

1 Phrasal verbs: the basics

A What are phrasal verbs?

Phrasal verbs are verbs that consist of a verb and a particle.

verb	particle	example	meaning
look	up	You can look up any new words in your dictionary.	You can find the meaning of any new words in your dictionary.
go	through	I will go through your application form with you.	I will carefully read your application form and discuss it with you to make sure that it is correct.
make	out	I just can't make Jake out at all.	I just can't understand Jake's behaviour.

Particles are small words which you already know as prepositions or adverbs. Here are some of the most common phrasal verb particles:

about (a)round at away back down for in into off on out over through to up

B What do I need to know about phrasal verbs?

First you need to know the meaning of the whole phrasal verb as a unit. The Mini dictionary in this book will help you. For example, **look** means to use your eyes and **up** means the opposite of down, but the phrasal verb **look up** can have several different meanings:

Look the word **up** in the dictionary. [**look up** = search for information in a book/computer]

I'll **look you up** next time I'm in London. [**look up** = visit someone you have not seen for a long time]

Things are **looking up**. [**look up** = improve]

Next you need to know the grammar patterns of phrasal verbs, e.g. whether the verb takes an object. The table shows the way the grammar patterns are shown in this book and in many dictionaries. Note that *sth* means 'something'; *sb* means 'someone'.

grammar pattern	comment	example
eat out	the verb is used without an object	We were too tired to cook at home so we decided to eat out . [eat in a restaurant] Not: We decided to eat out a meal.
bring back sth or bring sth back	the verb must have a non-human object	This photograph brings back happy memories . [makes me remember or think about something from the past] Not: This photograph brings back my sister.
ask out sb or ask sb out	the verb must have a human object	I'd love to ask Poppy out . [invite Poppy to go to a place like a cinema or a restaurant] Not: I'd love to ask my dog out.
look after sb/sth	the object can be either human or non-human	I'll look after the baby while you're cooking. Will you look after my plants while I'm away?
ring sb back	the object must come before the particle	I'll ring you back later. [phone you again] Not: I'll ring back you.
look after sb/sth	the object must come after the particle	Can you look after the cat while I'm away? Not: Can you look the dog after while I'm away?
drop off sb/sth or drop sb/sth off	the object can be before or after the particle	I dropped off the present at her house. [delivered/left] I dropped the present off at her house.

Exercises

1.1 Underline the 11 phrasal verbs in these sentences.

- I sent off the order last week but the goods haven't turned up yet.
- I came across an interesting book in the university library and noted down the title.
- The starter motor was playing up and the car broke down when we stopped at the service station.
- I brought up this item at the last meeting. It's really time to sort out the problem.
- I wish he'd stop messing us about! He's put the meeting off three times and now he wants to call it off altogether.

1.2 Match the 11 phrasal verbs from sentences 1–5 in exercise 1.1 above with their meanings from the box below.

cause inconvenience	deal with	stop working	find	arrive	mail	cancel
write	postpone	not work properly	mention			

1.3 Decide which of these sentences contain errors. Explain why they are wrong and suggest a correct answer. Use the table in B to help you.

- That song you just sang brings back memories of my days at college.
- She looked the children after when their mother was in hospital.
- I promised to ring my brother back. He called earlier when I was busy.
- We ate out a wonderful dinner last night.
- It was a beautiful summer evening so I asked the cat out for a drink.

1.4 Sometimes phrasal verbs are followed by a particular preposition to make three-part verbs. Try to learn these prepositions with the phrasal verbs. Look at these examples of three-part verbs, and then complete the sentences below with a preposition from the box. Use a dictionary or the Mini dictionary at the back of this book if necessary.

EXAMPLES I'm **looking forward to** the weekend.
 She's been **going out with** him for six months now.

with	against	with	on	with
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- She seems to **look down** people who are less intelligent than her.
- To save money, the company decided to **do away** free parking for staff.
- I **came up** a serious problem when I tried to save my work.
- How can some students **get away** doing no work and yet pass the exams?
- Her son is so horrible. I don't know how she **puts up** him.

That's not what I meant when I said, 'Can you drop me off at the beach, please?!'



2 The meaning of phrasal verbs

A The most common verbs

Here are the most common verbs that form part of phrasal verbs:

break	bring	call	come	cut	get	give	go	keep	knock
look	make	pass	pick	pull	put	run	set	take	turn

Units 6–12 deal with a selection of these verbs which form a large number of useful, everyday phrasal verbs.

B Meanings

The basic meanings of the verbs in A refer to concrete actions (e.g. *break* means separate into pieces), but when they are part of phrasal verbs, they often have abstract meanings too. Sometimes the concrete meaning can help you guess the abstract meaning, for example, you can **look back** to wave goodbye to someone as you leave in a car (concrete meaning – look behind you), or you can **look back** on your past life (abstract meaning – remember or recall).

verb	concrete meaning	abstract meaning
give	I gave my worksheet in at the end of the lesson. [handed it to the teacher]	Her parents finally gave in and let her go to the party. [agreed to something they had refused before]
get	She got on the bus. [entered]	Leo and Ella don't get on . [don't like each other and are not friendly to each other]
come	Would you like to come round this evening? [come to my home]	He was unconscious for three hours but came round in hospital. [became conscious again]

C Synonyms of phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb can often be replaced by a single verb with more or less the same meaning. The single-verb synonyms are often, but not always, more formal (see Unit 5, section C).

phrasal verb	single-verb synonym
put off	postpone
take off	remove
turn up	arrive

less formal	more formal
Let's put off the meeting until Friday.	Let's postpone the meeting until Friday.
Please take off your shoes when you enter the temple.	Please remove your shoes when you enter the temple.
Everyone turned up on time for the meeting.	Everyone arrived on time for the meeting.

Tip

If you know a single-verb synonym of a phrasal verb, write it in your vocabulary notebook and note whether or not the phrasal verb is more informal.

Exercises

2.1 Complete these sentences using verbs from the list in A opposite.

- The car b..... down on the way to the airport.
- It took him a long time to g..... over his illness.
- It isn't easy to learn German but you must k..... on trying.
- If you'd like a lift to the station tomorrow, I can p..... you up at 9 a.m.
- Please t..... off your phones. The performance is about to begin.
- The heavy snow blocked the roads and c..... the farm off completely.



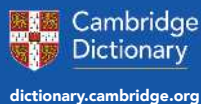
2.2 In which of the sentences in exercise 2.1 above could you put the particle in a different position?

2.3 Decide whether the phrasal verbs in these sentences are concrete or abstract in meaning, by writing C for concrete or A for abstract in the brackets.

EXAMPLE He looked up (C) and saw a hot-air balloon in the sky.

- I would never go against () my parents' wishes.
- Shall I cut out () this recipe from the food magazine? It looks good and is quick and easy to make.
- About five miles into our journey the engine cut out () and we broke down () completely. It was over an hour before the rescue service turned up ().
- Do we need to dress up () tonight or is it informal?
- I shall never really appreciate what people went through () during the war.

2.4 Replace the underlined verbs in these sentences with phrasal verbs made using the verbs and particles from the boxes below. If necessary, use the Mini dictionary at the end of this book.



dictionary.cambridge.org

make chase brush leave fall

up for out aside out

- They just ignored my complaints; it made me very angry.
- I believed his story about having lost all his money. How stupid I was!
- I couldn't understand what he was saying with all the noise.
- Could you pursue Emily's report? She promised it last week but I haven't seen it yet.
- If you are phoning from outside the country, omit the first zero in the city code.

2.5 Use more formal equivalents from the box instead of the phrasal verbs in these sentences. Write the formal verbs in the correct form.

decline issue organise cancel escape

- The government have put out a statement condemning the recent protests.
- The union accepted the new pay deal and called off the strike.
- The number of people not owning a smartphone nowadays has gone down dramatically.
- There was a disturbance in Blackmoor Prison yesterday and three prisoners got away.
- Could you see to lunch for our visitors? There will be four of them.

3 Particles in phrasal verbs

This unit looks at the role of particles in phrasal verbs. A particle is either a preposition (e.g. from, to, with) or an adverb (e.g. out, up, about). You can create phrasal verbs by adding different particles to a basic verb.

A What do particles mean?

In some phrasal verbs the particle has a clear basic meaning. Look at the examples of different particles used with the verb *invite*. On the right, you can see what the original speaker probably said.

Jack invited me out .	▶ Jack Let's go out together.
Rosie invited me in .	▶ Rosie Please come in!
Molly invited me over .	▶ Molly Come to our place.
Alex invited me round .	▶ Alex Come to my house for dinner or a drink.
James invited me up .	▶ James Come upstairs to my flat.
Mia invited me along .	▶ Mia Come with us!
Stan invited me back .	▶ Stan Come back home with me.

B What other meanings can particles have?

Most particles convey a number of different senses. For example, *over* can have various meanings, including:

- changing position, e.g. in **fall over** [fall to the ground] or **move over** [change the place where you are sitting or standing to make room for someone else].
- an idea of thoroughness, e.g. in **read over** [read thoroughly] or **talk over** [discuss something thoroughly before making a decision].

The meanings of particles are looked at in more detail in Units 13–21.

C Where does the particle go?

With verbs that have an object:

- Sometimes the particle has to go *before* the object of the verb, e.g. I'm **looking for** my keys (not: ~~I'm looking my keys for~~).
- Sometimes it must go *after* the object, e.g. I **have** a lot of work **on** (not: ~~I have on a lot of work~~).
- Sometimes the particle may go either *before* or *after* the object, e.g. The thunder **woke up** the children *or* The thunder **woke** the children **up**.

Note that if the object is a pronoun (e.g. him, them), then the particle must go *after* it, e.g. The thunder **woke** them **up** (not: ~~The thunder woke up them~~).

Exercises

3.1 Look at section A and then answer the questions about these sentences.

- My brothers were going to the cinema and they asked me along.
Did the speaker go to the cinema on her own, with her brothers or do we not know for sure?
- When I took Ruby a birthday present, she asked me in but I had to get to my lecture.
Did the speaker go into Ruby's house?
- When I saw George on the balcony, he asked me up.
Who was in a higher position, George or the speaker?
- When the Richardsons asked me back after the concert I was happy to accept.
Where did the speaker go after the concert?
- My cousin has asked me to go over to his flat this evening.
What word could replace *over* with no change in meaning?

3.2 Look at B opposite. Are the phrasal verbs underlined in the sentences below examples of the (a) or the (b) meanings of *over*?

- Think it over before you make up your mind what to do next.
- You may turn over the page now and read the exam questions.
- It's raining too hard to drive. Pull over to the edge of the road.
- Look over your answers before the end of the exam.

3.3 Look at C opposite. Then read these definitions and decide whether the sentences below are correct or incorrect. If necessary, correct them.

have on has, having, had

have sth on to have an arrangement to do something (never in continuous tenses)

have sb on to persuade someone that something is true when it is not, usually as a joke

have on sth or have sth on if you have clothes or shoes on, you are wearing them (never in continuous tenses; never passive)

- I have on three important meetings tomorrow.
- John has an amazing tie on.
- Sue was only having on her sisters when she told them she was planning to become a model.
- I'm having a lot of work on today.
- I don't believe you! I'm sure you're having me on.
- Lola was wearing her new jeans this morning and she had on them yesterday.

3.4 Put the words in the correct order to make sentences.

- to / you / for / make room / Can / move / over / your sister?
- finished / she / over. / Harry / it / to read / When / her essay, / asked / Daisy
- his house / tomorrow. / Luke / back / me / has invited / to
- when he / Max / his driving test. / his parents / he'd failed / only having / was / told them / on
- tomorrow? / What / you / on / do / have
- the light / in her bedroom, / was / she / at home. / Eva / had / I knew / on / so

4

Nouns and adjectives based on phrasal verbs

A Nouns made from verb + particle

In English we often create nouns from verbs, e.g. *to invite / an invitation*. In the same way it is sometimes possible to create a noun from a phrasal verb. Look at these examples.

Tom I got **ripped off** when I phoned that 0877 number [informal: was charged too much].
The call cost five pounds a minute!

Lily Yes, those numbers are a big **rip-off**.

Grace Her son **dropped out** of college last year. [gave up his course]

Ed Mm. There were a lot of **dropouts** that year. I wonder why?

Oliver Somebody **broke in** last night and stole a computer from the school. [entered by force to steal something]

Isla Really? That's the second **break-in** this year!

Rules for the use of verb + particle noun forms

- The plural is formed by adding -s to the particle, not the verb, e.g. **break-ins**, **dropouts**, **rip-offs** (not: ~~breaks in~~, ~~dropouts~~, ~~rips-off~~)
An exception is **goings-on** [strange or amusing events], which is always plural.
There was a lot of gossip about the **goings-on** at the office party.
- Verb + particle noun forms are sometimes written with a hyphen, e.g. **break-in**, **check-in**, **cover-up**; and sometimes without, e.g. **dropout**, **checkout**, **crackdown**.
Nouns with -out and -over are usually written as one word, e.g. **dropout**, **lookout**, **checkout**, **handout**, **changeover**, **leftovers**.
Nouns with -in, -up and less common particles usually have a hyphen, e.g. **lie-in**, **mix-up**, **put-down**, **run-through**.
- In pronunciation, the stress is on the verb, not the particle.
a **BREAK**-in at the office college **DROP**outs

B Nouns made from particle + verb

Some phrasal verbs have noun forms where the particle is first. The stress in pronunciation is usually on the particle.

phrasal verb	particle + verb noun	example
set out	outset	I knew from the outset that there would be problems. [beginning]
fall down	downfall	The economic crisis caused the downfall of the government. [sudden failure or end]
look on	onlooker	Crowds of onlookers watched as the police arrested the man. [someone who watches an event but doesn't take part]

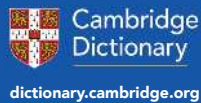
C Adjectives

There are also adjectives which are based on phrasal verbs. Make a note of any you meet.

e.g. a **broken-down** vehicle [vehicle whose engine had stopped working] a **breakdown** vehicle [vehicle which helps drivers who have broken down] **blocked-up** drains [drains where the water cannot flow properly]

Exercises

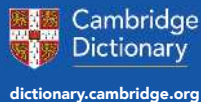
4.1 Complete the following table. If a noun form does not exist, write 'none' in the table. Use a dictionary if necessary. Decide whether the noun is written with a hyphen or as one word.



phrasal verb	verb + particle noun
show off	show-off
warm up	
hold on	
hide out	
turn over	
tear down	



4.2 Circle the correct noun form in these sentences. Use a dictionary if necessary.



- There was a big pile-up / up-pile on the motorway involving five vehicles.
- The government has announced a series of backcuts / cutbacks in funding for universities in order to save money.
- When the higher taxes were announced, there was a public outcry / cryout.
- Several standerbys / bystanders did nothing while the thieves robbed him of his cash.
- The new drug marks a throughbreak / breakthrough in the treatment of cancer.

4.3 Complete these sentences with adjective forms of phrasal verbs from the box below.

throwaway outgoing bygone getaway off-putting

- The robbers abandoned their car in a car park near the airport.
- I find his manner very He's so unfriendly.
- They decided to use paper plates and cups for their party.
- Let's invite Alice – she's very and loves parties.
- The pictures of the steam trains were like something from a era.

4.4 Write down the infinitive form of the phrasal verbs from which the adjectives in exercise 4.3 above are formed.

4.5 Match the sentences on the left with a suitable response on the right.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 I was looking for a way to turn off the air conditioning. | I know, I need to watch my outgoings. |
| 2 Have you heard about the scandal in the office? | Yes, but I don't understand the input. |
| 3 The economy is not doing so well these days. | The on/off switch is in the hall. |
| 4 A database can organise all the information you type into it. | Yes, there's been a downturn. |
| 5 You have to consider how much you spend each month. | Mm, amazing goings-on! |

5 Metaphor and register

A Multiple meanings of phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb can have a number of different meanings, e.g.

He **got on** the bus.
[entered the bus]

get on

Liam and Toby **get on** really well.
[like each other and are friendly]

Shh! I'm trying to **get on** with my work.
[continue doing my work]

Often there is no direct connection between the various meanings and you just have to learn each different meaning of the phrasal verb. The best way to do this is by trying to remember a sentence using the phrasal verb.

B Literal and metaphorical meaning

Sometimes the basic meanings of a phrasal verb and the additional meanings are clearly linked. This is because some additional meanings are based on a metaphor or image which has a direct connection with its literal or basic meaning. A metaphor is a way of expressing something by comparing it with something else that has similar characteristics. Here is an example:



Sometimes a phrasal verb exists as a phrasal verb only in the metaphorical meaning, but you can guess what it means from the meaning of the basic verb without the particle. For example:

These statistics look strange. Have we **slipped up** somewhere?

Here **slip up** [make a mistake] clearly comes from **slip** [fall usually because the floor is wet or the ground is icy].

C Register

Another important aspect of phrasal verbs is register. Phrasal verbs are typical of spoken English or informal writing, e.g. letters to friends and articles in popular journalism. There are often one-word equivalents, or synonyms, for use in a more formal spoken or written style. For example: **miss out** a question or **omit** a question. See section 2C in Unit 2 for other examples.

As with all English vocabulary, there are some different uses from one geographical area to another. For example, British, American and Australian users of English all talk of **clearing up** a room [putting things away tidily], but only British and Australian speakers would use **tidy up** as a synonym.

See Unit 69 for more examples of how phrasal verbs differ in North America and Australia.

Exercises

5.1 Match the different meanings a–f of *take in* with the appropriate sentences 1–6 below.

- a) make smaller
 - b) allow in through a hole
 - c) deceive
 - d) give a bed to
 - e) include
 - f) understand the meaning or importance
- 1 Because so many passengers were stranded at the airport, some local families offered to take them in overnight.
 - 2 The news is so shocking – I still can't take it in.
 - 3 The excursion will take in two of the most beautiful castles in the region.
 - 4 Maria has lost weight – she's going to have to take in a lot of her clothes.
 - 5 Alfie was totally dishonest, but he was so charming that I was taken in by him.
 - 6 We'd better return to the shore at once – the boat seems to be taking in water.

5.2 These pairs of sentences show phrasal verbs which can be used in both literal and metaphorical ways. Explain the two meanings and the connection between them.

- 1 a) I **stepped in** a puddle of water and my feet are soaking now.
 b) She **stepped in** to stop the argument from becoming more serious.
- 2 a) This music is rubbish. I wish you'd **switch off** the radio.
 b) The lecture was so boring that I **switched off**.
- 3 a) There's a hole in my bag. I think my pen must have **dropped out**.
 b) He **dropped out** of college and became a mechanic.
- 4 a) We **tied** the boxes **down** on the roof of the car.
 b) Marcos dreams of travelling, but he feels **tied down** by his family and work responsibilities.

5.3 Use your knowledge of the basic verb in the underlined phrasal verbs as well as the context of the sentence in order to work out the meanings of the phrasal verbs.

- 1 What are you driving at? I wish you would say exactly what you mean!
- 2 The teacher did all she could to drum the vocabulary into her pupils before the exam.
- 3 The old education system used to cream off the best pupils and teach them in separate schools.
- 4 The noise of the children playing completely drowned out his speech.

5.4 Write a one-word formal equivalent for each of the underlined phrasal verbs.

As the rain didn't let up, the football game was called off. So the team got down to discussing its strategy for the next match instead. We didn't get out of the clubhouse until the cleaners turned up in the evening.

Over to you

If you encounter a phrasal verb that you thought you knew but it does not seem to make sense, use other clues in the context to work out what the meaning might be. It may be quite different from the meaning that you already knew.