

Por vs. Para

(Two Words That Mean “For” — But Not the Same!)

Spanish uses two different words—**por** and **para**—that can both translate to “for” in English, but they express **very different ideas**. Choosing the correct one depends on the **reason, purpose, or context** of the action.

A helpful way to think about them is:

Para → destination, purpose, goal (*toward* something)

Por → cause, means, movement, exchange (*because of* something)

Understanding the distinction between *por* and *para* helps students communicate intentions and explanations clearly and naturally.

1) Para — Destination, Purpose, or Goal

Use **para** when you’re talking about:

- a **destination** (toward a place or goal)
- a **purpose** or **intended use**
- a **deadline**
- or a **recipient**

The “P.E.R.F.E.C.T.” acronym helps you remember:

Letter	Meaning	Example
P	Purpose / goal (“in order to”)	<i>Estudio para aprender.</i> → I study in order to learn.
E	Effect	<i>Trabajo para ganar dinero.</i> → I work to earn money.
R	Recipient	<i>Este regalo es para ti.</i> → This gift is for you.
F	Future / deadline	<i>La tarea es para mañana.</i> → The homework is for tomorrow.
E	Employment	<i>Trabajo para una escuela.</i> → I work for a school.
C	Comparison	<i>Para un niño, lee muy bien.</i> → For a child, he reads very well.

T Toward / destination *Salgo **para** Madrid.* → I'm leaving **for** Madrid.

Other examples:

- *Voy a la tienda **para** comprar pan.* → I'm going to the store **to buy** bread.
- *Este vaso es **para** agua.* → This glass is **for** water.
- *Necesito el proyecto **para** el viernes.* → I need the project **by Friday**.

2) Por — Cause, Method, Movement, or Exchange

Use **por** when you're talking about:

- **how** something happens
- **why** something happens (reason or cause)
- **movement through** time or space
- **exchange, duration, or agent** of an action

The "A.T.R.A.C.T.E.D." acronym helps you remember:

Letter	Meaning	Example
A	Around a place	<i>Caminamos por el parque.</i> → We walk around the park.
T	Through / along / by	<i>Paso por tu casa.</i> → I pass by your house.
R	Reason / cause	<i>Estoy cansado por trabajar tanto.</i> → I'm tired because of working so much.
A	After (going for something)	<i>Voy al supermercado por pan.</i> → I'm going for bread.
C	Cost / exchange	<i>Pagué diez euros por el libro.</i> → I paid ten euros for the book.
T	Thanks / gratitude	<i>Gracias por tu ayuda.</i> → Thanks for your help.
E	Exchange / substitution	<i>Sustituyó a Juan por Pedro.</i> → He substituted Juan for Pedro.
D	Duration / time period	<i>Vivimos allí por cinco años.</i> → We lived there for five years.
M	Means / manner	<i>Viajamos por avión.</i> → We travel by plane.
P	Passive voice (by)	<i>Fue escrito por Cervantes.</i> → It was written by Cervantes.

Other examples:

- *Lo hice **por** ti.* → I did it **because of / for** you.
- *Te cambio mi postre **por** tu fruta.* → I'll trade you my dessert **for** your fruit.
- *Hablamos **por** teléfono.* → We talk **by** phone.
- *Dormí **por** ocho horas.* → I slept **for** eight hours.

3) Por vs. Para: Side-by-Side Comparison

	Por	Para
Meaning		
Cause / Goal	Reason / because of	Purpose / in order to
Example	<i>Lo hice por ti.</i> → I did it because of you.	<i>Lo hice para ti.</i> → I did it for you (intended for you).
Movement	Through / along / by	Toward / to
Example	<i>Caminamos por el parque.</i>	<i>Salimos para el parque.</i>
Time	Duration	Deadline
Example	<i>Estudí por dos horas.</i>	<i>La tarea es para mañana.</i>
Action	Means / method	Goal / effect
Example	<i>Lo mandé por correo.</i>	<i>Trabajo para ganar dinero.</i>
Exchange	Substitute / trade	Recipient
Example	<i>Pagué cinco dólares por el libro.</i>	<i>El regalo es para mi madre.</i>
Agent	By (passive)	—
Example	<i>Fue escrito por García Márquez.</i>	—

4) Expressions with *Por*

Expression	Meaning	Example
por favor	please	<i>Por favor, ayúdame.</i>
por ejemplo	for example	<i>Por ejemplo, los lunes estudio.</i>
por eso	that's why	<i>Estoy cansado; por eso, no salgo.</i>
por fin	finally	<i>Por fin terminó la película.</i>
por supuesto	of course	<i>Por supuesto que sí.</i>
por lo general	generally	<i>Por lo general, estudio por la noche.</i>
por todas partes	everywhere	<i>Hay flores por todas partes.</i>
por primera vez	for the first time	<i>Visité España por primera vez en 2022.</i>

5) Expressions with *Para*

Expression	Meaning	Example
para siempre	forever	<i>Te recordaré para siempre.</i>
para variar	for a change	<i>Salimos temprano, para variar.</i>
para entonces	by that time	<i>Para entonces ya habremos llegado.</i>
para mí / ti / él	in my / your / his opinion	<i>Para mí, es importante.</i>
no estar para bromas	not in the mood for jokes	<i>No estoy para bromas hoy.</i>

6) Practice: Choose *Por* or *Para*

1. Este regalo es ___ ti.
2. Gracias ___ todo.
3. Caminamos ___ la playa.
4. Tengo que terminar el trabajo ___ mañana.
5. Estudio ___ ser médico.
6. Pagamos veinte euros ___ la cena.
7. Viajamos ___ tren.
8. Salimos ___ México el sábado.

Answers:

1. para
2. por
3. por
4. para
5. para
6. por
7. por
8. para

7) Practice: Translate

1. I worked for three hours.
2. This letter is for you.
3. We walk through the park.
4. I study in order to pass.
5. Thank you for your help.
6. The book was written by Borges.

Answers:

1. Trabajé **por** tres horas.
2. Esta carta es **para** ti.
3. Caminamos **por** el parque.
4. Estudio **para** aprobar.
5. Gracias **por** tu ayuda.
6. El libro fue escrito **por** Borges.

8) Quick Summary Chart

Por = because of, by, through Para = in order to, toward, for

Reason or cause

Purpose or goal

Duration of time

Deadline or specific time

Movement through / by

Destination or direction

Exchange / cost

Recipient

Means (by, via)

Employment

Passive voice (by)

Comparison / opinion

Why *Por* and *Para* Matter

Mastering *por* and *para* helps learners:

- Express **purpose, motivation, direction, and cause** accurately
- Avoid direct English translation errors
- Sound more **natural, fluent, and precise**
- [Understand authentic Spanish speech and writing](#), where both are used constantly

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