

1 Phrasal verbs: what are they and how are they used?

A What are phrasal verbs?

Phrasal verbs are verbs that consist of a verb and a particle (a preposition or adverb) or a verb and two particles (an adverb *and* a preposition, as in **get on with** or **look forward to**). They are identified by their grammar (more about that in Unit 2), but it is probably best to think of them as individual vocabulary items, to be learnt in phrases or chunks. They often – but not always – have a one-word equivalent. For example, you can **come across** a new phrasal verb or you can **encounter** it. You can **pick up** a language or you can **acquire** it. **Come across** and **pick up** sound less literary or formal than **encounter** or **acquire**.

B Why are phrasal verbs important?

Phrasal verbs are extremely common in English. They are found in a wide variety of contexts. You may have noticed them in songs, for example the Beatles' *I'll get by with a little help from my friends* or *Roll over Beethoven*, Bob Marley's *Get up, stand up* and Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Knock me down*. You find them in film titles such as *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Spirited Away*, *Along Came Polly* or *Cast Away*. They are very frequent in newspaper headlines. Here are just a few examples:

Country's misplaced pride
holds back its democracy

Cricket: England
holds out for a draw

Inquiry points
to a **cover-up**

Turner **adds up** likely cost of pensions

Phrasal verbs are common in less formal English, but you will also hear or see and need to use them in more formal contexts. Register is discussed in more detail in Unit 6.

C Which phrasal verbs does this book deal with?

This book is based on information gained from the Cambridge International Corpus (a huge computerised database of present-day English) about phrasal verbs and how they are used in contemporary English. It focuses on phrasal verbs more advanced students need to know – but in general does not deal with the verbs in the lower level *English Phrasal Verbs in Use Intermediate*. It includes phrasal nouns such as **standby** or **onset** (see Unit 3) and phrasal adjectives such as **outgoing** or **worn out** (see Unit 4).

D What can I do to help myself master phrasal verbs?

Try to think positively about them! And, now you are at a more advanced level, try not just to understand them but also to use them in your own speaking and writing.

Keep an eye open for them whenever you are reading anything in English and make a note of any interesting ones you find. Write them down in a complete phrase or a sentence to fix in your mind how they are used.

Be aware that one of the special features of phrasal verbs is that some of them have many different meanings – for example, you can **pick** something **up** from the floor, you can **pick up** a language or bad habits, the weather can **pick up**, you can **pick up** a bargain, a radio can **pick up** a signal, the economy can **pick up**, you can **pick up** a story where you left it, you can **pick** someone **up** in your car. Sometimes the meanings are clearly related, some being more literal and some more metaphorical. Unit 7 deals with this in more detail.

In this book we may not present all the meanings of the verbs that are included. You may find others in *English Phrasal Verbs in Use Intermediate* and there are still more in the *Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*.

Exercises

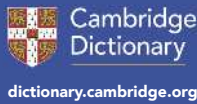
1.1 Underline the phrasal verbs in these texts. Remember the particle or preposition may not be immediately next to the verb.

- 1 I decided to take up gardening, so I took out a subscription to a gardening magazine and read up on the subject. I found out so many interesting things, such as the best time to plant flowers out for the summer and how to grow vegetables. I've really got into it now and spend hours in the garden every weekend.
- 2 The other day we went off on a hike in the mountains. We put our wet-weather gear on as the weather forecast wasn't good. We set off early to avoid the rush hour and soon reached the starting point for our walk. The whole walk took about four hours, and when we got back we were exhausted.
- 3 I have to catch up on my coursework this weekend as I've fallen behind a bit. I worked on it till midnight last night, but I still have loads to do. I have to hand one essay in on Tuesday and another one on Friday. I'm not sure whether I'll make it, but I'll try.

1.2 Choose the correct particle to finish these song titles.

- 1 Can't get you *off from / out of / away from* my head (Kylie Minogue)
- 2 Hold you *against / down / at* (Jennifer Lopez)
- 3 We can work it *with / across / out* (The Beatles)
- 4 Send *from / in / with* the clowns (Barbra Streisand)

1.3 Complete the sentences in the right-hand column with a phrasal noun or adjective based on the phrasal verbs in the left-hand column. Use a dictionary if necessary, and remember that the particle may come at the beginning or end of the noun or adjective.



1	The school took in some outstanding students last year.	Last year's included some outstanding students.
2	Some prisoners broke out of the local prison last night.	There was a(n) at the local prison last night.
3	It was an experience that put everyone off.	It was a(n) experience.
4	She always speaks out and gives her opinion.	She is very
5	A lorry which had broken down was blocking the road.	A lorry was blocking the road.

1.4 Match the headlines with the sentences from the stories.

- 1 BIG SHAKE-UP EXPECTED IN EDUCATION
- 2 MINISTER DENIES COVER-UP
- 3 LOCKOUT CONTINUES AT AVIATION PLANT
- 4 BREAKAWAY GROUP TO FORM NEW PARTY
- 5 POWER PLANT SHUTDOWN LEAVES 5,000 HOMES IN DARKNESS

- a) The dispute is now in its fifth week.
- b) Unity was no longer possible, a spokesperson said.
- c) The event happened at 7.45 p.m. with no warning.
- d) There will be major changes at all levels.
- e) There was no attempt to hide the truth, claimed Pamela Harding.

2 Grammar of phrasal verbs

A Phrasal verbs with and without objects

Some phrasal verbs take an object (transitive); others do not take an object (intransitive).

with object (transitive)	no object (intransitive)
They're knocking down the old hotel.	The path branched off ¹ to the river.
The plumber soon sorted out the shower problem.	The noise of the train died away .
She tied her hair back so she could swim faster.	In the winter the lake froze over .

¹ if a road or path branches off, it goes in another direction

Some verbs can be used both with and without an object, but the meaning may change. Use the context to decide if the verb has a different meaning from the one you are familiar with.

- Polly and Beth were so clever the teacher **moved** them **up** to a higher class. (with object)
- Polly and Beth **moved up** to a higher class. (no object = same meaning)
- I can **drop** you **off** at the station. (with object = drive you somewhere and leave you there)
- I was sitting in the armchair and I **dropped off**. (no object = fell asleep, different meaning)

Some verbs must have two objects, one after the verb and one after the particle.

- I always **associate** that song **with** our holiday in Jamaica.
- Playing tennis for three hours every evening after school **deprived** her **of** her youth.

B Position of the object

In many cases, the particle may come before or after the object.

- The teacher **marked** the student **down** / **marked down** the student because her bibliography wasn't up to standard.

Very long objects usually come after the particle.

- The accident **cut off** domestic and industrial water and electricity supplies.

When the object is a personal pronoun, the pronoun always comes before the particle.

noun object	personal pronoun object
I picked my parents up / picked up my parents and drove them to the airport.	I'll pick you up at 5.30. (Not: I'll pick up you at 5.30.)

Some verbs (sometimes called prepositional verbs) must have the object after the particle, even if it is a pronoun. A good dictionary will tell you if this is so.

- We've had to **contend with** a lot of problems lately. (Not: **contend** a lot of problems **with**) [deal with a difficult or unpleasant situation]

You probably already know some of these verbs (**look for**, **look after**, **cope with**).

C Three-part verbs

Some phrasal verbs have three parts – the verb and two particles. The object comes last.

- I will not **put up with** such bad behaviour. [tolerate]

Other examples include **look forward to**, **look down on**, **get on with**, **catch up on** [do something you did not have time to do earlier], **face up to** [accept that a difficult or unpleasant situation exists].

Exercises

2.1 Look at A. Do these sentences need an object? If they do, add an appropriate one in the correct place.

EXAMPLE Last summer we knocked down.

Yes. *Knock down* is transitive; it needs an object.

Last summer we knocked down the old shed in our garden.

- 1 The sound of the violin slowly died away.
- 2 If you're ready to leave now, I can drop off at your office.
- 3 The river in St Petersburg freezes over for several months each year.
- 4 My son is so good at English that I think the teacher should move up to the advanced class.
- 5 I associate with that evening we spent together in Rome.
- 6 I was so tired that I dropped off in front of the TV.

2.2 Put the words in the correct order to make sentences. If you can do it in two different ways, then do so.

- 1 pick / off / you / work / the / I / and / can / at / you / from / airport / up / drop / then
- 2 from / that / put / teacher / she / The / not / would / said / with / such / up / class / rudeness / her
- 3 villages / The / off / several / have / mountains / in / cut / the / floods
- 4 your / doesn't / the / improve / down / If / will / spelling / mark / examiners / you
- 5 always / Margot / to / with / all / seems / her / cheerfully / problems / cope

2.3 Rewrite each sentence using the verb in brackets in an appropriate form.

- 1 I'll have to ask my daughter to get my Internet connection working. (SORT)
- 2 I was so tired after work that I fell asleep in the train on the way home. (DROP)
- 3 I was given a lower mark because my essay was over the word limit. (MARK)
- 4 Jason has no right to despise me – he's no better than I am. (LOOK)
- 5 Lara doesn't have a good relationship with one of her flatmates. (GET)
- 6 You have to accept the fact that you will probably never see each other again. (FACE)
- 7 Maria has got a new job taking care of an old lady. (LOOK)
- 8 If you don't let the children get enough sleep, they won't be able to concentrate at school. (DEPRIVE)
- 9 In Lapland we had to manage in some difficult driving conditions. (CONTEND)
- 10 The road to our house leaves the main road just after the service station. (BRANCH)

2.4 Write answers to these questions using the phrasal verb in brackets.

- 1 What are your plans for the summer holidays? (LOOK FORWARD TO)
- 2 What homework have you got to do this weekend? (CATCH UP ON)
- 3 If you've been away somewhere by train and arrive back late, how do you usually get home from the station? (PICK UP)
- 4 What is your favourite album and why do you like it? (ASSOCIATE WITH)
- 5 What sorts of things make you feel stressed? (CONTEND WITH)
- 6 How easy do you find it to fall asleep at night? (DROP OFF)

Over to you

Look up these verbs in your dictionary: *associate with*, *deprive of*, *contend with* and *face up to*. How does your dictionary give information about the structures that these verbs require? What nouns do these verbs typically combine with according to the examples in your dictionary?

3 Phrasal nouns

A What are phrasal nouns?

Like phrasal verbs, phrasal nouns consist of a verb combined with a particle. The particle may come before or after the verb.

phrasal noun	meaning	example
standby	ready to be used if necessary	My wife’s a pilot and she’s on standby over the weekend. We’re keeping the old equipment as a standby , in case of emergencies.
letdown	disappointment	I had been looking forward to the concert for weeks, but it turned out to be a terrible letdown .
back-up	support	Nicholas can provide technical back-up if you need it.
warm-up	preparation	The comedian who did the warm-up for the studio audience before the TV programme started was excellent.
onset	start (of something unpleasant)	The match was halted by the onset of torrential rain.
input	contribution	Try to come to the meeting – we’d value your input .
overkill	more of something than is needed	Shall I add some more decorations to the cake or would that be overkill ?

Some such nouns have a corresponding phrasal verb, but some don’t. For example, there is no phrasal verb ~~to kill over~~. The phrasal verb **set on** exists but it means attack. The verb related to **onset** is **set in**: We couldn’t continue playing after the rain **set in**.

If the particle is in first place, then the phrasal noun is never written with a hyphen. If the particle comes second, then there is sometimes a hyphen between the two parts of the phrasal noun, particularly if that particle is *in* or *up* or if the phrasal noun is relatively infrequent, e.g. **walk-on** [small part, with no words, in a play], **stand-off**.

B When are phrasal nouns used?

Phrasal nouns are used frequently in newspapers and informal conversation.

STOWAWAY¹ FOUND ON PLANE

STAND-OFF² IN TRADE TALKS

WALKOUT³ AT CAR FACTORY

SINGER STAGES A COMEBACK

BREAKDOWN IN STRIKE TALKS

MANAGEMENT BUYOUT FOR HIGH STREET CHAIN

HELP FOR BUSINESS START-UPS

MILITARY BUILD-UP⁴ CONTINUES

¹ person hiding in order to travel
² failure to reach agreement

³ strike
⁴ increase in size or strength

Annie Who do you think will get the job – Paul or Elsa?

Finn I don’t know. It’s a **toss-up**.
[(informal) both seem equally likely]

Lily Did you have a good time at football last night?

David Yes, but we didn’t have a real game, just a **knockabout**.

Tip

The stress is on the first syllable in these nouns regardless of whether this is the verb or the particle.

Exercises

3.1 Complete these sentences using a phrasal noun from A opposite.

- 1 The of winter meant that there was less food for the animals and birds.
- 2 I thought having a 45-piece orchestra at their wedding really was , personally.
- 3 The police officer radioed for before entering the bank.
- 4 Let's ask Joel what he thinks. I always find his very useful in these matters.
- 5 TV producers find that studio audiences react better if they have a to watch before a live programme.
- 6 Our holiday in the Mediterranean was a bit of a The hotel was second-rate and the food was awful.
- 7 Although Cameron usually rides his new road bike to school now, he's kept his old bike as a

3.2 Rewrite these sentences, starting with the cues given, using phrasal nouns from the opposite page instead of the underlined words.

- 1 Two men who had stowed away in the container were arrested when police opened it.
The police opened the container and
- 2 Negotiations with union members broke down after a couple of hours.
There was a
- 3 The management bought out the company in 2014.
There was a
- 4 Last night all the workers walked out and the factory was forced to close.
There was a
- 5 Military forces are continuing to build up on both sides of the border.
The military

3.3 Correct the mistakes with the phrasal nouns in these sentences.

- 1 There has been a stand-up for several days now in the talks between the government and the rebels. Neither side will make any concessions.
- 2 Last year there were 15,000 new Internet business start-offs, most of which only survived for a few months.
- 3 After years without releasing an album, Madeleine Flame has staged a comeagain with her new collection of love songs.

- 4

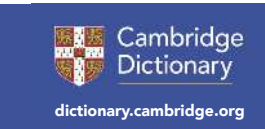
Holly Have you decided where you're going this summer?

Flora Not really. It's a toss-over whether it'll be Italy or Greece.

- 5 I met Nasser and we just had a knockover on the college football pitch for half an hour.

3.4 Choose the correct phrasal noun in each sentence. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- 1 Putout / Output has increased this year and the factory is doing well.
- 2 One of the robbers acted as lookout / outlook while the others robbed the bank.
- 3 There was a sudden pourdown / downpour and we all got very wet.
- 4 The breakout / outbreak of war in 1914 changed Europe for ever.
- 5 Lift-off / Off-lift is scheduled for 07.00 on Friday and the astronauts will arrive at the space station later that day.
- 6 There was a break-in / an in-break at our office last night. Two computers were stolen.




4 Phrasal adjectives

Some phrasal verbs have related adjectives. Make a note of these as you meet them.

phrasal verb	adjective	meaning	example
go on	ongoing	one which continues	We've had an ongoing problem with the computer system.
wear out	worn out	weak, damaged through much use	She was wearing old, worn-out shoes.
break down	broken-down	one that has stopped working	In our garage we've got an old broken-down fridge.


However, this is not the case for all such adjectives. We can say 'that way of thinking is very **outdated**', but there is no related verb ~~to date out~~; we can say 'the restaurant was really **overpriced**', but there is no phrasal verb ~~to price over~~ (the verb is 'to overprice').

Note the phrasal adjectives in these extracts from people talking about their dreams and ambitions.




I'm an **outgoing** sort of person, so I want a career where I mix with people. To be honest, I find the idea of a desk job quite **off-putting**¹; I just don't think I'd like it at all. I'd love to do something new, something completely different.

¹ makes you not like it or not want to do it



I've always been very **outspoken**. I'm never afraid to express my opinion, so I think a job campaigning for an environmental organisation would suit me. I would never accept any **watered-down**² proposals and would make some very direct demands of our political leaders.

² made less strong in order to make more people agree with them



I always feel completely **tired out** at the end of the day in my present job and just want to sleep. Instead of feeling cheerful after a good weekend, I always feel quite **downcast**³ every Monday when the new week starts, so I want something new and more stimulating, preferably with a more **go-ahead** company which will bring interest and excitement into my work.

³ sad and depressed

Here are some more examples in small advertisements and announcements.

Forthcoming⁴ events at the City Stadium

Live-in nanny wanted for 3-year-old.

Caravan for sale: **built-in** fridge, freezer and satellite TV

⁴ happening in the near future

Fold-up picnic chair for sale. As new.

For rent, cosy one-room flat with **foldaway** bed. Ideal for student.

Tip

When you come across a phrasal adjective, check to see whether it has a 'matching' verb and, if so, learn the two together.

Exercises

4.1 Replace the adjective in each sentence with a phrasal adjective with the opposite meaning.

- 1 There was a new carpet on the stairs.
- 2 The newsletter has a list of recent activities at the tennis club.
- 3 What’s happened? You’re looking very cheerful!
- 4 Unlike her sister, Emily is very introverted.
- 5 I find the cover of this novel very attractive, don’t you?
- 6 It doesn’t matter what time of day it is, Polina always looks fresh.
- 7 We are not in the habit of going to such cheap restaurants.
- 8 When you meet my boss I think you’ll find her surprisingly uncommunicative.

4.2 What do these pictures show?

- 1 a chair
- 2 a car
- 3 a oven
- 4 a bed



4.3 Answer these questions about the words on the opposite page.

- 1 Can you think of one advantage and one disadvantage for parents of having a live-in nanny?
- 2 In what kind of room might it be particularly useful to have a foldaway bed?
- 3 What kind of job would not be suitable for a very outspoken person?
- 4 When might you want to give a watered-down version of something that happened to you?
- 5 What kind of job requires you to be outgoing?
- 6 What kind of problem tends to be ongoing?
- 7 What might you find off-putting if you are having a meal in a restaurant?
- 8 What sorts of things do you think are often overpriced?

4.4 Match the pairs of synonyms in the box below.

broken-down	candid	continuing	diluted	downcast	dynamic
exhausted	extrovert	forthcoming	future	go-ahead	miserable
not working	obsolete	off-putting	ongoing	outdated	outgoing
outspoken	repellent	shabby	tired-out	watered-down	worn out

4.5 Here are some more phrasal adjectives. Work out from the context what they mean and rewrite the sentences replacing the underlined words with a word or phrase that means the same.

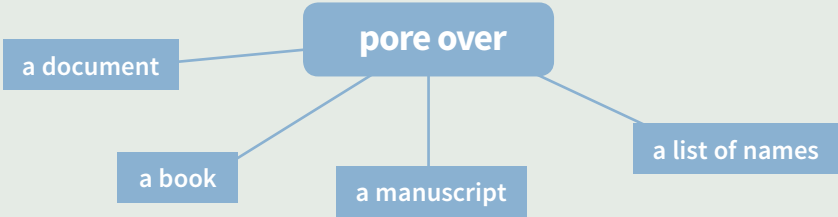
- 1 If the union doesn’t accept our terms, what should we have as our fallback position?
- 2 Clara always feels left out when her brother’s friends come round to play.
- 3 Julian is usually chatty but his sister is not very forthcoming.
- 4 You shouldn’t get so worked up about every little thing.
- 5 Zack met me at the airport with outstretched arms.

5 Collocation and phrasal verbs

A Why is collocation important?

Collocation means the way words combine with one another. When learning a phrasal verb, it is important to note what kinds of words the verb is typically used with. For example, can it be used for both people and things, or only for people, or only for things? Is it typically used with negative things or can it be used for both positive and negative things?

Look at this chart for the verb **pore over** [study or look carefully at something] and note how the objects it is used with refer especially to books or documents.



Making a note of collocations in this way will help you remember the meaning of the phrasal verb. It is a good idea to learn the verb and its typical collocations as chunks of language. This will help you to speak and write more fluently.

B Collocations with positive or negative/problematic things

Make a note if a phrasal verb collocates especially with positive or negative things.

☒ typical/correct collocation ☒ untypical/wrong collocation

The plan was **riddled with** problems ☒ good ideas ☒.

The rain ☒ The traffic ☒ The fine weather ☒ has **eased off/up** now.

After hours of discussion, we **hit on** a good idea ☒ the solution ☒ a stupid plan ☒.

C Collocations with objects denoting people or things

Make a note if a phrasal verb collocates especially with objects denoting people or things, or both.

I've really **gone off** Sienna ☒ cheese ☒ recently.

I'd advise you to **keep in with** the boss ☒ Andrew ☒ the exam system ☒.

D Collocations with subjects denoting people or things

Make a note if a phrasal verb collocates especially with subjects denoting people or things, or both.

As we opened the door, **water streamed into** the room. ☒

People were streaming into the meeting. ☒

I have to dash off. I have a meeting in ten minutes. ☒

The car dashed off along the motorway. ☒ [**headed off / drove off at high speed** would be more typical]

E Collocations with particular situations

Make a note of particular situations a phrasal verb typically refers to.

He just **sailed through** his exams ☒ the interview ☒ his breakfast ☒. [**sail through** is used with challenging things and situations]

I was always **hankering after** an easier life ☒ sweet food while I was on a diet ☒ passing my exams ☒. [**hanker after** is most often used with things we cannot or should not have]

Exercises

5.1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 What does the word *collocation* mean?
- 2 Which of these are correct collocations?
 - a) pore over a book
 - b) pore over a view
 - c) pore over a manuscript
 - d) pore over a flower
 - e) pore over a list of names
- 3 What do the nouns that collocate with *pore over* have in common?
- 4 Why is it helpful to learn phrasal verbs in collocations?
- 5 What sorts of things might you note down about what a phrasal verb collocates with?

5.2 Do the sentences below show appropriate collocations or not?

- 1 When we took our old dog to the vet, she discovered he was riddled with disease.
- 2 The pain in his leg seems to be beginning to ease off now.
- 3 You can always rely on Joseph to hit on an idea that will never work.
- 4 I used to enjoy that TV series but I've gone off it a bit now.
- 5 It's usually a good idea to keep in with your bank account.

5.3 Complete these sentences using the correct particles.

- 1 There is no point in hankering your lost youth.
- 2 When her housemate rang to say that water was streaming the basement, Maria dashed to the station to catch a train home.
- 3 I always find job interviews really difficult, but my brother seems to sail them.
- 4 We'll have to cut down that tree – it's riddled disease.
- 5 When my sister was pregnant she drank a lot of milk, but she completely went tea and coffee.
- 6 Liam was bullied a bit when he started school, but it seems to have eased now.
- 7 You should apologise to Juliette's mother. It's sensible to keep your future in-laws.

5.4 Rewrite each sentence using the verb in brackets in an appropriate form.

- 1 Helena easily passed her driving test. (SAIL)
- 2 I really don't like coffee any more. (GO)
- 3 The wind is less strong than it was now. (EASE)
- 4 If I have a problem, I find a walk by the sea often helps me to find a solution. (HIT)
- 5 Masses of people entered the shop as soon as it opened, hoping to find a bargain in the sale. (STREAM)
- 6 There are a lot of holes in his argument. (RIDDLE)

Over to you

Look back at any other phrasal verbs you have recently written in your vocabulary notebooks. Write them down in some typical collocations. You will find these in the example sentences of a good dictionary, e.g. the *Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*.