students to have a new partner, I have the front students of lines B and C go to the back of the line, and the remaining students in those lines move forward one space. Within ten seconds, everyone in the room has a new partner and can begin a new conversation.

The frequent re-pairing of students has the following advantages:

1. The idea is reinforced that you can have the same type of conversation with many different people, but the conversation is never exactly the same.
2. Students have to respond flexibly within a comfortable structure with a limited vocabulary. The most important words are reinforced by repetition, but (in all but the most basic levels) the conversation itself does not become repetitive.
3. Students learn from each other. Teachers must be aware of bad habits that may develop, and nip them in the bud. Make students aware of mistakes to avoid, then make sure that the stronger students correct the weaker students when mistakes are made.
4. These conversations allow students to meet everyone in the classroom, and exchange names, interests, opinions, hobbies. Entire friendships can develop in the target language! If you can occasionally find native speakers to place in a group, students will see that they can actually use these conversations in real life!

## In a Nutshell

- There is no script, just as in real conversations, but a culturally agreed upon format.
- Partners, roles, are not known in advance. Not knowing their roles in advance makes them practice more speech without increasing the length of the conversation (less work for you!)
- Roles are roughly equal in difficulty and length
- Grades are based on a set of minimum expectations to get them an A-. Higher As are awarded for increased fluency, although there is no penalty for halting, less fluent speech.

Classroom management is easy during practice, since they're doing all the work, and you're observing. You must condition your students, however, to stop talking, face you, and listen (I give them three seconds, which I explain to them is about 2.5 seconds longer than it takes to stop talking) when you need to get the attention of the class to correct an error you hear being propagated.

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### **Conversation: A new student asks about living in your town (comparatives)**

Just before you are to begin your conversation, you will be assigned a partner and a role. One of you will be a new student who has questions, and the other is answering questions about the school and community. Compare classes (most fun, hardest, etc.), teachers (most interesting, most boring, smartest, gives the most homework, etc.), sports, activities, restaurants, cafeteria meals, students (funniest, best looking, smartest, etc.)

The new student asks in terms of superlatives, for instance: Who is the funniest biology teacher? The veteran student answers in terms of comparatives, like: Mr. Anderson is funnier than Ms. Wheatley, but he gives more homework...etc.

Be prepared to to play either role.

**Teacher: Refer to the previous page for an explanation of how to prepare for, use, and grade this activity.**