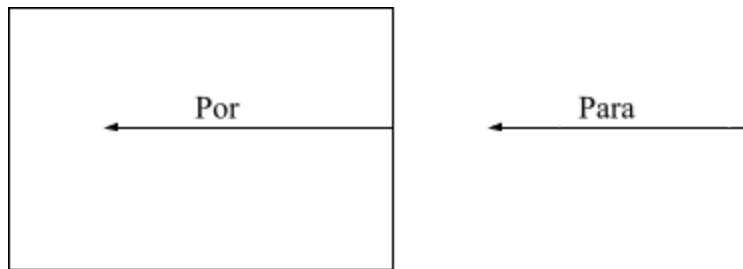


Por y Para

The prepositions *Por* and *Para* easily confuse most Spanish learners. This is because their English translations are incredibly confusing and misleading. For example, *both por and para* can be translated *for*. Despite this apparent similarity, these prepositions are used to express very different ideas.

It is important to understand their meaning from the Spanish perspective, and not from their English translations. Only through this perspective can we fully understand their meaning and use each one appropriately.

The best way I have heard this explained¹ is by imagining a box with two arrows. One arrow pointing towards the box from the outside and the other arrow from inside the box pointing towards its opposing side.



Por is then used to describe movement *through* the box or *beside* it. *Para*, on the other hand, is used to describe a movement *towards* the box, or in its direction. This comparison will be used when talking of different concepts, which we will discuss below.

Physical Space

The space in the box represents physical, geographical space.

Por here then means that you are moving *through* that space or *alongside* it.

Voy a viajar *por* Chile este verano.

I am going to travel through Chile this summer.

El avión voló *por* China.

The plane flew through China.

Ella caminó *por* la vereda.

She walked along the sidewalk.

Vamos a pasear *por* el parque.

Let's go for a walk around the park.

Está nevando *por* toda la ciudad.

It is snowing throughout the city.

¹ I first read this concept in Clark Zlotchew's book *Spanish in 24 hours*.

Para here means that you are moving *towards* that space, although we more commonly use *a* to express this.

Me voy *para* Chile este verano.
I am leaving for Chile this summer.
El avión se fue *para* China.
The plane left for China.
Nos vamos *para* el parque.
We are going to the park.

Time

Our box now represents a time frame.

Por now means that you are moving *through* that time frame.

Viví en Chile *por* dos años.
I lived in Chile for two years.
Estuvimos en el parque *por* una hora.
We were at the park for one hour.
Hablamos por teléfono *por* horas.
We talked on the phone for hours.
Nevó *por* dos días.
It snowed for two days.

Para, on the other hand, is used to express an arrow that is moving towards that time frame; the box is its destination. Something is supposed to happen at that time or by that time. This is similar to the English expression “due by”.

La tarea es *para* el viernes.
The homework is due Friday.
Quiero que lo hagas *para* las cinco.
I want you to do this by five.
¿*Para* cuándo está lista la comida?
When is the food going to be ready by?

Cause vs Goal

Why? And What for?

Para

The box is now a target with a bull's eye in the middle. Now the arrow is pointing to the bull's eye, speaking of a goal that we have in mind. We use *para* to speak of goals.

Aprendo español *para* hablar con mis amigos.
I am learning Spanish to speak with my friends.

El estudia *para* poder graduarse.

He studies so that he can graduate.

Nos despertamos temprano *para* ver el amanecer.

We wake up early to see the sunrise.

Por

To ask for the cause of an action you will need to use "¿por qué?" Instead of asking "what for?" you are asking "why?" You are speaking of the cause of the action instead of the goal of the action.

¿Por qué aprendes español?

Why are you learning Spanish?

¿Por qué te despiertas temprano?

Why do you wake up early?

¿Por qué estudia él?

Why does he study?

As you can guess, the answers to these questions may look incredibly similar to the ones we asked with "para". However, there is a slight difference. Imagine someone asking a prisoner in jail, "¿para qué estás acá?" This would be laughable. The prisoner is not there with a goal. Instead, one should ask "¿por qué estás acá?"

To answer "¿Por qué?", you will respond with either

- Porque before a conjugated verb (porque quiero ser una buena persona.)
- Por with an infinitive verb or a noun.

The other uses are not explainable with the arrows, and, unfortunately, you just have to know them.

More uses: *Por*

For Someone's Sake & On Someone's Behalf

For these instances we would use **por**. This can be understood with the most recent concept learned: doing something for someone's sake means that they are the cause of our action.

Examples:

El lo hizo *por* ella. He did it for her.

Ella le mintió a la policía *por* su esposo.

She lied to the police for her husband's sake.

Yo vine *por* mi esposa. I came on behalf of my wife.

Exchange

We also use *por* when speaking of exchange. Whether you exchange items or money. This can also be seen as a cause: one exchange is caused by the other.

Examples:

El me cambió su libro *por* el mío.
Pagué quince pesos *por* este anillo.

Instrument or Agent

Examples:

Fuimos *por* auto.
Me lo dijo *por* teléfono.
La cena fue cocinada *por* mi mamá.

Ambiguity about location

We use both *por* and *para* to express ambiguity about where we are going to (*para*) and where something is (*por*).

Examples:

Me fui *para* allá. I went somewhere over there.
El libro está *por* allá. The book is somewhere over there.

More uses: *Para*

"Considering that"

To use the phrase "considering that" we use *para* in Spanish.

Examples:

Para ser un animal, es muy inteligente.
Para ser bebé, es muy independiente.

Giving Opinions

Examples:

Para mí, es muy importante.
Para ella, es ridículo.