

16 Phrasal verbs: form and meaning

A Formation

A phrasal verb is a verb combined with an adverb or preposition, and occasionally with an adverb and preposition.

The price of petrol may **go up** (= increase) again next week.

He **fell over** (= fell to the ground) when he was running for the bus.

She's promised to **find out** (= learn/discover) the name of that new hotel.

Who is going to **look after** (= take care of) the children when she goes into hospital?

If you don't understand the meaning, you can **look it up** (= find the meaning in a book – in this case a dictionary).

He doesn't **get on with** (= have a good relationship with) his parents. (verb + adv + prep)

B Meaning

Sometimes the meaning of a phrasal verb is very similar to the base verb, and the adverb just emphasises the meaning of the base verb, e.g. **stand up**, **wake up**, **save up**, **hurry up**, **sit down**, **lie down** and **send off** (e.g. a letter). On other occasions, the adverb adds the idea of completing the action of the verb, e.g. **drink up** (= finish your drink), **eat up** (= finish eating), **finish off**.

But more often, the meaning of a phrasal verb is very different from the base verb, e.g. **go up** doesn't mean the same as **go**; **look after** is different from **look**; and **look after** is also quite different from **look up**. An adverb or preposition can therefore change the meaning of a verb a great deal.

Here are some more examples of this type of phrasal verb.

It took her a long time to **get over** (= get better / recover from) her illness.

He told me to **carry on** (= continue) as far as the traffic lights.

I persuaded my wife to **give up** (= stop) smoking.

I can't make any sandwiches because we've **run out of** bread. (= the bread is finished / all used, so we have no bread)

In the end my next-door neighbour had to come and **put out** (= extinguish/stop) the fire.

C Multiple meaning

Many phrasal verbs have more than one meaning, so you must be careful when you see a phrasal verb you think you know, or look up the meaning in a dictionary. In the examples marked *, the phrasal verb is much more natural than the explanation in brackets.

It was hot so I decided to ***take off** (= remove) my jacket.

I am always nervous when the plane ***takes off** (= leaves the ground).

I don't think I'll **get through** (= finish) this report before five o'clock.

I think she'll **get through** (= pass) the exam.

I ***picked up** the rubbish (= took it from the ground or a low place) and put it in the bin.

I had to go to the shop to **pick up** (= collect) my photos.

My alarm clock didn't **go off** (= ring) this morning.

The bomb could **go off** (= explode) at any minute.

The fish will ***go off** (= go bad) if you don't put it in the fridge.



Exercises

16.1 Fill the gaps to complete the phrasal verb in each sentence.

- 1 We went round the school and **up** all the rubbish.
- 2 I don't think they ever **out** how the man escaped.
- 3 This milk smells horrible; I think it has **off**.
- 4 Do you think they'll **through** the exam next week?
- 5 They had a bad relationship at first, but she **on** very well with him now.
- 6 The price has **up** three times this year.
- 7 I agreed to **after** my sister's cat when she goes to France.
- 8 We can **on** until the teacher tells us to stop.
- 9 Why didn't your alarm clock **off** this morning?
- 10 I'm afraid this photocopier has **out of** paper, but you can use the other one in my office.

16.2 Complete these sentences in a logical way.

- 1 It will take her a long time to get over
- 2 I'm afraid we've run out of
- 3 He had to look it up
- 4 I don't really get on with
- 5 She came in and took off
- 6 I had to put out
- 7 Who is going to look after
- 8 I went to the garage to pick up
- 9 The plane took off
- 10 My rent is going up

16.3 Look at the dictionary entry for *pick up*, and match the meanings with the sentences below.

pick up *v ad*: 1 [T] (pick sbdy./sthg.++ up) to take hold of and lift up: *Pick up the box by the handles.* -see picture on page 669 2 [T] (pick sthg.++ up) to gather together; collect: *Please pick up all your toys when you've finished playing.* 3 [I] to improve: *Trade is picking up again.* 4 [T] (pick sthg.++ up) to gain; get: *Where did you pick up that book/your excellent English?* 5 [I;T] (pick sthg.++ up) to (cause to) start again: *to pick up (the conversation) where we left off* 6 [T] (pick sbdy./sthg.++ up) to collect; arrange to go and get: *Pick me up at the hotel. I'm going to pick up my coat from the cleaner's.* 7 [T] (pick sbdy./sthg.++ up) to collect in a vehicle 8 [T] (pick sbdy.++ up)

- 1 I said I would pick her up at the airport.
- 2 I picked up most of the rubbish that was on the floor.
- 3 Where did he pick up that strange accent?
- 4 Business was bad at the beginning of the year but it's picking up now.
- 5 I hurt my back when I tried to pick up that chair.

16.4 Write two sentences for each of these phrasal verbs to show their different meanings.
pick up take off go off get through

17 Phrasal verbs: grammar and style

Look at Unit 16 on the form and meaning of phrasal verbs before you do this unit.

A Grammar: intransitive verbs

Some phrasal verbs are intransitive and do not need a direct object.

The children are **growing up**. (= getting older and more mature)

The doctor told me to **lie down** on the bed.

Don't wait out there. Please **come in**. (= enter)

I'm going to **stay in** (= stay at home) this evening.

With these verbs, you cannot put another word between the verb and adverb.

B Grammar: transitive verbs

But many phrasal verbs are transitive and do need a direct object. With some of these, you can put the object between the verb and adverb:

Put on your shoes ✓ Turn on the TV ✓

Put your shoes on ✓ Turn the TV on ✓

If the object is a pronoun, it must go between verb and adverb.

Put them on ✓ [NOT Put-on-them] Turn it on ✓ [NOT Turn-on-it]

Note: A dictionary will show you if you can put a word between the verb and adverb:

turn (toh) [SWITCH] /Etɜ:n, \$tɜ:rn/ * [always - adv/prep] to use a control to switch (a piece of equipment) on or off or to increase or reduce what it is producing • Turn off/out the light. [M] • Who turned the telly on? [M] • I asked him to turn down the heating. [M] • Turn the sound up - I can't hear what they're saying. [M] • This programme's boring - shall I turn over (= change the station) to BBC? [I] • This sort of heater turns off (= can be switched off) at the mains. [I] •

C Style: formal or informal

Some phrasal verbs can be used equally in written or spoken English. Sometimes this is because there is no other easy way to express the meaning of the phrasal verb.

I always wake up early, even at weekends.

The car **broke down** (= went wrong; stopped working) on the motorway.

The plane couldn't **take off** because of bad weather.

Thieves **broke into** (= entered by force and illegally) the house and took money, credit cards and all my jewellery.

D Informal phrasal verbs

But most phrasal verbs are informal and are more common in spoken English. In written English there is often a more formal word with the same meaning.

We had to **make up** a story. (= invent/create from our imagination)

I can usually **get by** on about £200 a week. (= manage)

You can **leave out** question 7. (= omit, i.e. you don't need to do question 7)

They've got a problem and they asked me to **sort it out**. (= resolve (it) / find a solution / do something about it)

Exercises

These exercises also practise and test some of the phrasal verbs from Unit 16.

17.1 Complete these sentences in a logical way.

- 1 I'm not very good at making up
- 2 Could you lie down
- 3 She asked me to turn on
- 4 Two men tried to break into
- 5 We have asked an engineer to come and sort out
- 6 Are you going to stay in
- 7 Why did you leave out
- 8 I'm afraid we broke down
- 9 Can you get by
- 10 I grew up

17.2 Is it possible to separate the two parts of the phrasal verb in the sentences below? Look at the examples first, and use a dictionary to check your answers. (You can also check your answers in the answer key.)

Examples: I forgot to get off the bus. NO (get the bus off ✗)

Why did he take off his trousers? YES (take his trousers off ✓)

- 1 She decided to carry on working.
- 2 He had to put out the fire.
- 3 Could you turn on the radio?
- 4 I had to lie down for a few minutes.
- 5 Could you go to the shop for me? We've just run out of coffee.
- 6 I think she made up that story.
- 7 I can't get by on the money my parents give me.
- 8 Children grow up very quickly these days.
- 9 I turned off the light when I went to bed.
- 10 Can we leave out this question?

17.3 Make these texts more informal by changing some of the verbs to phrasal verbs with the same meaning. (There are three in each text.)

- 1 The cost of living is increasing all the time and I find it quite difficult to manage on my salary. But I think I can probably continue for a few months.
- 2 She told us to enter, but then we had to remove our shoes and I had to extinguish my cigarette.
- 3 The teacher told the class to invent a story to go with the picture in their books, and then continue with exercise 4. She said they could all omit exercise 5.

17.4 There are many phrasal verbs in other units. Can you find:

- 1 three phrasal verbs in Unit 21 on page 46?
- 2 three phrasal verbs in Unit 47 on page 98?
- 3 three phrasal verbs in Unit 48 on page 100?
- 4 three phrasal verbs in Unit 56 on page 116?
- 5 three phrasal verbs in Unit 62 on page 128?
- 6 three phrasal verbs in Unit 75 on page 154?