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est mal()A phrase is a group of words commonly used together (e.g., once upon a time).phrasea. it's wrong Yo jams le miento a mis padres. Est mal.I never lie to my parents. It's wrong.b. is wrong La contrasea est mal. Cmo dijiste que era?The password is wrong. What is it again?2. (he or she is unwell; third person singular)a. he's sick Mi hijo debe permanecer en cama. Est mal.My boy must remain in bed. He's sick.b. she's sick Est mal y tiene que tomar medicamentos.She's sick and must take medication.c. he's ill Est mal y no puede salir de su casa.He's ill and can't leave his house.d. she's ill Luca no vino al ensayo porque est mal.Lucia didn't come to the rehearsal because she's ill.e. is sick Micaela est mal. Tenemos que llamar a un mdico.Micaela is sick. We have to call a doctor.f. is ill Mi hermano est mal. Ha estado vomitando mucho.My brother is ill. He's been vomiting a lot.3. (he or she is unhappy; third person singular)a. he's sad Pobre hombre. Est mal porque lo dej su esposa.Poor man. He's sad because his wife left him.b. she's sad Qu le sucede a Martina? - Est mal porque se qued sin trabajo.What's wrong with Martina? - She's sad because she lost her job.c. is sad Mi primo est mal porque su esposa est hospitalizada.My cousin is sad because his wife is in the hospital.Copyright 2025 Curiosity Media Inc.Machine Translators Translate est mal using machine translators Using malo and mal interchangeably is one of the most common mistakes that people learning Spanish make. Although they may have similar translations, in Spanish, mal and malo work with different grammatical elements. Since these words are used frequently in conversations, many Spanish learners wonder whats the difference between mal and malo. Malo is an adjective. It describes nouns. Depending on the context, it could mean bad, wicked, evil or mean. As an adverb, mal qualifies how an action is performed. It means bad, wrong or badly. As an adjective, mal means bad and it goes in front of singular masculine nouns. Understanding the difference between these words and applying them correctly can be a little bit challenging for new and experienced Spanish speakers. For that reason, in the following sections, youll find more information about the differences between mal and malo. Additionally, we included some examples, phrase structures and contexts where you can use these words. By the end of it, youll have a stronger understanding of the differences between mal and malo as well as when and how to use them properly. Whats the Difference Between Mal and Malo in Spanish? In Spanish, mal and malo are used in similar contexts. They both can be used to describe something or a characteristic. Although their function is the same, mal and malo work with different elements. Here is a table with the key differences between these words. MaloMalClassificationAdjectiveAdjective when used in front of a nounAdverb when used with a verbRules1. Only used after nouns.2. It has a plural and feminine form.1. It goes after a verb.2. As an adjective, it goes before singular masculine nouns.UsesTo describe people and objects.1. To describe how an action is done.2. To describe people and objects.Meanings-Bad-Evil-Mean-Wicked-Harmful Bad / terrible Badly Wrong /Incorrect Carlos canta muy malCarlos sings very badly Mi vecino es un hombre muy maloMy neighbor is a very bad man Juan es un mal hombre, no hables con lJuan is a bad man, dont talk to him No seas malo, Julieta solo quiere ayudarte!Dont be mean! Julieta just wants to help you! Now that you have a better understanding of mal and malo lets see the contexts as well as the rules that you will need to use these words. How & When to Use Mal in Spanish Depending on the context, in Spanish, mal could either be used as an adjective or as an adverb. Its function is to describe an action or a noun (object or person). Mal could be translated as: Bad / terribleBadlyWrong/Incorrect Here are some phrase structures as well as the contexts where you can use mal. Describing How an Action is Being Done One of the most useful ways to use mal in Spanish is to describe how an action is being performed. In other words, we can use mal to: Give our negative opinion about how people do certain activities.Express that an activity is not being performed correctly.Describe an activity or action. Here is how we use it: [Verb conjugated] + mal Carlos canta malCarlos sings badly No! Lo ests haciendo malNo! Youre doing it wrong Creo que ests mal, eso no se dice as en espaolI think youre wrong, you dont say that in Spanish Probasto la leche antes de tomarla? Creo que huele malDid you test the milk before drinking it? I think it smells bad Klaus habla muy mal francs, pero es muy bueno en espaolKlauss speaks french very badly, but hes very good in Spanish Also, when working with exclamatory sentences, mal can go before the verb. Qu mal que no viniste el sbado!Its too bad that you didnt come on Saturday! Qu mal te ves! Te sientes bien?You look terrible! Are you feeling well? Describing Things, Places and People (Nouns) Using mal to describe nouns (which means its used here as an adjective) can be very confusing for Spanish learners. In this situation, mal is a short version of malo. Mal only works before singular masculine nouns and it means bad. Here is the phrase structure that you need to use for this case: [Verb conjugated] + (un) + mal + [noun] Carlos es un mal cantanteCarlos is a bad singer Pablo tiene mal carcterPablo has a bad character Ese restaurante tiene un muy mal servicioThat restaurant has pretty bad service Creo que Lucas es un mal amigo para mi hermanoI think Lucas is a bad friend for my brother Julin es un mal hombre, no deberas hablar con lJulin is a bad man, you shouldnt talk to him Take Note: When describing objects and people, most of the time mal works with the verb ser since it expresses characteristics and qualities. It can also work with verbs that express possession such as tener. Although this is not a rule of thumb, it can give you some guidance. Related Resource: How to Use Ser in Spanish How & When to Use Malo in Spanish As a Spanish adjective, malo describes people, things, and objects (nouns). Depending on the context, malo could be used to: Describe negatively a person or objects behaviors, personality or qualities.Describe a persons ability/inability to do something.Express that an object or activity is harmful or bad. Depending on the context, malo could be translated as bad, wicked, mean, harmful or evil. When working with the verb estar, malo could also mean sick or ill. Here are some examples as well as some phrase structures that you can use: Noun + [ser conjugated] + (muy) + malo Comer tanta azcar es maloEating so much sugar is bad El cigarro es muy malo para la saludSmokes are bad for your health Julin es muy malo, no deberas hablar con lJulian is evil, you shouldnt talk to him Fabin es muy malo: no quiso ayudarme a estudiarFabin is very mean: he didnt want to help me study Take Note: As an adjective, malo needs to match the gender and plurality of the noun that it is describing. Therefore, malo has a plural and feminine forms: malos, mala, malas. If instead of talking about personality and qualities, you want to describe someones abilities (or inability) to perform a task or action, youll need to use the following phrase structure: Noun + [ser conjugated] + (muy) + malo + para + [infinitive verb] Carlos es malo para hablar con la genteCarlos is very bad at talking to people Marisol y Rebeca son muy malas para escucharMarisol and Rebeca are very bad at listening Take Note: Most of the time, malo works with ser since its talking about qualities. However, in some contexts, it can work with estar, when talking about a single situation or instance. Patricio est maloPatricio is sick Los tacos estn malosThe tacos are bad Related Resource: How to Use Estar in Spanish Wrapping Up Both mal and malo can be quite confusing for new and experienced Spanish learners since both words are negative descriptors. In this article, we discussed that mal could be either an adverb or an adjective while malo is always an adjective. As a result, these words are not always synonyms. Additionally, they follow their own sets of grammatical rules. Here are some key points to keep in mind: Mal It can be either an adjective or an adverb.As an adverb, it describes how an action is performed. Most of the time it goes after the verb.It means bad, wrong and badly.As an adjective, it is never used with the verb ser.As an adjective, mal goes before singular masculine nouns. It means bad and it is used with the verb ser. Malo Its always an adjective and its placed after a masculine noun.Describes a nouns personality, qualities or abilities to do something.Expresses that an object or activity is bad.Means bad, wicked, evil, mean or harmful. Has plural and feminine forms.Works with the verb ser:When used with estar it means sick or ill. Now youre ready to start using these words in your conversations. Related Resource: Bien vs Bueno 1) When do I say: Est mal and est malo. 2) Which is correct, both or only one? 3) What about the expression that is similar in English...It's not so bad. How would that be? People always say it very fast, like...No es tan malo, no est(n) malo, so I don't know which they are using: es/est. Could it be both? Thanks...Greg 1) When do I say: Est mal and est malo. 2) Which is correct, both or only one? You can say Es malo, but this means "he's mean". I'll leave the other part of your question for the native speakers. Hi, "Ser malo" means indeed "to be a bad, mean person"; SER always refers to a quality of a person or something that is permanent, while ESTAR normally is used to refer to a temporary situation or to appreciate something in a subjective way. I think that "estar mal / estar malo" both can be used to refer to a (mental/physical) health condition or to appreciate something (a movie, food,...). I don't know if there is any difference in meaning. You do have to be aware that ESTAR can be combined with an adjective (malo) and an adverb (mal), but SER can only be used with an adjective. Y a los nativos: por favor, corrijanme si me equivococ! Heidi Por eso, se dice...Estoy mal o estoy malo. (I'm sick) It's bad= est malo/est mal? Gracias I think you should say- estoy mal (malo,-a) when you're sick- est mal when something is bad But maybe a native speaker can help us out... Perfect. But you can use "Estoy mal" when you don't feel ok or are depressed too. Could I say: Est malo? Or ONLY: Est mal? What's the difference between: Estoy malo and estoy mal? Gracias,Greg Estoy malo: estoy enfermo.Estoy mal: me siento mal, fsica o emocionalmente.Soy malo: soy una mala persona.Mara no est mal: Mara es atractiva. La cosa no est tan mal: la situacin es aceptable. "est malo" puede refererirse a una persona enferma, y tambn al sabor de un alimento. Las diferencias entre "est mal" y "est malo" son idiomticas, una traducucin al ingls no las aclara. I think it depends on the country. In Chile people use estar and malo/mala/malos/malas in the following contexts. This answer is incorrect.Esta respuesta es incorrecta.