

Reference 14.1: Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive Pronouns: The phrase “reflexive” means that the doer of the action (the subject) is simultaneously the object of the sentence, as well. Basically, these verbs are verbs that the subject must be doing something for itself. The word “itself” is actually a reflexive pronoun. Reflexive Verbs do not translate nicely from English to Spanish. Some verbs in Spanish are automatically reflexive even though they may seem strange to us.

For example, in English, we tend to have many verbal expressions that contain “up” and “down”. For example, “stand up”, “sit down”, “shut-up”, “lay down”. In Spanish, there are no verbal phrases that exist like this. Spanish speakers say “to rise oneself” instead of “stand up”; moreover, they would also say “to sit oneself in a chair” instead of saying, “to sit down in a chair”.

Whenever you look up a verb in a Spanish Verb book, you will notice that some of the verbs have the word “se” attached to them. This means that the verb is reflexive and the person doing this verb will be doing it for themselves.

Example: llamarse- to get called; to call oneself

- Yo me llamo Eric.
- Who is the subject? (Who is doing the calling?) “yo”
- Who is the object? (Who is being called?) “me”
 - In English, when the “doer” and “receiver” are the same, we add the word “self” to make the pronoun reflexive in English.
 - **Example:** I call myself Eric.

Reflexive Pronouns in Spanish:

	Singular	Plural
1st Person	ME	NOS
2nd Person	TE	OS
3rd Person	SE	SE

Note: The word “se” functions for anything that conjugates in third person; whether it is singular OR plural.

Note: Although some verbs do not make sense in the English language to be reflexive, if a verb is a reflexive verb in Spanish, it will have “se” attached to it in the infinitive form when standing alone. These verbs must always have a reflexive pronoun if there is a conjugation that takes place. On the next page is a list of commonly used Reflexive Verbs in the Spanish language.

Reference 14.1: Reflexive Verbs

Verb	Meaning	Literal Meaning	Type of Verb
1. acostarse	to lie down	to lie oneself	O to UE Stem-Change
2. afeitarse	to shave	to shave oneself	regular AR verb
3. bañarse	to take a bath	to bathe oneself	regular AR verb
4. caerse	to fall down	to fall oneself	regular ER verb & irregular “yo”
5. callarse	to shut up	to shut oneself	regular AR verb
6. calmarse	to calm down	to calm oneself	regular AR verb
7. cepillarse	to brush	to brush oneself	regular AR verb
8. despedirse	to say goodbye	to unrequest oneself	E to I Stem-Change
9. despertarse	to wake up	to awaken oneself	E to IE Stem-Change
10. detenerse	to stop	to stop oneself	E to IE Stem-Change & irregular “yo”
11. dormirse	to fall asleep	to fall oneself to sleep	O to UE Stem-Change
12. ducharse	to take a shower	to shower oneself	regular AR verb
13. estirarse	to stretch	to stretch oneself	regular AR verb
14. lavarse	to wash	to wash oneself	regular AR verb
15. levantarse	to get up	to rise oneself	regular AR verb
16. llamarse	to call oneself	to call oneself	regular AR verb
17. peinarse	to comb	to comb oneself	regular AR verb
18. ponerse	to put on, in	to place on oneself	regular ER verb & irregular “yo”
19. quedarse	to stay	to remain oneself	regular AR verb
20. quitarse	to take off	to remove from oneself	regular AR verb
21. reírse	to make fun of	to laugh oneself	E to I Stem-Change with accent
22. secarse	to get dry	to dry oneself	regular AR verb
23. sentarse	to sit	to seat oneself	E to IE Stem-Change
24. sentirse	to feel	to feel oneself (health)	E to IE Stem-Change
25. vestirse	to get dressed	to dress oneself	E to I Stem-Change

Note: Reflexive Pronouns must match the subject of the conjugated verb in any sentence. When we use indirect, direct and reflexive pronouns, there are rules as to the order of the pronouns and where these must go.

RULE 1: OBJECT AND REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS: Go before a conjugated verb.

RULE 2: OBJECT AND REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS: Attach to an infinitive.

RULE 3: OBJECT AND REFLEXIVE PRNOUNS: Attach to a Gerund or Present Participle.

RULE 4: SUBJECTS ALWAYS GO FIRST (if you use one).

- I brush my teeth every day.
 - Me cepillo los dientes cada día.
- I am brushing my teeth now.
 - Me estoy cepillando los dientes ahora.
- I am going to brush my teeth in five minutes.
 - Me voy a cepillar los dientes en cinco minutos.

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Note: In all of the above examples, “yo” is the subject. The word “yo” is a first person singular subject pronoun. If a verb is reflexive, it must take a reflexive pronoun; moreover, it must match the subject. Since the subject is in first person singular form, the reflexive pronoun must be, as well. Let’s try another example.

Example: “Ella” is the subject; therefore, the reflexive pronoun “se” should match.

- She wakes up at six.
 - Ella se levanta a las seis.

Present Tense
Describing something that happens in general.
- She is waking up now.
 - Ella se está levantando ahora.

Present Progressive Tense
Describing what is happening now.
- She is going to wake up at seven.
 - Ella se va a levantar a las siete.

Immediate Future Tense
Describes what’s going to happen.

Example: “Tú” is the subject; therefore, the reflexive pronoun “te” should match.

- First, you put on your make-up.
 - Primero, te pones tu maquillaje.

Present Tense
Describing something that happens in general.
- You are putting on your make-up.
 - Te estás poniendo el maquillaje.

Present Progressive Tense
Describing what is happening now.
- Are you going to put on your make-up?
 - ¿Te vas a poner tu maquillaje?

Immediate Future Tense
Describes what’s going to happen.

Common Question: What is the difference between “dormir” and “dormirse”?

Answer: Sometimes verbs that are reflexive slightly change the meaning of a verb when it is not reflexive. The difference between “dormir” and “dormirse” is that “dormir” means “to sleep”. The verb “dormirse” means “to fall asleep”; moreover, it’s the specific moment you pass out in bed.

Example:

- Me duermo a las diez.
 - I fall asleep at ten o’clock.
- Duermo por siete horas.
 - I sleep for seven hours.

Alternate Expressions:

Like English, some Spanish verbs have Prepositions attached. For example, take “out”, take “in”; “bring up”, “bring out”. Here are a few that are verb common that are verbal expressions that contain Reflexive Verbs.

1. darse cuenta de- to realize
2. casarse con- to marry
3. quejarse de- to complain about