

[Home](#)

ThoughtCo.

'Atrás' or 'Detrás'?

Common Adverbs Easy To Confuse

by [Gerald Erichsen](#)

Updated April 13, 2019

Although both *detrás* and *atrás* are [adverbs](#) that can be translated as "behind" and are often listed as synonyms, they tend to be used in different ways. *Atrás* tends to indicate motion backward, while *detrás* tends to refer to a place, but the distinction isn't always clear. Sometimes the choice of word is a matter of which "sounds better" rather than following some fixed rule.

That said, it is probably easier to explain these verbs by pointing out when you are most likely to hear them used. **Detrás** is most often used:

As *detrás de* to form a prepositional phrase meaning "behind," "in back of" or "after." *Está detrás de la casa.* (It is behind the house.) *Vinieron detrás de ella.* (They came after she did.)

In a figurative sense as *detrás de* to mean "behind." *Condenó a los políticos detrás de las protestas.* (He condemned the politicians behind the protests.) *El cuento detrás del cuento.* (The story behind the story.)

As *por detrás* to form a phrase meaning "from behind." *Se rieron de ella por detrás.* (They laughed at her from behind her back.)

In parts of Latin America, it is common to use *atrás de* where *detrás de* might be used in the examples above.

Atrás is most often used:

By itself or as *hacia atrás* to mean "backwards." *Fue atrás.* (He went backwards.) *Miró hacia atrás.* (He looked backwards.)

To mean "ago." *Comí cinco días atrás.* (I ate five days ago.)

With *dejar* to mean "leave behind." *Tim LaHaye escribió el libro Dejados atrás.* (Tim LaHaye wrote the book *Left Behind*.)

As an exclamation (*¡atrás!*) to mean "Get back!"

In preference to *detrás* when accompanied by a comparative term such as *más* or *menos*. *Otro edificio más atrás servía de oficina.* (Another building further back served as an office.)

