CUÁL VS QUÉ – WHEN TO USE "WHICH" AND "WHAT" IN SPANISH

It is true, it is undeniable that Spanish has many shortcuts and corners that can lead you to different destinations; one of the controversial ones is the one that brings us on this occasion: when to use ***"cuál"*** and when to use ***"qué"***?

At first glance, even a native Spanish speaker might say: how can you confuse these two words, they are completely different! And it's true, in their form they are different. Unlike *porque* vs *por qué* vs *porqué* (which we have already talked about) or *Que vs Qué* (which we may talk about later), the dilemma between *Cuál vs Qué* is not one of form (appearance, spelling) but of substance (uses). Both words share certain uses (objects, information, choices), but in different ways.

If we add to that the fact that you are always told that **"Qué"** means "What" and **"Cuál"** means "Which", the confusion might grow when you realize that in several occasions things are more complex than that simple translation.

Difference Between Cuál and Qué

Don't panic, sometimes native Spanish speakers confuse or use one instead of the other, it won't be the end of the world if you do. But if your purpose is to be a superior Spanish speaker, welcome! Let's talk a little bit about those subtle, but important differences between these two words. Shall we start with the biggest one (and the one that will help you understand the rest of the differences)?

Word	Means "What" with...	Means "Which" with...	Plural?	It is used before...
Qué	Choices, definitions, explanations.	Preferences and objects.	Never.	Nouns and verbs
Cuál/Cuáles	Personal information	Choices or objects identification	It is written "Cuál" or "Cuáles" depending on the noun.	Spain: verbs only Latin America: verbs and nouns

Choices with…

· "Qué"

Asking someone to choose using *Qué* has two options, the first is when you present a broad or undefined group to choose from (What), almost like an open-ended or generic question, in which case you should formulate it as follows:

[Qué + verb + complement]

For example:

Broad group: food

- ¿**Qué** debo comer para ganar músculo? – What should I eat to gain muscle?

Undefined group: activities

- ¿**Qué** harás al terminar la universidad? – What will you do when you finish college?

On the other hand, if the choice you pose is based on a particular object, but which is unknown to you or out of sight and which generally implies a preference (Which), you should say:

[Qué + noun + verb + complement]

For example:

- ¿**Qué** teléfono compró? – Which phone did he buy?
- ¿**Qué** moto te gusta más? – Which bike do you like best?

• "Cuál"

Unlike "Which", when you pose a choice using *"Cuál/Cuáles"* (Which) the options are narrowed down either because the other person knows them or because you mention these to them beforehand, in which case we optionally say the items to choose from before or after the question:

[*Cuál/Cuáles + conjugated verb*]
Or
[Cuál/Cuáles + de + group to choose from]

For example:

- Hay muchos colores, ¿**cuáles** prefieres para la invitación? – There are many colors, which ones do you prefer for the invitation?
- ¿**Cuál** de estos sombreros quieres? – Which of these hats do you want?

Now, let's suppose you want someone to choose between two or more objects that you both know or can see, but the choice is based more on the characteristics of those objects than on their subjectivity (preferences, desires), you would say:

[Cuál/Cuáles + conjugated verb + distinguishing feature]

For example:

- ¿**Cuál** posee Wi-Fi? – Which one has Wi-Fi?
- ¿**Cuáles** pesan menos? – Which ones weigh less?

If you are in Latin America, you will notice that the elections are approached a little differently, as they use something that is theoretically incorrect, which is:

[Cuál/Cuáles + noun]

As in:

- ¿Manga corta o larga? ¿**Cuál** camisa quieres? – Short or long sleeve? Which shirt do you want? (Preferences)
- ¿**Cuáles** hoteles aceptan tarjeta de crédito? – Which hotels accept credit cards? (Características)

Information with...

· "Qué" (What)

We enter the realm of the unknown, starting with definitions and meanings of that which we do not know. In that case, you can say:

[Qué + verb Ser conjugated + noun]
Or
[Qué + verb Significar conjugated + expression or noun]

For example:

- ¿**Qué** es la arepa? – What is arepa?
- ¿**Qué** significa "chévere"? – What does "chévere" mean?

Now, if the information you want to request is not precisely a definition, but an explanation, in that case you would say:

[Qué + conjugated verb + complement]

As in:

- ¿**Qué** hace funcionar un reloj? – What makes a watch work?
- ¿**Qué** sucedió ayer? – What happened yesterday?

· "Cuál" (What)

If the information you are asking for moves away from definitions/explanations and has more to do with the personal (name, phone, address, etc.) or the precise information, you should go to *"Cuál/Cuáles"*. This is how you will do it:

[Cuál / Cuáles + verb Ser conjugated + desired information]

For example:

- ¿**Cuáles** son tus apellidos? – What are your last names?
- ¿**Cuál** es tu número de teléfono? – What is your phone number?

A Brief Summary

We're almost done! I find it very helpful to see the information condensed, and I think this chart can help you when you want to formulate a question more quickly. Don't forget that when you make a question with the words qué or cuál /cuáles, they must have a tilde to mark that it is an interrogative. Now let's break down the qué and cuáles:

Use	Qué / Cuál	When?	Example	English
Choices	Qué	Large or undefined groups or unknown or unseen objects (based on preferences)	¿Qué comprarás en el supermercado? ¿Qué pizza pedimos?	What will you buy at the supermarket? Which pizza shall we order?
	Cuál/Cuáles	Small or known group, visible objects (based on characteristics)	Ambos me gustan, pero ¿cuál compro? ¿Cuál es deslactosada?	I like both, but which one do I buy? Which one is lactose-free?
Information	Qué	Meaning / definition / explanation	¿Qué significa "tacaño"? ¿Qué es una pastilla? ¿Qué hace un bombero?	What does "tacaño" mean? What is a pill? What does a fireman do?
	Cuál/Cuáles	Personal / specific information	¿Cuál es tu estatura? ¿Cuál es el tren a Tokio?	What is your height? What is the train to Tokyo?

Cuál vs Qué – Quiz/Worksheet

Let's review and see how you do.

1. ¿_____ es la edad de tu padre? – What is your father's age?

2. ¿_____ son exóticas? – Which ones are exotic?

3. ¿De _____ material está hecho ese auto? – What material is this car made of?

4. ¿ _____ de tus hermanos es el mayor? – Which of your siblings is the oldest?

5. ¿___ es el amor? – What is love?

Answers

Hey there. Welcome.

I'm Kéllyta Quijada - and I wrote this article.

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Remember that it is possible to make mistakes, but it is mandatory not to give up in practice, ready?

1. Cuál

2. Cuáles

3. Qué

4. Cuál

5. Qué