Reflexive constructions: Verbs and Pronouns

A reflexive construction is one in which the subject is both the performer and the receiver of the action expressed by the verb. A reflexive construction consists of a verb and a reflexive pronoun. In English, reflexive pronouns end in –self, -selves; for example: myself, yourself, ourselves. With some verbs these pronouns represent the notion of “self.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>PRONOUN</th>
<th>VERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>levanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a las 8:00.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Isabel gets (herself) up at 8.

1. **Reflexive verb** is very easy to recognize, when you see the pronoun SE attached at the end of the infinitive you will know it is a reflexive verb. Sometimes, the notion of “self” expressed by such a verb will be similar to English:

- divertirse: to enjoy oneself (to have a good time)
- conocerse: to know oneself

2. Activities that are part of one’s *personal care*, or that one does to or for oneself, will usually be reflexive. Some of these convey the notion expressed by the English like: *get ... ready, dressed etc.*:

- aburrirse: to get bored
- acostarse: to go to bed
- arreglarse: to get ready
- bañarse: to take a bath
- cansarse: to get tired
- ducharse: to take a shower
- enojarse: to get angry
- juntarse: to get together
- levantarse: to get up
- preocuparse: to get worried
- quitarse la ropa: to take off one’s clothes
- vestirse: to get dressed

3. Other reflexive verbs, however, do not reflect the notion of “self” quite as clearly. Verbs that express feelings, moods, conditions, are often used with reflexive pronouns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NON REFLEXIVE</th>
<th>REFLEXIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acostar (to put to bed)</td>
<td>acostarse (to go to bed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir (to sleep)</td>
<td>dormirse (to fall asleep)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enfermar (to make sick)</td>
<td>enfermarse (to become sick)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ir (to go)</td>
<td>irse (to go away, to leave)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levantar (to lift)</td>
<td>levantarse (to get up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>llamar (to call)</td>
<td>llamarse (to be called)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poner (to put to place)</td>
<td>ponerse (to put on)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quitar (to remove)</td>
<td>quitarse (to take off)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vestir (to dress)</td>
<td>vestirse (to get dressed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Notice that:

- Some verbs have different meaning when used with a reflexive pronoun.

5. Reflexive constructions (reflexive verbs) require reflexive pronouns:

**LOS PRONOMBRES REFLEXIVOS: me, te, se, nos, os, se**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Me lavo myself (yo)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Te lavas yourself (tú)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se lava himself, herself, yourself (él, ella, Ud.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos lavamos ourselves (nosotros/as)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Os lavaís (Spain informal) yourselves (vosotros/vosotras)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se lavan themselves, yourselves (ellos, ellas, Uds.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. How to use reflexive verbs:

- When you are using reflexive verbs in the present to describe current activities or daily routine, their endings are the same as for non reflexive verbs in the present
tense (see the verb lavarse above) and you have to place the reflexive pronoun immediately before the conjugated verb: Me lavo las manos.

- When you use reflexive verbs in the infinitive form (like with the construction *ir + a + infinitive*), you attach the pronoun to the end:
  
  Voy a acostarme OR you place it in front of the conjugated form:
  
  Me voy a acostar. The reflexive verb is acostarse, but you have to adjust the reflexive pronoun according to the subject, in this example the subject is yo.

- In progressive constructions and with infinitives, reflexive pronouns are either attached to the present participle (*-ndo*) or the infinitive, or placed in front of the conjugated verb. A written accent is required with the present participle if the pronoun is attached (because of the additional syllable):
  
  Isabel está peinándose. Pepe is combing his hair.
  Isabel se está peinando.

  Marta va a maquillarse. Marta is going to put her makeup on.
  Marta se va a maquillar.

- Reflexive pronouns are attached to the affirmative command, but precede the negative command.

  ¡ Báñese ahora mismo! Take a bath right now.
  ¡ No se sienten allí! Don’t sit there.

- Some verbs can be used non reflexively when someone other than the subject receives the action.

  Monica acuesta a su hija. Monica puts her daughter to bed.
  Despierto a mi abuela. I wake up my grandmother.

- Notice that some reflexive verbs have stem changes in all forms except *nosotros/as* and *vosotros/as*.

**O – UE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acostarse:</th>
<th>Dormirse:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me acuesto</td>
<td>me duermo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te acuestas</td>
<td>te duermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se acuesta</td>
<td>se duerme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos acostamos</td>
<td>nos dormimos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Os acostáis</td>
<td>os dormís</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se acuestan</td>
<td>se duermen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### E – IE:
**Divertirse:**
- Me divierto
- Te diviertes
- Se divierte
- Nos divertimos
- Os divertís
- Se divieren

**despertarse:**
- Me desperto
- Te despiertas
- Se despierta
- Nos despertamos
- Os despertáis
- Se despiertan

**sentirse:**
- Me siento
- Te sientes
- Se siente
- Nos sentimos
- Os sentís
- Se sienten

### E – I:
**Despedirse:**
- Me despido
- Te despides
- Se despide
- Nos despedimos
- Os despedís
- Se despiden

**vestirse:**
- Me visto
- Te vistes
- Se viste
- Nos vestimos
- Os vestís
- Se visten

**reírse:**
- Me rio
- Te ríes
- Se ríe

- **Reciprocal constructions:** The plural reflexive pronouns *nos, os, se,* may be used with verbs that take direct objects to express reciprocal actions. The verbs can be reflexive or non-reflexive verbs, and these actions are conveyed in English by *each other* or *one another.*

- *(Nos queremos mucho.*
  We love each other a lot.
- Isabel y Pepe **se escriben** todas las semanas.
  Isabel and Pepe write to each other every week.*