

Notas gramaticales: verbos reflexivos

Reflexive verbs are simply normal –ar, –er, and –ir verbs that come with an extra little pronoun (me, te, se, nos, se) because the subject is doing the action *to themselves*. The verb endings never change: they still end in –ar, –er, or –ir. What changes is that a reflexive pronoun is added to show *who* receives the action.

What reflexive verbs are:

A reflexive verb describes an action that comes back to the same person who does it. Examples: *me despierto* (I wake myself up), *se baña* (he bathes himself), *nos reunimos* (we meet each other).

The reflexive pronoun tells us who is receiving the action:

- me (myself)
- te (yourself)
- se (himself/herself/yourself/themselves)
- nos (ourselves)

The verb itself is still a regular verb ending in –ar, –er, or –ir. The pronoun is what makes it “reflexive.”

Spanish uses reflexive verbs to express:

- **Daily routines** (getting up, getting dressed, showering)
- **Changes in emotion or state** (*se pone nervioso* = he gets nervous)
- **Accidental or indirect events** (*se me perdió* = it got lost on me)
- **Reciprocal actions** (*nos reunimos* = we meet each other)

English often uses a different structure (“I get dressed,” “I get nervous”), but Spanish marks these with a reflexive pronoun.

The dictionary and the *501 Verbs* book lists reflexive verbs because they are real verbs that we see constantly in everyday Spanish. They still end in –ar, –er, or –ir, but they are shown with “se” attached (like *levantarse*, *vestirse*, *ponerse*) to remind learners that these verbs require a reflexive pronoun when used.

So when you see *levantarse* in the book, it's not a new kind of verb — it's just *levantar* with the reflexive pronoun "se" added to show how it's used.

A reflexive verb always keeps its "se" in the dictionary, but you do NOT always keep the "se" in front of the verb when you use it in a sentence. The "se" in the dictionary is just a label telling you, "This verb needs a reflexive pronoun."

The real rule is this:

- In the dictionary: the verb appears as *levantarse*, *vestirse*, *ponerse*, etc.
- In a sentence: you remove the "se" and replace it with the correct pronoun (me, te, se, nos, se) and put that pronoun in front of the conjugated verb.

So:

- *levantarse* → me levanto
- *vestirse* → te vistes
- *ponerse* → se pone

The "se" at the end of the infinitive is not meant to be used literally in front of the verb. It's just a marker that tells you: *this verb is reflexive; it needs a reflexive pronoun.*

Why Spanish does it this way:

Spanish needs a way to show who is receiving the action, so the pronoun changes:

- me (I do it to myself)
- te (you do it to yourself)
- se (he/she/you/they do it to themselves)
- nos (we do it to ourselves)

The dictionary form uses -se because it's neutral — it doesn't know who the subject will be yet.

Further explanation:

In addition to expressing daily routines, the reflexive is used for changes in emotion or state (*se pone nervioso* = he gets nervous) Accidental or indirect events (*se me perdió* = it got lost on me) Reciprocal actions (*nos reunimos* = we meet each other) --

Those three categories feel strange at first because English doesn't mark them the same way Spanish does. The easiest way to understand them is this: Spanish uses reflexive pronouns anytime the subject is affected by their own action — physically, emotionally, or indirectly. Here's what each category really means, in simple, teacher-friendly language you can use with your class.

Changes in emotion or state:

Spanish treats emotional changes as something that "happens to you," so it uses a reflexive pronoun.

- *se pone nervioso* = "he gets nervous" (literally: "he puts himself into a nervous state")
- *me enoja* = "I get angry" (literally: "I make myself angry")
- *nos cansamos* = "we get tired" (literally: "we tire ourselves")

English uses "get," but Spanish uses a reflexive verb to show the person is entering a new state.

Accidental or indirect events:

Spanish uses reflexive pronouns to show that something happened to you without intention. It's not your fault — it just happened "on you."

- *se me perdió* = "it got lost on me" (literally: "it lost itself on me")
- *se me cayó* = "I dropped it / it fell on me" (literally: "it fell itself from me")
- *se me olvidó* = "I forgot" (literally: "it forgot itself from me")

Spanish uses this structure to soften blame and show lack of control. It's a cultural-linguistic way of saying: *Oops — that happened to me.*

Reciprocal actions:

When two or more people do the same action to each other, Spanish uses the reflexive pronoun.

- *nos reunimos* = “we meet each other”
- *nos abrazamos* = “we hug each other”
- *se miran* = “they look at each other”
- *se llaman* = “they call each other”

The reflexive pronoun here doesn’t mean “myself” — it means each other.

Spanish doesn’t have a separate “each other” word, so it uses the reflexive system to express it.

The unifying idea:

All the categories share one core logic:

Spanish uses reflexive pronouns whenever the subject is affected by their own action — physically, emotionally, or indirectly.

That’s why the same pronoun system covers:

- **daily routines**
- **emotional changes**
- **accidents**
- **reciprocal actions**

It’s one flexible tool that Spanish uses in several situations where English uses different structures.

Reflexive Pronoun Placement

1. Before the conjugated verb

Use this when the verb is **conjugated** (present, past, future, etc.).

Structure	Example	Meaning
pronoun + conjugated verb	Me despierto.	I wake up.
	Se viste.	He gets dressed.
	Nos peinamos.	We do our hair.

If the verb is conjugated, the pronoun goes in front.

2. Attached to the infinitive

Use this when the verb is in the **infinitive form** (-ar, -er, -ir) after another verb or a preposition.

Structure	Example	Meaning
infinitive + pronoun	despertarme	to wake myself up
	vestirse	to get dressed
	sentarnos	to sit down

In full sentences

- **Quiero despertarme temprano. (I want to wake up early.)**
- **Necesita vestirse rápido. (He/She needs to get dressed quickly.)**
- **Vamos a sentarnos. (We're going to sit down.)**

If it's an infinitive, you can hook the pronoun onto the end.

3. Attached to the gerund

Use this when the verb is in the **-ando / -iendo** form (progressive, ongoing action).

Structure	Example	Meaning
gerund + pronoun	vistiéndome	getting myself dressed
	duchándose	showering (himself)
	preparándonos	getting ourselves ready

In full sentences

- **Estoy vistiéndome. (I am getting dressed.)**
- **Está duchándose. (He/She is taking a shower.)**
- **Estamos preparándonos. (We are getting ourselves ready.)**

With gerunds, the pronoun can also attach to the end.

::::::: guidelines ::::::::::

Conjugated verb → pronoun BEFORE.

Infinitive or gerund → pronoun can attach AFTER.