

I 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

Cover-up raises fears over bird flu

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 like **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.

- I decided to take up gardening, so I went to the library, took a book out 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.
- 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.
- I have to catch up on my coursework this weekend as I've fallen behind a bit. I worked on 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.

- Can't get you *off from / out of / away from* my head (Kylie Minogue)
- Hold you *against / down / at* (Jennifer Lopez)
- We can work it *with / across / out* (The Beatles)
- 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.

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

- The dispute is now in its fifth week.
- Unity was no longer possible, a spokesperson said.
- The event happened at 7.45 pm with no warning.
- There will be major changes at all levels.
- 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).

<i>with object (transitive)</i>	<i>no object (intransitive)</i>
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 work better.	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.

Tina and Jo were so clever the teacher **moved them up** to a higher class. (with object)

Tina and Jo **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** two students **down** / **marked down** two students because they answered the wrong questions in the exam.

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.

<i>noun object</i>	<i>personal pronoun object</i>
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 teachers should move up to the class above.
- 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 / handwriting / 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 nephew 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 far too long. (MARK)
- 4 Bill has no right to despise me – I'm no worse than he is. (LOOK)
- 5 Lisa 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 petrol 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 railway 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)

FOLLOW UP

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	example	meaning
standby	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.	ready to be used if necessary
letdown	I had been looking forward to the concert for weeks but it turned out to be a terrible letdown .	disappointment
back-up	Neil can provide technical back-up if you need it.	support
warm-up	The comedian who did the warm-up for the studio audience before the TV programme started was excellent.	preparation
onset	The match was halted by the onset of rain.	start (of something unpleasant)
input	Try to come to the meeting – we'd value your input .	contribution
overkill	Shall I add some more decorations to the cake or would that be overkill ?	more of something than is needed

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

BREAKDOWN IN STRIKE TALKS

STAND-OFF² IN TRADE TALKS

MANAGEMENT **BUYOUT** FOR HIGH STREET CHAIN

WALKOUT³ AT CAR FACTORY

HELP FOR BUSINESS **START-UPS**

SINGER STAGES A **COMEBACK**

MILITARY **BUILD-UP**⁴ CONTINUES

¹ person hiding in order to travel

³ strike

² failure to reach agreement

⁴ increase in size or strength

Anna: Who do you think will get the job – Paul or Lisa?

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

Carla: Did you have a good time at squash last night?

Dave: Yes, but we didn't have a real game, just a **knockabout** with the ball.



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