Reflexive verbs and pronouns

Overview

Reflexive pronouns work with a reflexive verb to indicate that a person is performing the action toward or for him- or herself. These types of verbs are not very common in English, but are used frequently in Spanish. Many actions related to personal care or daily routines are reflexive, but other verbs can be reflexive as well.

- **Me ducho** cada mañana. (*I shower (myself) every morning.*)
- **Te peinas** el pelo. (*You brush your hair (yourself).*)
- **Se hablaba.** (*He was talking to himself.*)
- **Me veo** en el espejo. (*I see myself in the mirror.*)

The subject is performing the action on him- or herself, making the object of the verb, the same as the subject. Compare two sentences in which one is reflexive and one is not.

- I wash myself. (Me lavo.) - *myself* is the object of *wash*
- I wash the dog. (Lavo el perro.) - *the dog* is the object of *wash*

When the object of the verb is the same person as the subject, you will need to use a reflexive pronoun that matches the subject of the verb in both number (singular, plural) and person (1st, 2nd, 3rd).

- **Me lavo.** (*I wash myself.*)
- **Te lavas.** (*You wash yourself.*)
- **Se lava.** (*He washes himself./She washes herself./It washes itself./You wash yourself.*)
- **Nos lavamos.** (*We wash ourselves.*)
- **Se lavan.** (*They wash themselves./You wash yourselves.*)

**Reflexive Pronouns**

Reflexive pronouns have almost the same forms as **indirect object pronouns** except *se* is used in place of *le* and *les* for the third person. The reflexive pronoun will always be the same person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and number (singular, plural) as the subject of the sentence.

**Reflexive Pronoun Forms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st person</strong></td>
<td><strong>me</strong> <em>(to, for, from, or off myself)</em></td>
<td><strong>nos</strong> <em>(to, for, from, or off ourselves)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd person</strong></td>
<td><strong>te</strong> <em>(to, for, from, or off yourself)</em></td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd person</strong></td>
<td><strong>se</strong> <em>(to, for, from, or off himself, herself, itself, yourself)</em></td>
<td><strong>se</strong> <em>(to, for, from, or off themselves, yourselves)</em></td>
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</tbody>
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**Reflexive Pronoun Uses**

Reflexive verbs will require the use of reflexive pronouns to indicate that the direct object of the verb is also the subject, that the subject is performing the action on him- or her-self. Notice that the reflexive pronoun has the same person as the verb ending.
- **lavarse** (to wash one’s self) - Me lavo las manos. (I wash my hands.)
- **sacarse** (to take something off one’s self) - Nos sacamos los guantes. (We our gloves off (ourselves).)
- **despertarse** (to wake up) - Se despiertan a las seis cada mañana. (They wake themselves up at six o’clock every morning.)

As mentioned before, you can also add reflexive pronouns to verbs not regularly reflexive verbs in order to make them reflexive.

- verse (to see one’s self)
- hablarse (to talk to one’s self)
- escribirse (to write to one’s self)
- comprarse (to buy (something) for one’s self)

Reflexive verbs can also be used to indicate an emotional response to something. When a person becomes angry, sad, happy, etc., you can express this by using reflexive verbs.

- Me enojé rápidamente. (I got angry quickly.)
- Te alegras de hablar español. (It makes you happy to speak Spanish.)
- Se aburre en la clase de matemáticas. (He gets bored in Math class.)

Reflexive pronouns can also be used to add emphasis to a seemingly regular situation. The pronouns are not normally translated directly into English, but the sense of something extra is there in Spanish.

- Comí el pastel. (I ate the cake.)
- Me comí el pastel. (I ate up the cake/I ate the whole cake.)
- Estúdialo. (Study it.)
- Estúdiatelo. (Really study it./Study it thoroughly.)

**Reflexive Pronoun Placement**

Reflexive pronouns are placed immediately before simple conjugated verbs and negative commands.

- sacarse - Yo me saco los guantes. (I take off my gloves.)
- afeitarse - Tú te afeitas la cara. (You shave your face.)
- acostarse - Ellas se acuestan. (They go to bed.)
- escribirse - No se escriba notas. (Don’t write notes to yourself.)

Reflexive Pronouns are attached to affirmative commands and in the case of compound verbs (present progressive, ir+a+infinitive, etc.) the pronoun can either be attached to the infinitive or present participle or go before the conjugated verb.

- ducharse - Estoy duchándome. / Me estoy duchando. (I am showering (myself).)
- quitarse - Quitate el sombrero. (Take off your hat.)
- sentarse - Voy a sentarme. / Me voy a sentar. (I am going to sit (myself) down.)

**Reflexive Verb Examples**

Below is a list of common reflexive verbs. This is not a complete list, but rather a reference to help you understand which kinds of verbs are reflexive.
Reflexive Verbs with Meaning Changes

Making a verb reflexive can change its meaning in ways that you wouldn’t find very logical. Some are more subtle than others, while some are quite different. Some of these verbs are listed below.

- **abonar** to pay money  **abonarse** to subscribe to (a magazine, newspaper, etc.)
- **abrir** to open  **abrirse** to open up (confide in someone)
- **acordar** to agree/to decide  **acordarse** to remember
- **acusar** to accuse  **acusarse** to confess
- **cambiar** to change  **cambiar** to change
- **cerrar** to close  **cerrarse** to close oneself off emotionally
- **combinar** to combine  **combinarse** to take turns
- **convertirse** to become  **convertirse** to become
- **dormir** to sleep  **dormirse** to fall asleep
- **ir** to go  **irse** to go away
- **llevar** to carry  **llevarse** to take away
- **poner** to put  **ponerse** to put on/to wear
- **salir** to leave  **salirse** to leave unexpectedly/to leak