Reflexive Constructions: pronouns and verbs

(Las construcciones reflexivas: los pronombres y los verbos)
Reflexive constructions in Spanish are generally used to describe actions that people do to, or for, themselves:

Notice that we often indicate that a verb is to be used reflexively by attaching *se* onto the infinitive

- acostarse (ue)
- afeitarse
- bañarse
- cepillarse
- despertarse (ie)
- dormirse (ue, u)
- lavarse
- levantarse
- maquillarse
- peinarse
- quitarse
- secarse
- sentarse (ie)
- vestirse (i, i)
One useful function of reflexive constructions is to describe daily personal activities.

El despertador suena a las 5:00.

(Yo) me levanto temprano.

The subject pronoun, *yo*, is in parentheses since it is optional in this case; the object pronoun *me* is used to show who is being gotten up—in this case, the same person as the subject, indicating that *I* am getting *myself* up rather than someone else. Whenever the subject and the object of a verb are the same person, the verb is being used reflexively.
The reflexive pronouns

- me
- nos
- te
- os
- se
- se

Note that se serves for both.

The only reflexive pronouns that differ in form from direct or indirect object pronouns are third persons singular and plural.
Using the verb *bañar* as an example, the reflexive construction verb paradigm would be as follows in the present tense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo <em>me</em> baño.</td>
<td>I bathe (myself).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú <em>te</em> bañas.</td>
<td>You bathe (yourself).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Él, ella, Ud. <em>se</em> baña.</td>
<td>He, she, you (form.) bathe(s) (himself, herself, yourself).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nosotros <em>nos</em> bañamos.</td>
<td>We bathe (ourselves).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vosotros <em>os</em> bañáis.</td>
<td>You (pl., fam.) bathe (yourselves).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellos, ellas, Uds. <em>se</em> bañan.</td>
<td>They, you (pl., form.) bathe (themselves, yourselves).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that English often omits the reflexive pronoun (myself, etc.), whereas it is obligatory in Spanish.

Now let’s look at some more daily activities.
Clara se seca y se viste después de bañarse.

Reflexive pronouns, just like direct and indirect object pronouns, are placed either before the conjugated verb . . .

. . . or after and attached to an infinitive or gerund.
Isabel could, of course, comb someone else’s hair, in which case a reflexive construction would not be used, since someone other than the subject would be receiving the effect of the verb.

Isabel peina a su hermana.
Papá se seca el pelo antes de peinarse.

Su hija se sienta al tocador y se maquilla.
Todos *nos* acostamos temprano para poder *levantarnos* a tiempo al día siguiente.
Y ahora, ¿cómo nos sentimos?  
(Now, how do we feel?)

Reflexive constructions are often used to describe feelings, moods, and conditions:

Some examples are listed below

- **alegrarse** (de) → to become happy (about)
- **divertirse** [ie, i] (con) → to have fun (with)
- **enamorarse** (de) → to fall in love (with)
- **enfermarse** (de, con) → to become sick (from, with)
- **enojarse** (de, con) → to get angry (about, at)
- **olvidarse** (de) → to forget (to or about)
Nos alegramos de pasar tiempo con la familia.

A veces los niños se divierten mucho en la bañera.
Te vas a enamorar un día de éstos.

Me enfermo cuando como muchos dulces.
Mis padres se enojan si no me acuesto a tiempo.

Nunca nos olvidamos de lavarnos los dientes.
The important and versatile verb *poner*, basically “to put,” means “to put *on*” (as in clothing) when used reflexively. It also is used reflexively with adjectives to express the idea of “to become.”

**Pongo mis libros en mi mochila.**

*I put my books in my backpack.*

**En invierno, nos ponemos un abrigo antes de salir.**

*In the winter, we put on an overcoat before going out.*

**Los niños se ponen tristes cuando su padre está fuera.**

*The children are (become) sad when their father is out of town.*
One another, each other

The pronouns *nos*, *os*, and *se* can be used to express reciprocal actions or conditions, that is, what people do to each other or how they feel about one another.

Los novios *se* hablan por teléfono.

*The lovers talk to one another on the phone.*

Of course, the reciprocal pronouns must be plural by definition, since “one another” refers to more than one person. Note that they coincide in form with the *plural* reflexive pronouns.