

# Por y para

“Por” and “para” have a variety of meanings, and they are often confused because they can each be translated as “for.”

Gracias por la información                      Thanks for the information.  
Este regalo es para Juan                        This gift is for Juan.

To learn to use “por” and “para” correctly, you need to do two things:

1. Learn the rules for how por and para are used.
2. Memorize model sentences.

“Por” has many uses, and so it is the more problematic of the two.

**Rule:** to express gratitude or apology  
**Model:** Gracias por la ayuda.  
(Thanks for the help.)

**Rule:** for multiplication and division  
**Model:** Dos por dos son cuatro.  
(Two times two equals four.)

**Rule:** for velocity, frequency and proportion  
**Model:** Voy al restaurante cinco veces por semana.  
(I go to the restaurant five times per week.)

**Rule:** meaning “through,” “along,” “by” or “in the area of”  
**Model:** Andamos por el parque.  
(We walk through the park.)

**Rule:** when talking about exchange, including sales  
**Model:** Él me dio diez dólares por el libro.  
(He gave me ten dollars for the book.)

**Rule:** to mean “on behalf of,” or “in favor of,”  
**Model:** No voté por nadie.  
(I didn’t vote for anyone.)

**Rule:** to express a length of time  
**Model:** Yo estudié por dos horas.  
(I studied for two hours.)

**Rule:** to express an undetermined, or general time, meaning “during”  
**Model:** Se puede ver las estrellas por la noche.  
(One can see the stars during the night.)

**Rule:** for means of communication or transportation  
**Model:** Prefiero viajar por tren y hablar por teléfono.  
(I prefer to travel by train and speak by phone.)

**Rule:** in cases of mistaken identity, or meaning “to be seen as”

**Model:** Me tienen por loco.  
(They take me for crazy.)

**Rule:** to show the reason for an errand (with ir, venir, pasar, mandar, volver, and preguntar)

**Model:** Paso por ti a las ocho.  
(I’ll come by for you at eight o’clock.)

**Rule:** when followed by an infinitive, to express an action that remains to be completed, use por + infinitive

**Model:** La cena está por cocinar.  
(Dinner has yet to be cooked.)

**Rule:** to express cause or reason

**Model:** El hombre murió por falta de agua.  
The man died for lack of water.

**Rule:** “estar por” means to be in the mood, or inclined to do something

**Model:** Estoy por tomar café.  
(I’m in the mood for drinking coffee.)

**Rule:** in passive constructions

**Model:** El libro fue escrito por Octavio Paz.  
(The book was written by Octavio Paz.)

Por” also appears in many idiomatic expressions:

por adelantado ..... in advance  
por lo visto ..... apparently  
por ahora ..... for now  
por medio de ..... by means of  
por allí ..... around there; that way  
por lo menos ..... at least  
por amor de Dios ..... for the love of God  
por lo tanto ..... consequently  
por aquí ..... around here; this way ..  
por mi parte ..... as for me  
por casualidad ..... by chance  
por ningún lado ..... nowhere  
por ciento ..... percent  
por otra parte ..... on the other hand  
por cierto ..... certainly  
palabra por palabra ..... word for word  
por completo ..... completely  
por primera vez ..... for the first time  
por dentro ..... inside  
por separado ..... separately  
por desgracia ..... unfortunately  
por supuesto ..... of course  
por ejemplo ..... for example  
por suerte ..... fortunately

por eso ..... therefore  
 por todas partes..... everywhere  
 por favor ..... please  
 por todos lados ..... on all sides  
 por fin..... finally  
 por último..... finally  
 por lo general ..... generally

“Para” — in contrast, has relatively fewer uses.

**Rule:** to indicate destination

**Model:** El hombre salió para Madrid.  
 (The man left for Madrid.)

**Rule:** to show the use or purpose of a thing

**Model:** El vaso es para agua.  
 (The glass is for water.)

**Rule:** to mean “in order to” or “for the purpose of”

**Model:** Para hacer una paella, primero dore las carnes.  
 To make a paella, first sauté the meats.

**Rule:** to indicate a recipient

**Model:** Este regalo es para ti.  
 (This gift is for you.)

**Rule:** to express a deadline or specific time

**Model:** Necesito el vestido para el lunes.  
 (I need the dress by Monday.)

**Rule:** to express a contrast from what is expected

**Model:** Para un niño lee muy bien.  
 (For a child, he reads very well.)

**Rule:** “estar para” to express an action that will soon be completed

**Model:** El tren está para salir.  
 (The train is about to leave.)

It is quite important to learn to use these two prepositions correctly, because if you inadvertently substitute one for the other, you might end up saying something altogether different from what you had intended. Study the two examples:

Juan compró el regalo para María ..... Juan bought the gift for Maria.  
 (he bought it to give to her)

Juan compró el regalo por María..... Juan bought the gift for Maria.  
 (he bought it because she could not)

“Por” and “para” can also be used in questions. “¿Por qué?” means “Why?” (for what reason) while “¿Para qué?” means “Why?” (for what purpose).

¿Por qué estudias español? ..... For what reason do you study Spanish?

**Possible answer:**

Porque es un requisito..... Because it's required.

¿Para qué estudias español?..... For what purpose do you study Spanish?

**Possible answer:**

Para ser profesor de español ..... In order to become a Spanish teacher.

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