Por and Para both mean “for”, but they can be used in very different ways to mean a variety of things. It is important to learn the differences and know how to use each properly.

We’ll start with para, because it’s the simplest. Para is used for:

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

**Rule:** use/ purpose of a thing  
**Model:** El vaso es para agua.  
(The glass is for water.)

**Rule:** to mean "in order to"  
**Model:** Para hacer una ensalada, usa muchas verduras.  
(To make a salad, use a lot of veggies.)

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

**Rule:** deadline or specific time  
**Model:** Necesito el vestido para el lunes.  
(I need the dress by Monday.)

**Rule:** 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.)

Expressions using **por**:

**por ahora por fin por favor**  
for now finally please

**por aquí, allí por lo general por todas partes**  
around here/there generally everywhere

**¡por Dios! por lo menos por suerte**  
for heaven’s sake! at least luckily

**por ciento por lo tanto por cierto**  
percent consequently certainly

**por ejemplo por primera/última vez por completo**  
for example for the first/last time completely

**por eso por supuesto por dentro**  
therefore of course inside

**por la mañana/tarde/noche por las buenas o por las malas**

in the morning/afternoon/evening whether you like it or not

Por has a few more uses than para. Por is used for:

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

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

**Rule:** meaning "through," "along," or "by"  
**Model:** Andamos por el parque.  
(We walk through the park.)

**Rule:** an exchange

**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/distance  
**Model:** Yo estudié por dos horas.  
(I studied for two hours.)

**Rule:** 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:** 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:** to express cause or reason  
**Model:** El hombre murió por falta de agua.  
The man died for lack of water.

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

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 compró el regalo por María.

Juan bought the gift for Maria. Juan bought the gift for Maria.

(he bought it to give to her) (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? ¿Para qué estudias español?

For what reason do you study Spanish? For what purpose do you study Spanish?

Possible answer: Possible answer:

Porque es un requisito. Para ser profesor de español.

Because it's required. In order to become a Spanish teacher.

**A. Choose the correct preposition (por or para).**

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ eso, volvió tarde.  
(For that reason he returned late.)

2. El estudiante fue \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ el lápiz.  
(The student went for the pencil.)

3. Una casa cuesta \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ lo menos treinta mil dólares.  
(A house costs at least thirty thousand dollars.)

4. Llegué tarde \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ el tráfico.  
(I arrived late because of the traffic.)

5. ¿Tienes algo \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ mí?  
(Do you have something for me?)

6. Andrés tomó el avión \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Barcelona.  
(Andrés took the plane bound for Barcelona.)

7. La casa de piedra fue construida \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ los incas.  
(The stone house was built by the Incas.)

8. Los toros corren \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ las calles.  
(The bulls run through the streets.)

9. Lo hará \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ el lunes.  
(He will do it by Monday.)

10. Fidel habló \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ cuatro horas.  
(Fidel spoke for four hours.)

11. Vamos a la playa \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ nadar.  
(We go to the beach to swim.)

12. Te daré $50 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ tus pantalones.  
(I'll give you $50 for your pants.)

13. Me pagan dos veces \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ mes.  
(They pay me twice a month.)

14. Salgo \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Madrid.  
(I’m leaving for Madrid.)

15. ¿Me enviaste el dinero \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ correo?  
(Did you send me the money by mail?)

16. Pagué veinte dólares \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ la camisa.  
(I paid twenty dollars for the shirt.)

17. Me caí \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ el hielo.  
(I fell because of the ice.)

18. Ese libro es \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Manuel.  
(That book is for Manuel.)

19. Estudio \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ aprender.  
(I study in order to learn.)

20. El autobús va a 100 kilómetros \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ hora.  
(The bus goes 100 kilometers per hour.)

Answers:

1. por

2. por

3. por

4. por

5. para

6. para

7. por

8. por

9. para

10. por

11. para

12. por

13. por

14. para

15. por

16. por

17. por

18. para

19. para

20. por