

What is a phrasal verb?

A **phrasal verb** is a phrase that combines a verb with a preposition or adverb or both and that functions as a verb whose meaning is different from the combined meanings of the individual words.

Example: To find out = to discover

The tricky thing about phrasal verbs is that their meanings are often quite different to the original meaning of the verb.

Example: To take over = to gain control of something (e.g. a company)

How are phrasal verbs formed?

1. Verb + Adverb

These phrasal verbs can either be:

Transitive and Intransitive

All verbs can either be transitive or intransitive. When a verb is transitive it means it has an object.

Examples,

Throw a ball.

Phone someone.

Study English.

When a verb is intransitive, it doesn't need an object.

Examples,

Walk to school.

Arrive on time.

Go to the cinema.

Transitive Phrasal Verbs

The same meaning of transitive and intransitive applies to phrasal verbs in the same way as it does to normal verbs.

A transitive phrasal verb takes an object.

Example:

Hang up your jacket.

When a phrasal verb is transitive, it's possible to put the object between the verb and the adverb/preposition, or put it afterwards. There is no difference in meaning.

For example,

Take off your jacket. OR Take your jacket off.

However, when we use a pronoun, it must go in the **middle**.

Example,

You can say: Take **it** off.

Not to say: X Take off it. X

Choose the transitive phrasal verb in the following sentences:

1. Before you use the computer you need to turn it on.
2. She looked at the magazine then put it down.
3. There are lots of dead leaves in the garden. We need to clear them up.
4. Make sure you fill in your landing card.
5. What a pretty dress! Why don't you try it on?
6. If we're going to have fish for dinner, you'd better take it out of the freezer.
7. That old building looks awful. They should knock it down.
8. If you've got a good idea, bring it up at the meeting.
9. Jill phoned. She wants you to call her back.

Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

Intransitive phrasal verbs are easier to use because there is no object to worry about. Since there is no object, intransitive phrasal verbs can never be separated.

Choose the intransitive phrasal verb in the following sentences:

1. The plane took off and landed on time. (left the ground)
2. Where did you grow up? – In a small town just outside this city. (live your childhood)
3. This car is terrible. It breaks down all the time! (stops working)
4. You're doing really well, so carry on like this. (continue)
5. He started a university course but dropped out after one year. (left/stop participating)
6. My colleague and I get on really well. (have a good relationship)
7. Pete and Sue had an argument but they've made up now. (reconcile)
8. Did you get the tickets? No, they'd sold out. (sell all those available)

Exercise:

1. Transitive or intransitive
He sat down at his desk and began to work.
2. Transitive or intransitive:
The company is taking on a new manager this month.
3. Correct or incorrect:
You can hang up it here.
4. Correct or incorrect:
Our car broke down last week.
5. Correct or incorrect:
The plane is going to take off soon.
6. Correct or incorrect:
Can you call him back later?

2. Verb + Preposition

prepositional verb	meaning	example sentence	
			direct object
believe in	have faith in the existence of	I believe in	God.
look after	take care of	He is looking after	the dog.
talk about	discuss	Did you talk about	me?
wait for	await	John is waiting for	Mary.

NOTE:

Prepositional verbs cannot be separated. That means that we cannot put the direct object between the two parts. For example, we must say "look after the baby". We cannot say "look the baby after".

3. Verb + Adverb + Preposition

phrasal-prepositional verb	meaning	example sentence	
			direct object
get on with	have a friendly relationship with	He doesn't get on with	his wife.
put up with	tolerate	I won't put up with	your attitude.
look forward to	anticipate with pleasure	I look forward to	seeing you.

Exercise

1. She switched the radio off and went outside.

Correct
Incorrect

2. Why do we always talk the weather about?

Correct
Incorrect

3. I will look your letter forward to.

Correct
Incorrect

4. He applied for a loan, but they turned down him.

Correct
Incorrect

5. You believe in ghosts, don't you?

Correct
Incorrect

6. We will have to wait the bus for at the corner.

Correct
Incorrect

7. Melissa is going to look after the children.

Correct
Incorrect

8. I have to put the baby down while I sweep the floor.

Correct
Incorrect

9. Why don't you switch the light on? It's getting dark.

Correct
Incorrect

10. Can you go to the store before we run milk out of?

Correct
Incorrect