New Rules for Ser and Estar

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As a result of many years' experience in teaching Spanish to high school students, the author has found one fundamental defect in all textbooks that have come to his notice in the treatment of the verbs ser and estar. This is that all such texts convey the mistaken impression that the pupil should primarily base his decision as to which verb to employ on the degree of permanency involved. Yet it is clear that the verb ser must be used in such sentences as "I am a teacher," whether I am a teacher of long standing or substituting for a brief while only. Likewise, one must employ the verb estar in such sentences as "John is in the city," regardless of the length of John's sojourn.

The following rules have been found to obviate this difficulty and to be nearer "fool-proof" than any with which the writer has been made acquainted in the textbooks:

Rule One.—Always write the proper form of ser to translate any form of the English verb be when followed by a noun or pronoun in the predicate; e.g., Mi padre es abogado. Soy yo.

Rule Two.—Always use the proper form of estar to translate any form of the English verb be to express location or position; e.g., Estamos en la escuela.

Rule Three.—When neither Rule One nor Rule Two will apply, use ser to express relatively permanent or inherent ideas, and estar to express relatively temporary or accidental ideas; e.g., Mi hermano es grande. Mi amigo está enfermo.

It can be readily shown that all rules given elsewhere for ser and estar can be condensed and classified under these three rules.