

Reflexive Verbs in Spanish (Los Verbos Reflexivos)

Reflexive verbs describe actions that a person performs on themselves. They use reflexive pronouns to show that the subject and the object are the same—meaning the person doing the action is also receiving it.

1) What Is a Reflexive Verb?

A **reflexive verb** is one that uses a **reflexive pronoun** (*me, te, se, nos, os, se*).

In English, we sometimes use “myself,” “yourself,” “themselves,” etc. But [Spanish uses reflexive verbs](#) more frequently — often for **daily routines, emotions, or changes in state**.

Example:

- *Yo me levanto temprano.* → I get up early.
(Literally: I lift **myself** up.)

Here, **me** shows that the action (*levantar*) reflects back on the same person performing it.

2) Reflexive Pronouns

Subject	Reflexive Pronoun	English
yo	me	myself
tú	te	yourself
él / ella / usted	se	himself / herself / yourself
nosotros / nosotras	nos	ourselves
vosotros / vosotras	os	yourselves (Spain)
ellos / ellas / ustedes	se	themselves / yourselves

These [pronouns always refer back to the subject](#) of the sentence.

3) Structure of Reflexive Verbs

The infinitive form includes the **-se** ending:

- **lavar** → **lavarse** → to wash oneself
- **vestir** → **vestirse** → to get dressed
- **bañar** → **bañarse** → to bathe oneself

When conjugated, the **-se** is removed and replaced by the appropriate pronoun **before the [conjugated verb](#)**.

Formula:

Subject + reflexive pronoun + [conjugated verb](#)

Subject	Example Verb: <i>lavarse</i> (to wash oneself)
yo	me lavo
tú	te lavas
él / ella / Ud.	se lava
nosotros	nos lavamos
vosotros	os laváis
ellos / ellas / Uds.	se lavan

Meaning:

Me lavo las manos. → I wash my hands.

4) Reflexive Verbs vs. Non-Reflexive Verbs

Some verbs can be used **both reflexively and non-reflexively**, changing the meaning slightly.

Non-Reflexive	Reflexive	Difference
<i>levantar</i> → to lift	<i>levantarse</i> → to get up	
<i>llamar</i> → to call	<i>llamarse</i> → to call oneself / be named	
<i>poner</i> → to put	<i>ponerse</i> → to put on (clothing)	
<i>dormir</i> → to sleep	<i>dormirse</i> → to fall asleep	
<i>ir</i> → to go	<i>irse</i> → to leave / go away	
<i>acordar</i> → to agree	<i>acordarse (de)</i> → to remember	
<i>quedar</i> → to stay / remain	<i>quedarse</i> → to stay (in a place)	
<i>probar</i> → to taste / try	<i>probarse</i> → to try on (clothing)	

Examples:

- *Me llamo Ana.* → My name is Ana.
- *Se pone una chaqueta.* → She puts on a jacket.
- *Nos dormimos a las once.* → We fall asleep at eleven.

5) Common Reflexive Verbs (Daily Routine)

Verb	English
acostarse (o → ue)	to go to bed
afeitarse	to shave
bañarse	to bathe
cepillarse (los dientes / el pelo)	to brush (one's teeth / hair)
despertarse (e → ie)	to wake up
ducharse	to shower
lavarse	to wash oneself
maquillarse	to put on makeup
peinarse	to comb one's hair
ponerse	to put on (clothes)
quitarse	to take off (clothes)
vestirse (e → i)	to get dressed
llamarse	to be called
relajarse	to relax
sentarse (e → ie)	to sit down
sentirse (e → ie)	to feel
quedarse	to stay
enojarse	to get angry
divertirse (e → ie)	to have fun

Example:

Cada mañana me despierto, me ducho y me visto. → Every morning I wake up, shower, and get dressed.

6) Reflexives with Body Parts and Clothing

When talking about **body parts or clothing**, [Spanish uses definite articles](#) (**el, la, los, las**) — not possessive adjectives (my, your, etc.).

Examples:

- *Me lavo **las manos**.* → I wash my hands.
- *Se cepilla **los dientes**.* → He brushes his teeth.
- *Nos ponemos **los abrigos**.* → We put on our coats.

7) Placement of Reflexive Pronouns

A. Before a Conjugated Verb

- *Me levanto a las siete.* → I get up at seven.
- *Nos duchamos después del ejercicio.* → We shower after exercising.

B. Attached to an Infinitive

When there are **two verbs**, the reflexive pronoun can attach to the end of the infinitive.

Both options are correct:

- *Me voy a dormir.*
- *Voy a dormirme.* → I'm going to go to sleep.

C. Attached to a Gerund (Progressive)

With the [present progressive](#), attach the pronoun to the gerund (or place it before *estar*).

Both options are correct:

- *Me estoy duchando.*
- *Estoy duchándome.* → I'm showering.

Remember: add an **accent** to maintain pronunciation when attaching a pronoun to

a gerund.

8) Reflexive Verbs in Other Tenses

You can use reflexive verbs in **any tense** — just move the pronoun accordingly.

Present

Me levanto temprano.

Preterite

Me levanté tarde.

Imperfect

Me levantaba a las seis cada día.

Future

Me voy a levantar temprano. / Voy a levantarme temprano.

Present Progressive

Estoy levantándome ahora. / Me estoy levantando ahora.

9) Reflexive Pronouns with Commands

A. Affirmative Commands

Attach the pronoun to the **end** of the verb (and add an accent).

- *¡Levántate!* → Get up!
- *¡Siéntate!* → Sit down!
- *¡Vístete!* → Get dressed!
- *¡Dúchate!* → Take a shower!

B. Negative Commands

Place the pronoun **before** the verb.

- *¡No te levantes!* → Don't get up!
- *¡No se preocupe!* → Don't worry (formal).

10) Reflexive vs. Reciprocal Actions

When **two or more people** do something **to each other**, the same [reflexive pronouns are used](#) — [but the meaning is reciprocal](#).

Reflexive

Me miro en el espejo. → I look at myself.

Se llama Carlos. → His name is Carlos.

Reciprocal

Nos miramos. → We look at each other.

Se llaman todos los días. → They call each other every day.

Context determines whether *se / nos / os* is reflexive (self) or reciprocal (each other).

11) Practice: Fill in the Blanks

Complete with the correct reflexive pronoun and verb form.

1. Yo _____ (levantarse) a las seis.
2. Ella _____ (maquillarse) antes de salir.
3. Nosotros _____ (ponerse) los zapatos.
4. ¿A qué hora _____ (acostarse) tú?
5. Mis amigos _____ (llamarse) Mateo y Luis.
6. Ellos _____ (divertirse) en la fiesta.

Answers:

1. me levanto
2. se maquilla
3. nos ponemos
4. te acuestas

5. se llaman
6. se divertieron

12) Practice with Placement

Choose the correct placement of the reflexive pronoun.

1. Quiero (me levantar / levantarme) temprano.
2. Estoy (me duchando / duchándome).
3. (Te cepillas / Cepillas te) los dientes.
4. Vamos a (acostarnos / nos acostar) tarde.
5. No (te preocupes / preocúpate).

Answers:

1. levantarme
2. duchándome
3. Te cepillas
4. acostarnos
5. te preocupes

13) Common Pitfalls & Fixes

Wrong	Correct	Explanation
<i>Lavo mis manos.</i>	<i>Me lavo las manos.</i>	Use reflexive + definite article for body parts.
<i>Se va su casa.</i>	<i>Se va de su casa.</i>	Some reflexives require prepositions.
<i>Me llamo es Ana.</i>	<i>Me llamo Ana.</i>	No <i>es</i> needed — “me llamo” = “my name is.”
<i>Estoy me duchando.</i>	<i>Me estoy duchando. / Estoy duchándome.</i>	Pronoun before <i>estar</i> or attached to gerund.

14) Quick Summary Table

Element	Spanish	Example	English
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Reflexive Pronouns	me, te, se, nos, os, se	<i>Me levanto temprano.</i>	I get up early.
Infinitive Form	verb + se	<i>lavarse</i>	to wash oneself
Placement	before conjugated verb or attached to infinitive/gerund	<i>Voy a vestirme.</i>	I'm going to get dressed.
Body Parts	use article (el, la, los, las)	<i>Me cepillo los dientes.</i>	I brush my teeth.
Reciprocal Use	<i>nos / se</i> = each other	<i>Nos abrazamos.</i>	We hug each other.

Why Reflexives Matter

Reflexive verbs are **core to daily communication** — describing:

- **Morning and bedtime routines**
- **Personal care and clothing**
- **Emotions and states**
- **Actions between people**

They're essential for realistic, conversational Spanish and help learners move beyond memorized phrases into **real-life fluency**.

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