

Por vs. Para

The complete guide — uses, examples and exercises

Level B1 · One of the most confusing topics in Spanish — but not after this!

◆ THE BIG IDEA — How to think about Por and Para

Both **POR** and **PARA** are translated as "for" in English — but they mean very different things in Spanish.

POR looks BACKWARD or INWARD. It deals with: **causes, reasons, means, movement through, exchanges, and duration.**

Think of POR as answering: "Why did this happen?" / "How?" / "Through where?" / "How long?"

PARA looks FORWARD or OUTWARD. It deals with: **goals, recipients, destinations, deadlines, and opinions.**

Think of PARA as answering: "What is this for?" / "Who gets it?" / "Where is it going?" / "By when?"

→ **Quick test:** "Trabajo **por** dinero" (because of / for the reason of money) vs. "Trabajo **para** mi familia" (for the benefit of my family).

◆ COMPLETE REFERENCE — 5 uses of POR · 5 uses of PARA

POR <i>Looks BACKWARD — causes, means, movement</i>	PARA <i>Looks FORWARD — goals, recipients, deadlines</i>
1. Cause / Reason <i>"Because of" or "due to"</i> No pude dormir por el ruido. <i>I couldn't sleep because of the noise.</i>	1. Purpose / Goal <i>"In order to" + verb</i> Estudio para hablar bien. <i>I study in order to speak well.</i>
2. Movement through / along <i>"Through", "along", "around"</i> Caminamos por el parque. <i>We walked through the park.</i>	2. Recipient / Beneficiary <i>"For" (who receives it)</i> Este regalo es para ti. <i>This gift is for you.</i>

3. Means of communication <i>"By" (phone, email, internet...)</i> Te llamo por teléfono. <i>I'll call you by phone.</i>	3. Destination <i>"To" or "headed to"</i> Salgo para Madrid mañana. <i>I'm leaving for Madrid tomorrow.</i>
4. Exchange <i>"In exchange for"</i> Cambié mi café por un jugo. <i>I traded my coffee for a juice.</i>	4. Deadline <i>"By" (a specific time/date)</i> Necesito el reporte para el lunes. <i>I need the report by Monday.</i>
5. Duration of time <i>"For" (how long)</i> Estudié español por dos años. <i>I studied Spanish for two years.</i>	5. Opinion / Perspective <i>"For me / In my opinion"</i> Para mí, el español es fácil. <i>For me, Spanish is easy.</i>

◆ MEMORY TRICKS — Two quick questions to ask yourself

When to use POR: → Can I replace it with "because of"? → Does it mean "through", "along", or "around"? → Is it "by phone / email / text"? → Is it an exchange ("in exchange for")? → Does it answer "how long"? If YES to any → use POR	When to use PARA: → Can I replace it with "in order to" + verb? → Is someone receiving something ("for you")? → Is it a physical destination ("going to")? → Is there a deadline ("by Monday")? → Is it an opinion ("for me / in my opinion")? If YES to any → use PARA
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EXERCISES

No passive reading — now you use it.

01 — Fill in the blank: por or para?

Write **por** or **para** in each blank. Then write the specific USE next to it (cause, purpose, recipient, etc.).

#	Complete with por or para
1	Estudio español _____ trabajar en Colombia algún día.
2	No llegué a tiempo _____ el tráfico terrible de esta mañana.
3	Este paquete es _____ la señora González en el tercer piso.
4	Hablamos _____ teléfono durante dos horas anoche.
5	Necesito terminar este informe _____ el viernes a las 5 pm.
6	Caminamos _____ el centro histórico toda la tarde.
7	_____ mí, el café colombiano es el mejor del mundo.
8	Te cambio mi sándwich _____ tus papas fritas.
9	Ella lleva años estudiando medicina _____ ser doctora.
10	Vivimos en esta ciudad _____ más de diez años ya.

02 — Spot and fix the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake the wrong preposition is used (or the sentence is a trap and is already correct). Find the error, cross it out, and write the full corrected sentence in the right column.

Sentence with a mistake — find it	Write the corrected sentence here
"Estudio inglés para aprender más sobre mi cultura." ¿Is there really a mistake here?	
"Este regalo lo compré para mi madre para su cumpleaños."	

"No dormí bien para el ruido de la fiesta de mis vecinos."	
"Cambié mi apartamento para uno más grande en el centro."	
"El paquete tiene que llegar por el lunes o habrá un problema."	
"Para mí, aprender idiomas es difícil para muchas razones."	

03 — Translate into Spanish

Translate into Spanish. The hint tells you which use is needed. Write in the green column.

#	English	Your Spanish translation
1	<i>I'm calling you by email because I can't talk right now.</i> → Hint: means + cause	
2	<i>This coffee is for you — you look very tired.</i> → Hint: recipient	
3	<i>She studied medicine for eight years to become a doctor.</i> → Hint: duration + purpose	
4	<i>We walked through the old city for two hours.</i> → Hint: movement + duration	
5	<i>For me, Spanish grammar is hard — but not impossible.</i> → Hint: opinion	
6	<i>I need this report ready by Thursday morning.</i> → Hint: deadline	
7	<i>He couldn't come to the meeting because of the traffic.</i> → Hint: cause	
8	<i>She traded her old car for a newer one last week.</i> → Hint: exchange	

04 — Write your own sentences

Write ONE original sentence for each use. These must be true about YOUR life — no copying examples from the table above. Full sentences only.

POR — cause/reason — Write a sentence explaining why something happened in your life.

→

PARA — purpose — Write a sentence about something you do in order to achieve a goal.

→

POR — duration — Write a sentence about how long you did or have been doing something.

→

PARA — deadline — Write a sentence about something you need to finish by a specific time.

→

POR — means — Write a sentence about how you communicate with someone.

→

PARA — opinion — Write a sentence giving your opinion about something in Spanish.

→

◆ BONUS — The 4 most common mistakes with por and para

Incorrect	Correct	Why?
Estudio español para dos años.	Estudio español por dos años.	Duration uses POR. PARA is for goals and deadlines, not time spans.
Lo hice para mis propios errores.	Lo hice por mis propios errores.	Cause and reason always use POR. "Por mis errores" = because of my mistakes.

Salgo por Madrid mañana.	Salgo para Madrid mañana.	Physical destination uses PARA. POR would mean "through Madrid", not "to Madrid".
Para mí es difícil. / Lo hice por ella.	¡Both are CORRECT! They can appear in the same sentence.	POR and PARA can coexist — each has its own function.

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aprendecontucaneo@gmail.com
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