

Introduction to Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a combination of a verb and either an adverb, a preposition, or both, which together create a new meaning that is different from the verb alone. Phrasal verbs are frequently used in spoken and informal English and are a key feature for achieving fluency.

Why Phrasal Verbs Matter

Phrasal verbs are important because native speakers use them all the time, so understanding them helps you sound natural. The meanings of phrasal verbs cannot always be guessed by understanding the parts. They need to be learned as separate vocabulary items. Mastery of phrasal verbs aids comprehension in real-life situations like conversations, media, and texts.

Types of Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs can be organized into four key categories: transitive, intransitive, separable, and inseparable. Understanding each type helps clarify how the verb interacts with objects and its parts in sentences.

1. Transitive Phrasal Verbs

Transitive phrasal verbs require a direct object to complete their meaning. Without an object, the sentence feels incomplete or unclear.

Example: “Turn off the light.”

“Light” is the object. Removing it would leave the action unfinished—“Turn off” doesn’t specify what.

Other examples include:

1. “Carry on the conversation.”
2. “Call off the meeting.”
3. “Bring up a topic.”

In each case, the sentence needs an object for clarity.

2. Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

Intransitive phrasal verbs do not take an object. The action or state is complete without needing to refer to anything else.

Example: “Give up.”

The sentence is understandable without an object— “She finally gave up.”

Other examples:

1. “Break down” (The car broke down.)
2. “Go ahead” (You can go ahead.)
3. “Grow up” (Kids grow up quickly.)

These verbs describe processes or actions with no direct object following them.

3. Separable Phrasal Verbs

Separable phrasal verbs allow the object to be placed between the verb and the particle, or after the entire verb phrase. These are always transitive.

Example:

“Pick up the book” or “Pick the book up.”

Both are correct; the object (“the book”) can appear in either position.

Other examples:

1. “Turn off the fan” or “Turn the fan off.”
2. “Put on your coat” or “Put your coat on.”

Note: When the object is a pronoun, it must go between the verb and the particle (“Pick it up,” not “Pick up it”).

4. Inseparable Phrasal Verbs

Inseparable phrasal verbs cannot be split; the object must always come after the entire verb phrase or not at all. Some may be transitive, while others are intransitive.

Example: “Look after the children.”

“Look after” stays together; you cannot say “Look the children after.”

Other examples:

1. “Run into problems.”
2. “Come across a book.”
3. “Get over an illness.”

The verb and particle always remain together, and the object (if present) follows the full phrase.

Summary Table

Type	Object Needed?	Can Split?	Example
Transitive	Yes	Sometimes	Bring up a topic
Intransitive	No	No	Break down
Separable	Yes	Yes	Turn off the light / Turn the light off
Inseparable	Maybe	No	Look after the child

Advanced Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs can also include three-word combinations: “look forward to,” “get away with,” “put up with.” These are especially common in business, academic, and casual settings.

Phrasal Verbs List

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Example Sentence
look after	to take care of	She will look after the kids tonight.
give up	to stop trying	Don't give up – you can solve this!
run out	to have none left	We ran out of milk this morning.
pick up	to collect	I'll pick you up at 8 AM.
bring up	to mention a topic	He brought up the problem in the meeting.
set up	to arrange/organize	They set up a new company last year.
take off	to leave the ground	The plane will take off at noon.
turn off	to switch off	Please turn off the lights before leaving.
break down	to stop functioning	My car broke down on the way home.
call off	to cancel	They called off the meeting.
come across	to find by chance	I came across an old photo.
come up with	to invent, create	She came up with a clever solution.
get ahead	to advance, succeed	He works hard to get ahead at his job.
get along with	to be friendly	I get along with all my colleagues.
get away	to escape	The thief got away quickly.
give in	to surrender	She finally gave in to the pressure.
go on	to continue	The show must go on.
go over	to review	Let's go over the details.
grow up	to become an adult	Everyone grows up eventually.
hang up	to end a phone call	She hung up the phone angrily.
hold on	to wait	Hold on a moment, please.
keep up	to continue at the same rate	He keeps up with the latest news.
let down	to disappoint	Don't let me down.
look for	to search	I'm looking for my keys.
make up	to invent, compensate	She made up an excuse.
pass out	to faint/lose consciousness	He passed out from exhaustion.
put off	to postpone	Let's put off the meeting
put up with	to tolerate	I can't put up with that noise.
show up	to appear/arrive	She showed up late to class.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning	Example Sentence
take after	to resemble	She takes after her mother.
take up	to start (a hobby/activity)	He took up painting last year.
turn down	to refuse/decline	She turned down the job offer.
turn up	to appear unexpectedly	He turned up at the party.
work out	to exercise/resolve	They worked out the problem.
write down	to record in writing	Write down your ideas.
find out	to discover	I found out the truth.
fill out	to complete a form	Please fill out this form.
get rid of	to eliminate	I want to get rid of old clothes.
look forward to	to anticipate with excitement	I look forward to our meeting.
bring up	to raise a child/topic	She brought up her children alone.
come up	to arise, occur	Something urgent came up.
cut off	to disconnect/stop	The power was cut off.
drop out	to quit school/competition	He dropped out of college.
get over	to recover	She got over her cold quickly.
look out	to be cautious	Look out for cars!
pay off	to be worth the effort	Your hard work will pay off.
sort out	to organize/fix	Let's sort out the problem.
take over	to acquire control	The company was taken over.
back up	to support	His friends backed him up.

