

English: to be ('ser' or 'estar'?)

The verb "to be" can have two meanings: "ser" or "estar". Therefore, to say that "eu sou professor", we say "I am a teacher" (permanent context), and to say that "eu estou na escola", we say "I am at school" (temporary context), both using the same verb "to be".

- I am (*eu sou/estou*)
- you are (*você é /está*)
- he is (*ele é/está*)
- she is (*ela é/está*)
- it is (*ele/ela é/está*)
- we are (*nós somos/estamos*)
- you are (*vocês são/estão*)
- they are (*eles/elas são/estão*)

Usually, it is clear whether the verb represents a permanent or a temporary context:

- You are a student. (*ser*)
- He is my neighbour. (*ser*)
- I am cold. (*estar*)
- He is angry. (*estar*)

But how does the English language deal with ideas like these?

- "Como ele está?" vs "Como ele é?"
- "Ele está bravo." vs "Ele é bravo."
- A: "Eu estou bonita?" B: Você está porque você é!

Well, since the English language doesn't have separate verbs for temporary and permanent ideas, we need to use different structures or extra words:

- "Como ele está?" = "How is he?" (temporary)
- "Como ele é?" = "What is he like?" (permanent)
- "Ele está bravo." = "It is angry." (dog) (temporary)
- "Ele é bravo." = "It is an angry dog." (permanent)

To ask about somebody's health or current state, we use "How is ____ ?" or "How are ____ ?". These questions demand a short reply:

- **How are** you? I'm fine, thanks.
- **How is** your mother? She's better, thanks.
- **How is** your day? It's busy.
- **How are** your kids? They are fine, thanks.

We can add words or expressions to indicate a temporary idea (ex. now, today, at the moment, recently, these days, etc.).

- A: How are you **today**? B: I'm fine.
- A: How is your mother **recently**? B: She's great.
- A: How is your job **these days**? B: Stressful.

However, to ask about personality, jobs, places or the weather, we use "What is ____ like?". These questions demand a description as a reply:

- A: **What is** your wife **like**? B: She is intelligent but shy.
- A: **What is** New York **like**? B: It is vibrant and glamorous.
- A: **What is** the weather **like**? B: It is cold and rainy.
- A: **What is** your job **like**? B: It is interesting and challenging.

It doesn't make sense to ask:

How is New York? / How is the weather? / How is your house?

We can reply "It's fine", but it is not very informative!

More examples:

Temporary

The dog **is** angry.

He **is** funny.

The lady **is** nice.

John **is** drunk.

London **is** cold.

How is the project?

Permanent

It **is an** angry dog.

He **is a** funny person.

She **is a** nice lady.

John **is a** drunk.

London **is a** cold city.

What is the project **like**?

Exercise 1. Translate the following to Portuguese, using "ser" or "estar":

1. It's cold today. _____
2. He's a bad boy. _____
3. What is the weather like in São Paulo today? _____
4. We are retired. _____
5. The dog is hungry. _____
6. The girls are in their bedrooms. _____

Exercise 2. Translate the following to English:

1. Como está seu irmão?

 2. Como é seu irmão?

 3. Tenha cuidado! O cão é bravo.

 4. Eu gosto muito do seu pai. Ele é muito engraçado.

 5. Minha mãe está triste.

 6. O gerente está no escritório dele.

- 7a. Você está bonita. 7b. Você é bonita.

Funny video: <https://english.insl.com.br/files/videos/Ser-estar.mp4> (1 min)