



Por & Para



We can all agree that prepositions are hard! No matter what language you want to learn, these little words always trip us up. Today, I will be talking about two Spanish prepositions that tend to confuse most learners of *Español*: *por* and *para*. If you want to understand these two better, keep reading!

For native speakers of English, *por* and *para* are confusing because technically, the only equivalent preposition in English is *for*. I can say in Spanish: *¡Gracias por venir!* Or *¿Eso es para mí?*; however, in English the exact same preposition, *for*, is used for both sentences: *Thank you for coming!* Or *Is that for me?* So, what is the difference between *por* & *para*? Do they only mean *for*? I would suggest keeping your minds open as we explore these two prepositions! Spanish is simply different from English, and sometimes, a little more complex. But with patience, consistency and practice, you'll be able to understand them and use them properly. Since there are several meanings for each, I will focus on the most common uses of both prepositions. This doesn't mean that there can't be exceptions, but I am sure these examples will help you understand and use these two prepositions in a better way.



POR

- There are different ways Spanish speakers think about *por*. One of the most common meanings is **cause**: *¡Gracias por venir!* In English, it would be: *Thank you for coming!* In this specific sentence, both Spanish and English attach a cause or a reason to be thankful for. In this case, the reason is that *someone came*. However, in most cases, English expresses *cause* through the use of *because of*. Consider this Spanish sentence and its English translation: *él murió por tu culpa* (*He died because of you*). This means that, if there is a context in Spanish in which you need to express *cause* or *reason for something*, you need to ask yourself: “If I had to express the exact same thing in English, could I use the term *because of*? If so, then in the Spanish context, you can be very confident it will be *por* and not *para*. Let’s have a look at another example: *I love you for who you are* (i.e: the reason why I love you is *because of* who you are). Since we can use *because of* in the English sentence, we can be sure that in Spanish, it will most certainly be “te quiero *por* quien eres”.
- Another meaning Spanish attaches to *por* is the same that the English language attaches to the preposition *through*. Consider this example: *He pasado por muchas cosas en la vida* (=I have been through many things in life). Or: *Tuve que salir por la ventana* (=I had to get out through the window). It is important to bear in mind that, in English, *through* also has slight differences in meaning. In Spanish, the use of *por* as *through* is attached to the meanings “**by means of**”, “**from one side to the other**”.
- *Por* is also used to express **approximate location**. In English, this meaning refers to "around", meaning approximate location as well. For instance: "*He*



estado viajando por Europa este mes" ("I've been traveling around Europe this month").

- To express **time duration**: for instance: *Estuve escribiendo esa carta por dos horas* (I was writing that letter for two hours). In this case, *por* and *for* coincide in meaning!
- To talk about the **agent who performs an action** in passive forms: *Este libro fue escrito por Cervantes* (This book was written by Cervantes).
- To talk about rates, prices or measurements that mean "**for each**". In English, this is the equivalent to the word *per* (meaning "for each"). E.g: *ese coche alcanza los 300 kilómetros por hora* (That car reaches 300 kilometres per hour).
- To ask for something in **exchange** for something else. For instance: *Te cambio mis libros por tus zapatillas*. (I will give you my books for your tennis shoes). As you can see, in this case, *por* in Spanish and *for* in English also coincide in meaning.

PARA

- The most common use of *para* in Spanish is to express an **aim or purpose**. In English, this is generally expressed through "*to* or *in order to*". I.e.: *Estoy estudiando español para poder ir a España* (I am studying Spanish to/in order to go to Spain).
- To indicate a **beneficiary of something**: *Estoy haciendo café para ti*. (I am making coffee for you). As we can see, in this case, *para* and *for* coincide in meaning!



- To express **something that you see or seems to you**: *Para mí, eso no tiene sentido* (To me, that doesn't make sense).
- To talk about a **time limit or deadline**: *El ensayo es para el lunes* (the essay is for Monday). Once again, *para* and *for* coincide in meaning.
- To talk about **direction or movement toward a place**: *voy para tu casa* (I'm on my way to/towards your house).
- When considering how a situation should be due to its **difficulty**, but it's not: *ella es muy alta para lo joven que es* (she is very tall considering how young she is). In English, the preposition *for* also applies to this example (*She is very tall for her age*).

These are the most common expressions of *por* and *para* in Spanish! As you've been able to see, sometimes *para* and *por* coincide with the English meanings of *for*, which is why it seems tricky. However, as you've also been able to notice, *for* has different meanings as well. The key is to think about *por* and *para* as words that have different meanings and not just one. This will certainly help you set your mind to understand the meanings better. And of course, make sure you get lots of practice!