

# Phrasal Verbs

**phrasal verb**

noun GRAMMAR  
plural noun: phrasal verbs

an idiomatic phrase consisting of a verb and another element, typically either an adverb, as in *break down*, or a preposition, for example *see to*, or a combination of both, such as *look down on*.

Translations, word origin, and more definitions

## Phrasal Verb and Idioms

It's like cooking: combine flour and water, stick it in the oven for a bit, and you have bread. If you combine a verb and certain prepositions, and stick it somewhere in a sentence, you have a phrasal verb. However, baking the dough in a gas oven will obviously result in a different flavor than baking the dough over an open fire; phrasal verbs don't require such varied treatment to have a different meaning, even if you're working with the same two words. Sometimes all that's required is they phrasal verb being used in a different room of the house.

This is where the idiomatic meaning comes in. You won't be able to figure out the meaning of the phrasal verbs just by looking at the two or three words involved. Each phrasal verb is capable of having several meanings, and the meanings can also vary from place to place: if English isn't your first language, be sure you understand the local idiomatic interpretation of a phrasal verb so you don't end up getting your face slapped. For instance, you can look at a baby who is just learning to walk and say, "She really gets around"; you don't want to say that about a twenty-three year old woman.

Verb	Meaning	Example
blow up	explode	The terrorists tried to <u>blow up</u> the railroad station.
bring up	mention a topic	My mother <u>brought up</u> that little matter of my prison record again.
bring up	raise children	It isn't easy to <u>bring up</u> children nowadays.
do over	repeat a job	<u>Do</u> this homework <u>over</u> .
fill up	fill to capacity	She <u>filled up</u> the grocery cart with free food.
find out	discover	My sister <u>found out</u> that her husband had been planning a surprise party for her.
give away	give something to someone else for free	The filling station was <u>giving away</u> free gas.
give back	return an object	My brother borrowed my car. I have a feeling he's not about to <u>give it back</u> .

hand in	submit something (assignment)	The students <u>handed in</u> their papers and left the room.
hang up	put something on hook or receiver	She <u>hung up</u> the phone before she hung up her clothes.
hold up	delay	I hate to <u>hold up</u> the meeting, but I have to go to the bathroom.
leave out	omit	You <u>left out</u> the part about the police chase down Asylum Avenue.
look over	examine, check	The lawyers <u>looked over</u> the papers carefully before questioning the witness. (They <u>looked</u> them <u>over</u> carefully.)
look up	search in a list	You've misspelled this word again. You'd better <u>look it up</u> .
make up	invent a story or lie	She knew she was in trouble, so she <u>made up</u> a story about going to the movies with her friends.
pick up	lift something off something else	The crane <u>picked up</u> the entire house. (Watch them <u>pick it up</u> .)
point out	call attention to	As we drove through Paris, Francoise <u>pointed out</u> the major historical sites.
put away	save or store	We <u>put away</u> money for our retirement. She <u>put away</u> the cereal boxes.
put off	postpone	We asked the boss to <u>put off</u> the meeting until tomorrow. (Please <u>put it off</u> for another day.)
put on	put clothing on the body	I <u>put on</u> a sweater and a jacket. (I <u>put</u> them <u>on</u> quickly.)
set up	to arrange, begin	My wife <u>set up</u> the living room exactly the way she wanted it. She <u>set it up</u> .
take down	make a written note	These are your instructions. <u>Write</u> them <u>down</u> before you forget.
take off	remove clothing	It was so hot that I had to <u>take off</u> my shirt.
talk over	discuss	We have serious problems here. Let's <u>talk</u> them <u>over</u> like adults.
throw away	discard	That's a lot of money! Don't just <u>throw it away</u> .
try on	put clothing on to see if it fits	She <u>tried on</u> fifteen dresses before she found one she liked.
try out	test	I <u>tried out</u> four cars before I could find one that pleased me.

turn down	lower volume	Your radio is driving me crazy! Please <u>turn</u> it <u>down</u> .
turn down (2)	reject	He applied for a promotion twice this year, but he was <u>turned down</u> both times.
turn up	raise the volume	Grandpa couldn't hear, so he <u>turned up</u> his hearing aid.
turn off	switch off electricity	We <u>turned off</u> the lights before anyone could see us.
turn off (2)	repulse	It was a disgusting movie. It really <u>turned me off</u> .
turn on	switch on the electricity	<u>Turn on</u> the CD player so we can dance.

## Separable Phrasal Verbs

Separable phrasal verbs are transitive (they can take a direct object), and the direct object can separate the verb and the adverb (or preposition). If you encounter a new phrasal verb, there's no way to identify it as separable. If you're unsure, look up the meaning and usage in a good dictionary which gives examples.

*I need to **take back** the shirt I lent you.*

*Where's that shirt I lent you? I need to **take it back**.*

In the first example, the object (*the shirt*) comes after the phrasal verb. In the second example, the object (*it*) separates the verb from the adverb. The phrasal verb has the same meaning in both examples.

*The cloth is so thin you can **see through** it.*

*The project is difficult, but we have to **see it through**.*

By separating *see through*, we change the meaning of the phrasal verb. In the first example, it means the cloth provides no barrier to sight. In the second example, it means the project needs to be completed.

*Alice is sick today: call Catherine, and see if she can **fill in**.*

*Sorry I'm late; can you **fill me in** on what's happened so far?*

***Wash this teapot out**, please.*

***Wash out this teapot**, please.*

*We heard you were feeling low, so we've come to **cheer you up**.*

***Cheer up!** Life isn't all bad.*

***Put on your coat** and let's go!*

***Put your coat on!** Let's go!*

*There's no such thing as a man in the moon. Stop trying to **put me on**.*

Phrasal Verb

Explanation

*Kick Off*

*When I start doing something.*

Example 1

*Neymar kicks off the ball to start the soccer match.*

Example 2

*The referee allows the kick off of the match when he whistles.*

Phrasal Verb

Explanation

Example 1

Example 2

Phrasal Verb

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