

# PREPOSITIONAL VERBS AND PHRASAL VERBS

## INTRODUCTION

Many English verbs consist of two parts: a *base* verb (like bring, take, come) and another *small word* (like up, down, off, away). The small word is either a preposition or an adverb particle.

In some cases, the meaning of a two-part verb is simply a combination of the meanings of the two words. Examples are *come in*, *run away*, *walk across*, *sit on*.

In some cases, the first word keeps its meaning, but the second has a special *intensifying* sense. It means something like *completely* or *thoroughly*. Examples: *break up*, *tire out*.

In other cases, the new two-part verb has quite a different meaning from the two separate parts: *give up* means surrender, and *blow up* means explode.

## PREPOSITIONAL VERBS

There are a very large number of combinations of *verb+preposition*. Prepositions always have objects:

*Please look **after** the children.*  
*I've fallen **for** you in a big way.*

In English, the preposition does not always come before its object; in certain kinds of sentence, it can come at the end of the clause: ***What** are you talking **about**?*

Prepositional verbs are those which accept the passive and/or the pronominal question, but not the adverbial question form.

## PHRASAL VERBS

When a verb is used with an adverb particle the combination is called a *phrasal verb*. There are a very large number of these in English. The meaning of a phrasal verb is often very different from the meanings of the two words taken separately. In order to understand the meaning of a phrasal verb, you may have to refer to the dictionary. Phrasal verbs can be intransitive (not followed by a direct object) or transitive (followed by a direct object). Examples.

*break down (transitive)*

*get up (transitive)*  
*sit down (transitive)*  
*turn up (transitive)*

Intransitives:

*bring something up (=mention it)*  
*kick somebody out (=expel him)*  
*put something off (=postpone it)*  
*throw something away (=accommodate him)*  
*turn something down (=refuse it).*

When a phrasal verb has a direct object, the two parts of the verb can usually be separated: the adverb particle can be put before or after the object.

*We'll have to **put off the party/put the party off.***  
*Why don't you **throw away that stupid hat/throw that stupid hat away?***  
*Could you **put up my sister/put my sister up** for three nights?*

However, when the object is a pronoun, the adverb particle can only go after the object:

*We'll have to **put it off.***  
*Could you **put her up?***

Phrasal and prepositional verbs display certain *phonological* and *syntactic* differences.

- 1. Phonological differences.** The particle in phrasal verbs is normally stressed and, in final position, bears the nuclear tone, whereas the particle of a prepositional verb is normally unstressed and has the "tail" of the nuclear tone on the lexical verb:

*He called 'up the man The man was called ÛP*  
*He 'called on the man The man was CÀLLED on.*

- 2. Syntactic differences.** A syntactic difference is that the particle of a phrasal verb can often stand either before or after the noun, whereas it can only stand after a personal pronouns as it can be stated above.

## PHRASAL-PREPOSITIONAL VERBS

There are a few verbs which consist of three parts: a base verb, an adverb particle and a preposition: *to get on with, to put up with, to check up on*. These look complicated, but in fact, they are used in the same way as any other prepositional verb. For example, *to get on with*

follows the same rules as *to go with*. Compare:

*I get on well with Jill.*  
*I often go to the theatre with Jill.*  
*He's difficult to put up with.*  
*He's difficult to work with.*

## IS THE VERB A PHRASAL/PREPOSITIONAL VERB OR NOT?

### SEMANTIC CRITERIA FOR PHRASAL/PREPOSITIONAL VERBS.

The semantic unity in phrasal and prepositional verbs can often be manifested by substitution with a single-word verbs, for example: *visit* for *call on*, *summon* for *call up*, *omit* for *leave out*, *see* for *look at*, etc.

Furthermore, phrasal and prepositional verbs often have composite meanings which are not normally deducible from their parts, for example, *make out* (understand), *take in* (deceive), *come by* (obtain). The terms *phrasal* and *prepositional* verbs are not, however, restricted to such idiomatic combinations. We can distinguish three subclasses:

- a. The verb and the particle keep their individual lexical meanings, as in *look over* (inspect), *set up* (organize). The individuality of the components appears in possible contrastive substitutions: *bring in/out*, *take in/out*, *turn on/off*, *switch on/off*.
- b. The verb alone keeps its basic lexical meaning and the particle has an intensifying function: *find out* (discover). *sweep (up) the crumbs*, *spread (out) the rug*.
- c. The verb and the particle are fused into a new idiomatic combination, the meaning of which is not deducible from its parts, for example, *bring up* (educate), *come by* (obtain), *put off* (postpone), *turn up* (appear), *come in for* (receive). In such combinations there is no possibility of contrastive substitution: there are no pairs such as *bring up/down*, *put off/on*, *give up/down*, *give in/out*, etc for this subclass. The adverbial, lexical values of the particles have been lost, and the entire verb-particle combination has acquired a new meaning.

### SYNTACTIC CRITERIA FOR PHRASAL/PREPOSITIONAL VERBS

**1. Passivization.** The syntactic similarity of these verbs can be seen in their acceptance of passivization:

*The man was called up*

*The man was called on*  
*The man was put up with*

In the passive, these verbs behave identically with single-word transitive verbs (*The man was called*).

**2. Pronominal question form.** The questions of these verbs are formed with *who(m)* for personal and with *what* for non-personal objects:

*Who(m) did John call up?*  
*What did John look for?*

**3. Adverbial question form.** The prepositional phrases of the second set have adverbial function, and have question forms with *where*, *when*, *how*, etc:

*Where did John call from?*  
*When did John call?.*

### IS THE VERB A PHRASAL VERB OR A PREPOSITIONAL VERB?

**1. Phrasal verbs.** We say that a verb is phrasal because the particle after it is an *adverb*. They are different to prepositional verbs because:

1. The accent is on the particle, not on the verb.  
*I'll put 'ON my trousers.*
2. If the complement is a pronoun, it cannot be placed after the particle.  
*\*I'll put on THEM.*
3. An adverb can't be placed between the verb and the particle.  
*\*I'll put CAREFULLY on my trousers.*
4. The particle cannot be placed before the relative pronoun.  
*\*The trousers ON which I put.*
5. The object (substantive) can be placed between the verb and the particle.  
*I'll put MY TROUSERS on.*
6. The pronoun (object) must be placed between the verb and the particle.  
*I'll put THEM on.*

**2. Prepositional verbs.** We say that a verb is prepositional when the particle is not an adverb but

a *preposition*. They can be distinguished from the phrasal verbs for the following reasons:

1. The accent is on the verb, not on the particle.  
*I'll 'LOOK after the children.*
2. If the object (substantive) is substituted by a pronoun, it must be placed after the particle.  
*I'll look after THEM.*
3. It is grammatically acceptable to include an adverb between the verb and the particle.  
*I'll look CAREFULLY after the children.*
4. The particle can be placed before a relative pronoun.  
*These are the children AFTER WHOM I looked.*

### PHRASAL VERBS SUMMARISED

Phrasal verbs can be summarised as follows:

TYPE	STRUCTURE	EXAMPLES
1	Verb+preposition	<i>We came across an old man.</i>
2	Verb+adverb particle	<i>Don't give in.</i>
3	Verb+object+adverb particle or Verb+adverb particle+object	<i>Bring a child up/Bring up a child/Bring him up.</i>
4	Verb+adverb particle+ preposition.	<i>We've run out of bread</i>

**Type 1. VERB+PREPOSITION+NP:** Prepositions are unstressed, unless otherwise indicated, passive frequently used where an example of it is used. Examples:

VERB	MEANING	EXAMPLE
<b>Be about (it)</b>	<i>be doing it</i>	Please get me some stamps, and post these letters while you're about it.
<b>Break into</b>	<i>enter (by force or for robbery)</i>	Thieves broke into the house last night. The house was broken into.
<b>Close with</b>	<i>1. approach so as to hold.</i>	1. Two policemen closed with the hijacker and held by

	<i>2. conclude a business deal</i>	the arms. 2. I've sold my house. I closed with a buyer yesterday.
<b>Come a'cross</b>	<i>1. Find. 2. Meet by chance.</i>	1. If you should come across my sleepers, put them in the cupboard, will you? 2. I came across a very strange man in the village today.
<b>Do with'out</b>	<i>manage otherwise</i>	If there's no bread, we must do without it, that's all.
<b>Get at</b>	<i>1. mean 2. criticise</i>	1. What exactly are you getting at? 2. Are you getting at me? Am I being got at?
<b>Get 'over</b>	<i>recover from</i>	You've only got a slight cold. You'll get over it in a day or two.
<b>Go for</b>	<i>attack</i>	The dog suddenly went for me!
<b>Go 'into</b>	<i>investigate</i>	The auditors have gone into our accounts and have found a few serious mistakes. These must be gone into immediately.
<b>Jump at</b>	<i>accept immediately</i>	It's an offer that you won't get again so I should jump at it if I were you.

**Type 2. VERB+ADVERB PARTICLE.** Particle always stressed, no passive.

<b>VERB</b>	<b>MEANING</b>	<b>EXAMPLE</b>
<b>Answer back</b>	<i>argue after receiving an order or rebuke.</i>	Do what I tell you and don't answer back.
<b>Back down</b>	<i>become less aggressive</i>	Bullies often back down when you stand up to them.
<b>Bear up</b>	<i>not give in to fatigue, sorrow etc.</i>	In spite of her grief, she bore up bravely throughout the ceremony.
<b>Break off</b>	<i>stop (a meeting, speech)</i>	I suggest we break off now and meet again at three o'clock.
<b>Carry on</b>	<i>continue</i>	Don't stop, carry on.
<b>Catch up</b>	<i>reduce the distance between oneself and those in front</i>	George is running forth but he's beginning to catch up (with the leaders)
<b>Clear up</b>	<i>improve</i>	The clouds are drifting away and the weather is clearing up.
<b>Draw back</b>	<i>step back</i>	Seeing the snake, he drew back in horror.
<b>Fall back</b>	<i>retreat</i>	The defeated army fell back.

<b>Fall through</b>	<i>come to nothing</i>	I'm afraid our plans have fallen through. We'll have to think again.
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**Type 3. VERB+OBJECT+PARTICLE** or **VERB+PARTICLE+OBJECT**. Particle stressed when it follows the object, passive freely used.

<b>VERB</b>	<b>MEANING</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
<b>Bear out</b>	<i>confirm</i>	The results of the experiment bear out your theory. It has been borne out by statistics.
<b>Break down</b>	1. <i>overcome</i> 2. <i>analyse</i>	1. Resistance was finally broken down. 2. Can you break down these figures and let me have the details?
<b>Carry on</b>	<i>continue</i>	Let us carry on the good work.
<b>Carry out</b>	<i>fulfill</i>	Let us carry out our original plan.
<b>Cut off</b>	1. <i>stop (supplies)</i> 2. <i>separate; or prevent progress</i>	1. They will cut the electricity off if you don't pay the bill. 2. The tanks advanced rapidly, cutting us off (from our base).
<b>Do up</b>	<i>repair, redecorate</i>	Your car looks very smart. Has it been done up?
<b>Give up</b>	1. <i>surrender</i> 2. <i>stop</i>	1. I want your gun. Give it up. 2. Why don't you give up smoking?
<b>Lay out</b>	1. <i>spread in an orderly way.</i> 2. <i>knock down, perhaps unconsciously</i>	1. A printed page is easy to read if you lay it out clearly. 2. Bob, who knew how to box, laid out his attacker with a quick blow to the chin.
<b>Look up</b>	<i>look in a dictionary, catalogue, etc, for.</i>	Look that word up in the dictionary.
<b>Make out</b>	<i>understand</i>	I can't make out what you've written

**Type 4. VERB+PARTICLE+PREPOSITION+NP**. Particle stressed.

<b>VERB</b>	<b>MEANING</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
<b>Back out of</b>	<i>withdraw from</i>	You've signed an arrangement and you can't back out of it now.
<b>Be fed up with</b>	<i>have had enough of</i>	I'm fed up with your nonsense. Please stop it.

<b>Be up to</b>	<i>be doing something wrong</i>	What are those boys doing? Are they up to mischief?
<b>Break in on</b>	<i>interrupt</i>	I'm sorry, did I break in on a private conversation?
<b>Cut down on</b>	<i>reduce consumption of</i>	You're smoking too much. You must cut down on cigarettes.
<b>Drop in on</b>	<i>visit, see, drop in</i>	Drop in on me some time.
<b>Face up to</b>	<i>be realistic</i>	You're too old. Why don't you face up to it?
<b>Fall in with</b>	<i>agree to</i>	You can rely on me. I'll fall in with anything you suggest.
<b>Get away with</b>	<i>escape the penalty of</i>	Someone will find you out. You won't be able to get away with it.
<b>Get on with</b>	<i>1. make progress with 2. agree with</i>	1. John is getting on with his mathematics nicely. 2. They get on with each other very well.

### EXERCISES

**1. Decide which of the following are true. There is more than one correct answer in each case.**

1. If you use these verbs, you are talking about money:  
pay up, rattle through, club together, tamper with, settle up, splash out, shop around.
2. If you use these verbs, you're talking about food or drink:  
opt out, dine out, drink to, dispose of, boil over, stock up, romp through.
3. If you use these verbs, you are talking about sleep or rest:  
butt in, doze off, sit down, lie in, sit back, lash out, flake out.

**2. Try to find one phrasal verb in each group which is inappropriate.**

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|--|--------------|
| 1. do up, take on, pack off, board up                                      | a flat.      |
| 2. scale down, smooth over, think over, weed out, sort out, hush up        | a problem.   |
| 3. rub out, colour in, cross out, pin up, piece together, tear up, doll up | a picture.   |
| 4. draw up, rush through, rule out, thrash out, frighten away, hammer out  | an argument. |
| 5. soak up, top up, wipe out, wipe away, hammer out                        | a liquid.    |
| 6. bail out, hunt down, fight off, shoot down, track down, smooth over     | a criminal.  |
| 7. fill in, fill up, shoot down, tear up, tidy away                        | a form.      |
| 8. frighten away, warn off, throw out, fight off, add up                   | an intruder. |

**3. Rewrite the following sentences using ergative phrasal verbs.**

1. He woke her up. She \_\_\_\_\_
2. He wakes his wife up at 8am. His wife \_\_\_\_\_
3. They have closed down the old cinema. The old cinema \_\_\_\_\_
4. They will check passengers in at 1.30. Passengers \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Put in the correct prepositions or adverbs.**

1. I don't care \_\_\_\_\_ the expense; I want the party to be a real success.
2. I can't account \_\_\_\_\_ the disappearance of the pictures; they were all there yesterday.
3. If passports were done \_\_\_\_\_ (abolished), travel would be much simpler.
4. You will have to allow \_\_\_\_\_ some extra expenses on the train.
5. They set \_\_\_\_\_ on their camping trip with great enthusiasm.
6. When you have thought \_\_\_\_\_ what I have said, you will understand.
7. He doesn't care \_\_\_\_\_ continental cookery. He thinks it's too rich.
8. The car pulled \_\_\_\_\_ beside me and the driver asked me the way to Piccadilly.
9. You can throw \_\_\_\_\_ the packet; it's empty.
10. They set \_\_\_\_\_ at six and reached their destination before dark.
11. The doctor thinks he'll pull \_\_\_\_\_ now. His temperature has gone down.
12. I don't know how she manages to care \_\_\_\_\_ ten children without help.
13. My children are picking \_\_\_\_\_ English very quickly but I find it more difficult.
14. She fainted but they brought her \_\_\_\_\_ by throwing cold water on her face.
15. The teacher pointed \_\_\_\_\_ several mistakes that the student had not corrected.
16. You need capital before you can set \_\_\_\_\_ on your own in any kind of business.
17. He suddenly threw \_\_\_\_\_ his job and went to Australia.
18. Don't make up your mind at once; talk it \_\_\_\_\_ with your lawyer first.
19. The room needs doing \_\_\_\_\_; it's very shabby.
20. The factory will have to close down if production is not stepped \_\_\_\_\_.
21. His final argument brought me \_\_\_\_\_ to his point of view.
22. We must get the roof mended before the wet weather sets \_\_\_\_\_.
23. I don't like the look of these men hanging \_\_\_\_\_ outside my gate.
24. He picked \_\_\_\_\_ all the biggest ones for himself.
25. You must carry \_\_\_\_\_ the instructions on the packet exactly.

26. After the music had died \_\_\_\_\_ there was a storm of applause.
27. The mob burnt \_\_\_\_\_ several important buildings in the riots.
28. The wearing of national costume has largely died \_\_\_\_\_ in Europe.
29. These children are very polite; they have obviously been well brought \_\_\_\_\_.
30. She carried \_\_\_\_\_ with her work in spite of all interruptions.

**5. Combinations with *clear, cut, fall, hold, let and hand*. Put the correct prepositions or adverbs.**

1. Clear \_\_\_\_\_ your books. I want to set the table for lunch.
2. The army fell \_\_\_\_\_ when the enemy attacked.
3. You should cut \_\_\_\_\_ this tree. It is too near the house.
4. The examination was so easy that all the candidates handed \_\_\_\_\_ their answer papers after the first hour.
5. My plans for starting a restaurant fell \_\_\_\_\_ for lack of capital.
6. Our water supply was cut \_\_\_\_\_ because the pipe burst.
7. At the end of term attendance at these classes usually falls \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Mary has cut \_\_\_\_\_ all the pictures in this magazine; her mother will be very angry.
9. I hope the rain holds \_\_\_\_\_ until my washing is dry.
10. They won't let you \_\_\_\_\_ if you aren't a member of the club.
11. The mounted police cleared \_\_\_\_\_ the crowds.
12. A heavy snowfall held \_\_\_\_\_ the trains from the north.
13. If you really want to slim you must cut \_\_\_\_\_ on sweets.
14. The two brothers fell \_\_\_\_\_ over their father's will.
15. You would recover your sense of taste if you cut \_\_\_\_\_ smoking altogether.
16. If you will hold \_\_\_\_\_ I'll put you through to Enquiries.
17. If he refuses to fall \_\_\_\_\_ my plans I can probably find someone more co-operative.
18. These folk songs have been handed \_\_\_\_\_ from generation to generation.
19. She has grown so much that her mother will have to let \_\_\_\_\_ all her dresses.
20. Children, you must clear \_\_\_\_\_ this mess before going to bed.
21. I was cut \_\_\_\_\_ in the middle of my call because I had no more money to put in the box.
22. The burglar cleared \_\_\_\_\_ when he heard me coming downstairs.
23. The retiring general handed \_\_\_\_\_ to his successor.
24. I should feel very cut \_\_\_\_\_ if I lived more than twenty kilometres from the town.
25. The soldiers fell \_\_\_\_\_ and marched off.

26. In the film the train, the train was held \_\_\_\_\_ and robbed by four armed men.
27. The mystery of his sudden disappearance was never cleared \_\_\_\_\_.
28. He didn't dismiss the man; he let him \_\_\_\_\_ with a warning.
29. I hope the weather will clear \_\_\_\_\_ soon. I want to go out.
30. He let the rest of the team \_\_\_\_\_ by not turning up for the match.
31. Deaf people often feel very cut \_\_\_\_\_ from others by their disability.
32. When she got fatter her clothes were too tight and she had to let them all \_\_\_\_\_.
33. I'd like Jones to have the job, but if he doesn't accept we'll have to fall \_\_\_\_\_ a less experienced man.
34. The survivors of the plane crash were able to hold \_\_\_\_\_ till help came.
35. Could you hand \_\_\_\_\_ the photographs so that everyone can see them?
36. You'll need somewhere to keep your books. I'll clear \_\_\_\_\_ this cupboard for you.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

Victoria College  
 Women's Residence  
 University of Toronto.  
 Toronto, Ontario

December 7th., 1983

Dear mother and dad,

It has been three month since I left for college. I have been remiss in writing, and I very sorry for my thoughtlessness in not having written before. I will bring you up to date now. But, before you read, please sit down. OK?

Well then, I am getting along pretty well now. The skull fracture and the concussion I got when I jumped out of the window of my dormitory when it caught fire shortly after my arrival are pretty well healed now. I only spent two weeks in the hospital, and now I can see almost normally and get those sickly headaches only once in a while.

Fortunately, the fire in the dormitory and my jump were witnessed by an attendant at the gas station near the dorm, and he was the one who called the fire department and the ambulance. He also visited me at the hospital, and since I had nowhere to live because of the burned out dorm, he was kind enough to invite me to share his apartment with him. It is really a basement room, but it's kind of cute. He is a very fine boy and we have fallen deeply in love and are planning to get married. We haven't set the date yet, but it will be before my pregnancy begins to show.

Yes, mother and dad, I am pregnant. I know how much you are looking forward to being grandparents, and I know you will welcome the baby and give it the same love and devotion and tender care that you gave me when I was a child. The reason for the delay in our marriage is that my boyfriend has some minor infection which prevents us from passing our premarital blood tests, and I carelessly caught it from him. This will soon clear up with the penicillin injections I am now taking daily.

I know you will welcome him into our family with open arms. He is kind, and although not well-educated, he is ambitious. Although he is of a different race and religion than ours, I know your often expressed tolerance will not permit you to be bothered by these facts.

Now that I have brought you up to date, I want to tell you that there was no dormitory fire, I did not have a concussion or a skull fracture, I was not in hospital, I am not pregnant, I am not engaged, I do not have syphilis, and there is no one in my life. However, I am getting a D in History and an F in Science, and I wanted you to see these marks in their proper perspective.

Your loving daughter,

Edna.



### QUESTIONS

1. Tell the letter in about 80 words.
2. Where is the girl from?
3. Where does she study?
4. What marks has she got in History and Science?

5. Why does she tell lies to her family?
6. Would you do the same? Why?
7. Vocabulary:  
Skull: Concussion:  
Blood test: Dormitory:

## Snow White and the Seven Vertically challenged Folk HER 'DWARFS' MAY UPSET SHORTIES SAYS DAFT COUNCIL

**Roll up, roll up, for a fun-filled, production of Snow White. But don't care mention the word dwarf. It's so much nicer to say seven "vertically challenged" chums.**

Dopey councillors, you see, think the word dwarf could make the little people a bit grumpy.

They want the Christmas panto at Hull's New Theatre changed from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs to just plain snow White.

### Killjoys

Liberal Democrat Andrew Meadowcroft insisted: "This would ensure that those suffering from the disease are not offended."

But Hull comedian Norman Collier described councillors on the cultural committee as a "bunch of killjoys."

He said: "Whatever will they do next? Will the giant in Jack And The Beanstalk be the next to go because he is too tall? And then they will be saying Snow White is racist and Humpty Dumpty too fat.

"I really don't know what is happening to our sense of humour.

"Kids will have nothing to laugh at soon."

### QUESTIONS

1. Where did the event happen?
2. Who wanted to omit the word *dwarf*?
3. What season was it?
4. What is your opinion about this fact? (60 words)
5. Vocabulary:  
Disease: Committee:  
Suffer: Bunch:  
Killjoy: