



PHRASAL VERBS

Phrasal verbs are characteristic of informal language, and are commonly used in spoken English. Though they do not look difficult, they can be problematic for learners of English because of their construction and idiomatic meanings.

Phrasal verbs consist of a verb followed by a preposition. This forms a new verb, one sometimes related to the original verb, but sometimes not.

There's no pattern to the meanings they take, and they often have a number of different meanings.

Phrasal verbs are expressions or phrases which consist of a:

- **verb + adverb - *look up***

Example: Please **look up** the word in the dictionary.
These kinds of constructions are called *phrasal verbs*.

- **verb + preposition - *deal with***

Example: The study notes **deal with** various aspects of English grammar.
These kinds of constructions are sometimes called *prepositional verbs*.

- **verb + adverb + preposition - *catch up on***

Example: I need to **catch up on** my reading because my test is next week.
These kinds of constructions are sometimes called *phrasal-prepositional verbs*.

The adverb or preposition that is used to form the phrasal verb is sometimes called the *particle*.

STUDY TIPS

Because phrasal verbs have more than one meaning and because the meanings may not necessarily be understood from the meanings of the individual words, it is important to consult a dictionary when learning the meanings of phrasal verbs.

It is helpful when building your vocabulary with phrasal verbs to write sample sentences as well showing these verbs in context.

Be aware that phrasal verbs are used in the listening passages of the IELTS test.



Phrasal Verbs and Meanings

When a verb combines with either an adverb or preposition to form the phrasal verb, a new or extended meaning is created. This meaning is sometimes predictable from the meanings of the words that form them, but usually the meanings are unpredictable because they are idiomatic – the meanings cannot be understood from the individual words. For example:

	Phrasal Verb	Meaning
Predictable	fall off	'decrease in number'
	Sales have been falling off in the last quarter due to the increase in interest rates.	
	call back	'telephone again'
	The receptionist asked me to call back because the manager was in a meeting.	
Unpredictable	carry on	'behave in a foolish or improper manner'
	That child carried on terribly in the park.	
	bottle up	'keep feelings and emotions to yourself'
	After the two hour meeting, he was bottled up for days.	

Phrasal verbs are commonly followed by prepositions and adverbs such as: *in, out, up, off, back, into, on, over, down* and others. Compare how the meaning of a verb, for example **go**, changes with the preposition or adverb.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning
go ahead	to proceed with permission
go along with	to agree
go back	to return to a place
go for	to aim for
go into	to investigate
go on	to continue
go out with	to date
go over	to review
go through	to undergo
go with	to harmonise in style, colour



Transitive and Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

As with other verbs, phrasal verbs may be transitive (requiring an *object*) or intransitive (not requiring an object). For example:

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Example
put (somebody/ something) down [transitive]	1. write down someone's name on a list to include them in an event 2. <i>a part payment with a promise to pay the rest later</i>	I've put you down for the soccer match next week. They've put down some money for that two-bedroom flat.
put down [intransitive]	<i>reduce prices</i>	Prices were put down because of good returns from sales.

Sometimes it is possible to separate the parts of a transitive phrasal verb.

- If it is formed with a preposition, then the object follows the preposition:
 - I'm happy I **got through** the maths exam yesterday.
[pass the exam]
 - He **jumped at** the opportunity to study at Insearch, UTS.
[accept an opportunity keenly]
- If it is formed with an adverb, then the *pronoun* object is placed between the verb and adverb:
 - Count me out** of Saturday's rugby match.
[exclude]
 - The school **turned it down** for safety reasons.
[reject]
- If the object is a *noun* or *noun phrase* in the verb + adverb phrasal structure, then it may come either before or after the adverb:
 - The brigade **put out** the fire quickly.
[extinguish]
 - The brigade **put the fire out** quickly.
- If the object is *indirect*, then it always precedes the adverb:
 - Hand him back** his keys.
[return after borrowing]

There are some two-part and all three-part phrasal verbs, which cannot be separated:

break down	carry on	come across
cut down on	get on with	go through
look after	look into	run out of



Style

Phrasal verbs are characteristic of informal language, and are commonly used in spoken English. In academic writing, it is important not to use phrasal verbs. Below is a list of phrasal verbs with possible formal verb choices.

Phrasal Verb (informal)	Verb (formal)
ask out	invite
break out	erupt
bring up	mention (a topic/event)
call on	visit
check out	investigate
come off	become detached
drop out of	withdraw (from)
duck out of	avoid
enter into	become involved (in)
face up to	accept (a difficult situation)
fall into	belong (to a group/category)
fall out with	quarrel
find out	learn/discover
fix up	arrange
fork out	pay (money)
gear up	prepare
get away with	avoid punishment
get out of	avoid
go after	pursue
go through	examine
hit out at	criticise
iron out	solve/overcome (a problem/difficulty)
keep up	maintain properly
lie down	recline
light up	illuminate
look into	investigate
look over	examine
look up to	respect
pass out	distribute
pay back	repay
pick on	tease/annoy
pick up	collect
put down	criticise
put off	postpone/delay
put up with	tolerate
show up	appear
take off	leave
talk into	persuade
try out	test
turn down	reject
wait on	serve
work out	resolve differences