

Por vs Para

Matthew Williams • Spanish • April 24, 2026

Both **por** and **para** can translate to "for" in English, but they mean different things. The shortcut: **por** looks backward (cause, duration, exchange, means); **para** looks forward (goal, recipient, deadline, destination).

Por

Por points backward — to causes, durations, exchanges, and the means by which something happens.

Use	Clue	Example
Cause / reason	because of, on account of	Llegué tarde por el tráfico
Duration	for (a length of time)	Estudí por tres horas
Movement through	through, along, around	Caminamos por la playa
Exchange	in exchange for	Pagué cien dólares por la camisa
On behalf of	on behalf of, for the sake of	Firmé por mi jefe
Means / mode	by, via, through	Te llamo por teléfono
Per / rate	per, a	Gano veinte dólares por hora

POR — CAUSE / REASON

Spanish	English
Llegué tarde por el tráfico.	I arrived late because of the traffic.
Lo hice por amor.	I did it out of love.
Fui al médico por el dolor.	I went to the doctor because of the pain.
Gracias por tu ayuda.	Thank you for your help.
No pudo dormir por el ruido.	He couldn't sleep because of the noise.

POR — DURATION

Spanish	English
Estudí por tres horas.	I studied for three hours.

Viví en España por dos años.	I lived in Spain for two years.
Esperé por una hora.	I waited for an hour.
Trabajó por toda la noche.	He worked all through the night.

POR — MOVEMENT THROUGH / ALONG

Spanish	English
Caminamos por la playa.	We walked along the beach.
El tren pasa por Madrid.	The train passes through Madrid.
Dimos un paseo por el parque.	We took a walk through the park.
El río corre por el valle.	The river runs through the valley.

POR — EXCHANGE

Spanish	English
Te doy este libro por ese.	I'll give you this book for that one.
Pagué cien dólares por la camisa.	I paid a hundred dollars for the shirt.
Cambié mi almuerzo por el tuyo.	I exchanged my lunch for yours.

POR — ON BEHALF OF

Spanish	English
Firmé el documento por mi jefe.	I signed the document on behalf of my boss.
Habló por todos nosotros.	He spoke on behalf of all of us.
Lo hago por ti.	I'm doing it for your sake.

POR — MEANS / MODE

Spanish	English
Te llamo por teléfono.	I'll call you by phone.
Me enteré por las noticias.	I found out through the news.
Enviaron el paquete por correo.	They sent the package by mail.
Hablaron por videollamada.	They spoke via video call.

POR — PER / RATE

Spanish	English
Gano veinte dólares por hora.	I earn twenty dollars per hour.

El límite es noventa kilómetros por hora.	The limit is ninety kilometres per hour.
Dos veces por semana.	Twice a week.

Para

Para points forward — to goals, recipients, deadlines, and destinations.

Use	Clue	Example
Purpose / goal	in order to (+ infinitive)	Estudio para aprender
Recipient	for (a person)	Compré flores para mi madre
Deadline	by, due	Necesito esto para el lunes
Destination	heading to	Salgo para España
Opinion	in my opinion, for me	Para mí, es fácil
Employment	work for	Trabajo para una empresa
Comparison	for (unexpected quality)	Habla bien para principiante

PARA — PURPOSE (+ INFINITIVE)

Spanish	English
Estudio para aprender.	I study in order to learn.
Trabajo para pagar las deudas.	I work to pay off my debts.
Llama a tu madre para decirle la verdad.	Call your mother to tell her the truth.
Salí temprano para llegar a tiempo.	I left early in order to arrive on time.

PARA — RECIPIENT

Spanish	English
Compré flores para mi madre.	I bought flowers for my mother.
Este regalo es para ti.	This present is for you.
Preparé una sorpresa para los estudiantes.	I prepared a surprise for the students.
¿Hay un mensaje para mí?	Is there a message for me?

PARA — DEADLINE

Spanish	English

Necesito esto para el lunes.	I need this by Monday.
El proyecto es para fin de mes.	The project is due at the end of the month.
Termina el examen para las dos.	Finish the exam by two o'clock.
El informe tiene que estar listo para mañana.	The report has to be ready by tomorrow.

PARA — DESTINATION

Spanish	English
Salgo para España mañana.	I am leaving for Spain tomorrow.
El vuelo sale para Londres a las seis.	The flight departs for London at six.
Voy para la oficina ahora.	I'm heading to the office now.
El tren sale para Caracas.	The train leaves for Caracas.

PARA — OPINION / COMPARISON

Spanish	English
Para mí, el español es fácil.	For me / In my opinion, Spanish is easy.
Para ella, no hay problema.	As far as she's concerned, there's no problem.
Habla muy bien para ser principiante.	He speaks very well for a beginner.
Hace mucho frío para ser abril.	It's very cold for April.

PARA — EMPLOYMENT

Spanish	English
Trabajo para una empresa grande.	I work for a large company.
Ella trabaja para el gobierno.	She works for the government.

Common Confusions

These pairs show how a single swap completely changes the meaning:

Phrase	Translation	Why
Lo hice por ti	I did it because of you / for your sake	Por = cause
Lo hice para ti	I did it for you (as a gift / benefit)	Para = recipient
Estudí por tres horas	I studied for three hours	Por = duration

El libro es para el lunes	The book is due Monday	Para = deadline
Caminé por el parque	I walked through / around the park	Por = movement through
Salgo para el parque	I'm leaving for the park	Para = destination
Compré flores por ella	I bought flowers because of her / on her behalf	Por = cause / on behalf of
Compré flores para ella	I bought flowers for her (she gets them)	Para = recipient

Exam Tip

When you see "**for**" in English, ask two questions before translating:

- 1. **Does it mean "because of", "in exchange for", or "through"?** 'Por
- 2. **Does it mean "in order to", "by (a deadline)", "destined for someone", or "headed to"?** 'Para

If you can replace "for" with "in order to" or "by (date)" '**para**. If you can replace it with "because of" or "through" '**por**.

Practice

Test yourself. Fill in the blank with **por** or **para**, then flip to check.

PRACTICE — POR VS PARA

Llegué tarde ___ el tráfico.

por — cause (because of the traffic)

Estudí ___ tres horas.

por — duration (for a length of time)

Necesito esto ___ el lunes.

para — deadline (by Monday)

Salgo ___ España mañana.

para — destination (heading to Spain)

Lo hice ___ ti. [you receive it as a gift]

para — recipient (it's for you)

Lo hice ____ ti. [you are the reason]

por — cause (because of you / for your sake)

Estudio ____ aprender.

para — purpose + infinitive (in order to learn)

Te llamo ____ teléfono.

por — means (by phone)

Trabajo ____ una empresa grande.

para — employment (I work for a company)

Caminamos ____ la playa.

por — movement through/along

Gracias ____ tu ayuda.

por — exchange/cause (thanks for your help)

Pagué cien dólares ____ la camisa.

por — exchange (in exchange for the shirt)

El vuelo sale ____ Londres a las seis.

para — destination (departing for London)

____ mí, el español es fácil.

para — opinion (in my opinion / for me)

Habló ____ todos nosotros.

por — on behalf of (he spoke for all of us)