

Universidad de Los Andes
Facultad de Humanidades y Educación
Escuela de Idiomas Modernos

Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs, also called **two-word and three-word verbs**, are compound verbs that consist of a verb followed by an adverb particle, which may also function as a preposition. Phrasal verbs function as semantic units; that is to say, they have a meaning as a whole. Often their meaning cannot be inferred from the sum of the meanings of the individual words. For this reason, the meaning of phrasal verbs must be memorized as a whole. For example, *run into* = meet (someone) by accident, *talk over* = discuss (something), *look up* = seek (a word) in a reference book, *turn on* = start the operation of (an appliance), *turn off* = stop the operation of (an appliance), *wait on* = serve (someone at a restaurant), *look over* = examine (a test), *look into* = investigate.

Likewise, phrasal verbs are grammatical units that fulfill normal English verb functions in sentences. They may be transitive or intransitive verbs; i.e., they may or may not be followed by noun phrases or object pronouns (direct objects). E.g., *I wanted to **call up** the department store, but I didn't have its number. He **got off** at the corner. I haven't seen my dog for a while; I'm **looking for** him. If you don't know the meaning of a word, **look it up** in a dictionary.*

Phrasal verbs must be differentiated from normal **verb + preposition sequences** (also referred to as **verb + prepositional phrases**). Firstly, phrasal verbs have a stress-placement pattern similar to that of compound words; they have the secondary stress [ˌ] on the verb (the first word) and a primary stress [ˈ] on the function word (the second word); e.g., *ˌcall ʊp, ˌtake ɒf, ˌput ɒn*. For their part, plain verb + preposition combinations often have stress only on the verb (the first element); the preposition (the second word) is usually unstressed, unless it is the last element in a phrase or sentence. E.g., *The boys **ran into** the street. The two neighbors enjoy **talking over** the fence. Who did you **run into** this morning?* Secondly, unlike phrasal verbs, in verb + preposition combinations both the verb and the prepositions are generally used in their literal meanings. On the other hand, although the meaning of two-word verbs cannot be guessed from the individual meanings of their component words, they can often be paraphrased by using another (usually single-word) verb. For instance, *bring about* = cause, *bring up* = raise, care for (someone) from childhood, *call off* = cancel (a meeting), *call on* = visit, *carry on* = continue, *carry out* = fulfill, complete; *come across* = discover accidentally, *get off* = descend from or leave (a bus), *get on* = mount or enter (a bus), *leave out* = omit, *look over* = examine, *make up* = invent or compose, *pick out* = select, *put off* = postpone, *put on* = dress in, *put out* = extinguish (a fire), *take up* = begin to study or prepare for a career.

Thirdly, in preposition + verb combinations, the preposition and the following noun phrase form an adverbial prepositional phrase, which can be used as an answer to a question with *where*. E.g., Q: *Where did the boys run?* A: *Into the street.* With phrasal verbs, we ask questions with *what* or *who(m)* and the answer is usually the direct object, if the verb is transitive. E.g., Q: *What is the committee looking over?* A: *The report.* Q: *Who did Mr. Brown run into?* A: *An old friend.*

Types of Two-Word Verbs followed by Noun Phrases

Two-word verbs function as single units in both meaning and construction. Some of them can have direct objects like ordinary transitive verbs. E.g., *We **looked up** the words.* / *We **found** the words.* *I didn't leave out any questions.* / *I didn't **omit** any questions.* *Have you **called on** Mrs. Price?* / *Have you **visited** Mrs. Price?*

There are two basic types of two-word verbs: separable and inseparable.

a) **Separable two-word verbs** are those verbs that, besides taking short (direct object) noun phrases right after the adverbial particle (or preposition), can also take them between the verb and adverbial particle. E.g., *We **looked up** the word.* / *We **looked** the word **up**.* *I didn't leave out any questions I didn't **leave** any questions **out**.* However, if the direct object is a pronoun (of any kind), this **can only occur** between the verb and the adverbial particle. E.g., *We **looked** it **up**.* *I didn't leave them out.* *Throw those **away**.* *Write mine **down**.* *He **brought** something **up**.* Other separable two-word verbs are *pick out* (select), *call off* (cancel), *call up* (telephone), *bring up* (raise; care from childhood), *carry on* (continue), *carry out* (complete; fulfill; accomplish; perform), *look over* (examine), *blow up* (cause to explode), *burn down* (destroy by burning), *cross out* (eliminate), *do over* (redo), *figure out* (interpret; understand), *fill out* (complete a printed form), *find out* (discover), *have on* (be dressed in), *hold off* (delay), *make over* (remake), *pick up* (take or lift with the hands or fingers), *point out* (indicate), *put away* (store; put in the proper place), *take off* (remove clothes, shoes), *think over* (consider), *throw away* (discard), *try on* (put on a clothes, shoes, etc. to verify the fit), *try out* (test; use experimentally), and *wear out* (use something until it is no longer usable).

When we speak, the second part of the verb or adverbial particle generally takes a stronger stress than the verb. This is especially true when two-words verbs are separated by direct object noun phrases and pronouns. Practice saying the following sentences aloud.

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| 1. He called his sister up. | He called her up. |
| 2. We called the meeting off. | We called it off. |
| 3. She looked the answer up. | She looked it up. |
| 4. They turned the engine on. | They turned it on. |
| 5. I picked the present out. | I picked it out. |
| 6. We put the fires out. | We put them out. |
| 7. We brought the children up. | We brought them up. |
| 8. I took the subject up. | I took it up. |
| 9. They put the jackets on. | They put them on. |
| 10. She turned the drier off. | She turned it off. |
| 11. We left the answer out. | We left it out. |
| 12. They put the picnic off. | They put it off. |
| 13. He made the story up. | He made it up. |
| 14. I took the hat off. | I took it off. |

However, when the direct object noun phrase occurs after the adverbial particle, the noun phrase generally takes the primary sentence stress. Practice saying the following sentences aloud.

1. We talked over the problem.
2. I looked over the homework.
3. He brought about these changes.

4. She carried out her plans.
5. Will picked up the wallet.

b) **Inseparable two-word verbs** (or **prepositional verbs**) are those verbs can only take short direct object noun phrases or pronouns right after the prepositional particle. In other words, no nouns or pronouns can come between the verb and the particle. E.g., *I **ran into** Mrs. Lake yesterday afternoon. She was **getting on** the bus at the corner. A: Have they investigated the matter? B: Yes, they're **looking into** it now. A: Who's helping that lady? B: I'm **waiting on** her.* Other inseparable two-word verbs are *come across* (find accidentally), *care for* (like; guard; supervise; maintain; tend), *get in* (enter or board a car) *get over* (recover from), *get through* (finish), *go over* (review), *go with* (harmonize with; be compatible with), *hear from* (receive a communication, news from somebody), *look after* (take care of), *look for* (seek), *see about* (consider; arrange), and *take after* (resemble).

When we speak, if the two-word verb is the last element of a sentence, the first part receives the primary sentence stress and the preposition receives secondary stress. E.g., *He's the man I'm **looking for**. That is the book he **came by**.* If the direct object is a noun phrase, it generally receives the primary sentence stress. E.g., *We looked into the **problem**. She ran into a **friend**.* When the direct object is a pronoun, the primary sentence stress usually falls on the first part of the two-word verb. E.g., *We **looked into** it. She **ran into** her.* However, when we wish to focus on the prepositional particle, it receives the primary sentence stress. E.g., *We looked **into** it. They got **on** it.* Practice saying the following sentences aloud.

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| 1. They got on the train. | They got on it. |
| 2. We got off the bus. | We got off it. |
| 3. He got over his cold. | He got over it. |
| 4. They went over the lesson. | They went over it. |
| 5. She takes after her father. | She takes after him. |
| 6. I got through the test. | I got through it. |
| 7. He got in the car. | He got in it. |
| 8. The saw through the trick. | They saw through it. |
| 9. I waited on the guests. | I waited on them. |
| 10. Mary called on her neighbor. | She called on him. |
| 11. I heard from my brother. | I heard from him. |
| 12. She looked for her glasses. | She looked for them. |

Exercises

I. Answer the following questions affirmatively using phrasal verbs. Follow the example.

Example: Did Mr. Dawson select a gift for his wife? (a nice gift)

Yes, he picked out a nice gift.

1. Did the students omit a question in the exam? (question #10)

2. Did the Bradfords raise any children? (both their nephew and their niece)

3. Did you discover any antiques? (a rare old clock)

4. Did the thief invent an alibi? (an unusual one)

5. Did Joe begin to study engineering? (civil engineering)

6. Did the election cause any reforms? (some political reforms)

7. Did the secretary complete her tasks?

8. Did the entertainers continue the show? (the entertainment)

II. Change the following sentences, using the correct form of the two-word verb given at the left of each sentence in place of the italicized verb.

Example: *call on*

I *visited* all my cousins last year.

I called on all my cousins last year.

1. *put out* The rain *extinguished* the huge forest fire.

2. *make up* John *invented* that joke about the talking dog.

3. *get off* You should *leave* the bus at the corner of First and Maple.

4. *look into* We are going to *investigate* the disappearance of the money.

5. *talk over* The entire committee will *discuss* the proposals.

6. *carry out* The Parliament *fulfilled* the Prime Minister's program.

7. *put off* We'll have to *postpone* the dance until next Friday.

8. *come across* Margaret *discovered* that quotation in a poem.

9. *pick out* Boys usually enjoy *selecting* gifts for others.

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| 10. <i>bring about</i> | The chairman's orders <i>caused</i> a change in policy. |
| 11. <i>call up</i> | Bill often <i>telephones</i> his brother. |
| 12. <i>turn of</i> | They <i>extinguish</i> the street lights at the same time every morning. |
| 13. <i>wait on</i> | Ten young ladies <i>served</i> the customers. |
| 14. <i>call off</i> | The county fair was <i>cancelled</i> because of financial difficulties. |
| 15. <i>run into</i> | Anne <i>met</i> a former high school classmate last week. |
| 16. <i>put on</i> | We have to <i>dress in</i> our best clothes for the dinner. |
| 17. <i>look over</i> | The Board of Education usually <i>examines</i> the class schedule. |
| 18. <i>leave out</i> | Please <i>omit</i> the last ten names on the list. |
| 19. <i>bring up</i> | The nurses <i>raised</i> the problem of over crowding in the hospital |

III. Complete the following sentences by providing the proper function word to complete the two-word verb. The meaning of the two-word verb is given at the left of each sentence.

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| 1. <i>telephone</i> | When are you going to call _____ the Employment Office? |
| 2. <i>visit</i> | We often call _____ our next-door neighbors. |
| 3. <i>cancel</i> | Why was the conference called _____? |
| 4. <i>seek in a reference book</i> | I had to look _____ that address in the phone book. |
| 5. <i>examine</i> | The professor is looking _____ the homework. |
| 6. <i>investigate</i> | Will the supervisor look _____ the complaints? |
| 7. <i>board</i> | Where do we get _____ the bus for the station? |
| 8. <i>leave</i> | We'll get _____ the train at the up town station. |
| 9. <i>raise</i> | Who brought _____ that problem at the meeting? |
| 10. <i>cause</i> | The flood was brought _____ key several days of heavy rain. |
| 11. <i>extinguish</i> | Please put _____ the lights before you leave. |
| 12. <i>clothe oneself in</i> | The children had better put _____ their boots and raincoats. |
| 13. <i>postpone</i> | I'm afraid they're going to have to put _____ the picnic. |
| 14. <i>complete</i> | Have the laboratory technicians carried _____ the experiments? |
| 15. <i>continue</i> | In spite of their bad luck, they decided to carry _____ their work. |

IV. Complete the answers to the questions below by using the appropriate form of one of the two-word verbs in the list.

come across take up leave out talk over make up turn off
pick out turn on run into wait on

1. A: Did you happen to see Helen last week?
B: Yes, I _____ her when I was shopping.
2. A: Has Robert decided what, he's going to study?
B: Yes, he's going to _____ dentistry.
3. A: When are they going to discuss the plans for next year?
B. They're going to _____ the plans sometime this month.
4. A: Why won't the car start?
B: Well, you haven't _____ the motor yet!
5. A: Do you extinguish all the lights in the room when you watch TV?
B: No, they say it's bad for the eyes to _____, all the lights.
6. A: Do most children enjoy inventing imaginary playmates?
B: Not all children _____ imaginary stories, but many do.
7. A: Who is the waitress serving the Smiths?
B: Oh, that's Alice Woodson who is _____ Mr. and Mrs. Smith.
8. A: Where did you find that lovely painting?
B: I _____ that picture in a little shop on Tenth Street.
9. A: Who selected the furniture for the apartment?
B: I think Mrs. Gibson _____ all the furnishings.
10. A: Why did you omit the pepper from the recipe?
B: I _____ the pepper because the meat is already well spiced.

V. Write complete answers to the following questions, using the same two-word verb that appears in the question.

1. Whom did the servants wait on?

2. What are the teachers talking over?

3. Whom did the Youngs bring up?

4. What did the cook leave out?

5. Whom do we have to call on?

6. What are the children picking out?

7. What must the students look up?

8. Whom did you run into downtown?

9. What did she say to turn off?

10. What are you going to put on for the party?

VI. Complete the answer to each question below by filling in the blank with the correct form of a two-word verb from the list.

blow up	make over	do over	figure out	cross out
call up	point out	take off	talk over	put out
hold off	find out	think over	throw away	look over

1. A: Why are they delaying their decision for so long?
B: They're _____ it _____ because of changing conditions.
2. A: Can you remake this dress?
B: Yes, I think I can _____ it _____ .
3. A: Did anyone discover what their new address is?
B: No, we couldn't _____ it _____ .
4. A: Didn't anyone indicate the museums to you?
B: Yes, the guide _____ them _____ to us.
5. A: Should a man remove his hat indoors?
B: Yes, he should _____ it _____ when he is inside.
6. A: Won't you please consider my proposals?
B: Well, I'll _____ them _____ and let you know.
7. A: Can the professor read the inscription?
B: No, he can't _____ it _____ .
8. A: Does the school discard all of its waste paper?
B: Yes, they _____ it _____ once a week.
9. A: When, should we telephone for a cab?
B: _____ them _____ when we're ready to leave the house.
10. A: How was the bridge destroyed?
B: The enemy _____ it _____ with explosive.
11. A: How can you extinguish a small grease fire in a pan?
B: You can _____ it _____ with a handful of baking soda.
12. A: Do I have to redo my homework?
B: Yes, you must _____ it _____ unless you want to fail.
13. A: Did Mr. and Mrs. Fuller examine the new house?
B: I'm sure they _____ it _____ very carefully.
14. A: Why did they eliminate the word "very"?
B: They _____ it _____ because they thought it was unnecessary.
15. A: Let's discuss the question privately.
B: All right, we'll _____ it _____ at my house.

VII. Answer these questions using a personal pronoun as the direct object form.

Examples: A: Have you heard from your brother William?

B: *No, I haven't heard from him.*

A: Did Arthur get over the shock of his father's death?

B: *Yes, he got over it.*

1. A: Will this blue sofa go with the green carpet?
B: No, _____
2. A: Did the class go over the words?
B: Yes, _____
3. A: Isn't Mr. Thompson going to see about the reservations for the concert?
B: Yes, _____
4. A: Does your daughter take after you?
B: No, _____
5. A: Don't you care for this kind of candy!
B: No, _____
6. A: Did the policeman see through the thief's story!
B: Yes, _____
7. A: Has Mr. Porter looked for his lost watch at his office?
B: Yes, _____
8. A: Did you come across this theory in your research?
B: Yes, _____
9. A: Is Miss Glover going to call on the Nelsons?
B: Yes, _____
10. A: Have the union members looked into the proposed contract?
B: No, _____

VIII. Complete the following sentences by using one of the following two-word verbs: *get on*, *get off*, *get over*, *get through*, *get in*. The meanings to be expressed are given to the left of each sentence.

1. *board* In English, we say that we _____ a bus or train, but we _____ a car or a taxi.
2. *recover from* It isn't easy to _____ a serious illness.
3. *finish* The construction crew must _____ with the job before winter begins.
4. *leave* Be sure to _____ the bus before it turns the corner.
5. *enter* Passengers are not supposed to _____ a bus through the back door.
6. *recover from* The ABC Company has never really _____ the losses from the fire two years ago.
7. *enter* I always lock the car door after I _____ .

8. *finish* Do the farmers expect to _____ with the plowing this week?
9. *leave* Mr. Salter _____ the bus too soon, and lost his way.
10. *finish* Hurry up! We have to _____ all these papers before five o'clock.

IX. Answer the following questions, using the pronoun *it, him, her, or them* in your answer.

Examples: A: Did you look up the word?

B: Yes, *I looked it up.*

A: Is she looking for her gloves?

B: Yes, *she's looking for them.*

1. A: Will they look into the problem?

B: Yes, _____

2. A: Has he looked over the plan?

B: Yes, _____

3. A: Should I put on my hat?

B: Yes, _____

4. A: Has he put off the lecture?

B: Yes, _____

5. A: Can they put out-the fire?

B: Yes, _____

6. A: Did you put away your typewriter?

B: Yes, _____

7. A: Should he try out the pen?

B: Yes, _____

8. A: Is she going to call up her cousin Mary?

B: Yes, _____

9. A: Did she pick up the broken gasses!

B: Yes, _____

10. A: Did you pick out that chair?

B: Yes, _____

11. A: Will you turn on the TV?

B: Yes, _____

12. A: Can you turn off the machine?

B: Yes, _____

13. A: Did she take up nursing?

B: Yes, _____

14. A: Should they take off their coats?

B: Yes, _____

15. A: Does he take after his father?

B: Yes, _____