

Phrasal Verbs

What are Phrasal Verbs?

A phrasal verb is a verb like *pick up*, *turn on* or *get on with*. These verbs consist of

A basic verb + another word or words. The two or three words that make up a phrasal verb form a short "phrase" - which is why we call them "**phrasal verbs**". But a phrasal verb is still a verb. **Look** is a verb. **Look up** is also a verb - a **different** verb. They do not have the same meaning, and they behave differently grammatically. You should treat each phrasal verb as a separate verb, and learn it like any other verb. Look at these examples. You can see that there are three types of phrasal verb formed from a single-word verb:

	verb	definition	example
single-word verb	look	direct your eyes in a certain direction	You must look before you leap.
phrasal verb verb + adverb	look up	search for and find information in a reference book	You can look up the word in a dictionary.
verb + preposition	look after	take care of	Who is looking after the baby?
verb + adverb + preposition	look forward to	anticipate with pleasure	I look forward to meeting you.

Phrasal Verb: VERB + ADVERB

The structure of this type of phrasal verb is:

verb + adverb

These phrasal verbs can be:

- **transitive** (direct object)
- **intransitive** (no direct object)

Look at these examples of transitive and intransitive:

	meaning	example sentence	direct object
transitive	put off	We will have to put off	the meeting. my offer.
	turn down	They turned down	
	get up	I don't like to get up .	
intransitive	break down	He was late because his car broke down .	

Separable

When this type of phrasal verb has a direct object, we can usually separate the two parts. For example, "turn down" is **separable**. We can say: "**turn down** my offer" or "**turn** my offer **down**". Look at these example sentences:



They **turned down** my offer.



They **turned** my offer **down**.

However, if the direct object is a **pronoun**, we have no choice. We **must** separate the two parts of the verb and insert the pronoun. Look at these examples with the verb "switch on". Note that the last one is impossible:



John **switched on** the radio.



John **switched** the radio **on**.



John **switched** it **on**.



John ~~**switched on**~~ it.

Phrasal Verb: VERB + PREPOSITION

This type of phrasal verb is also called a "**prepositional verb**". The structure of a prepositional verb is:

verb + preposition

Because a preposition always has an object, all prepositional verbs have direct objects (ie they are transitive).

Look at these examples of prepositional verbs:

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.

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":

✓ Who is **looking after** the baby?

✗ Who is ~~looking~~ the baby ~~after~~?

Phrasal Verb: VERB + ADVERB + PREPOSITION

This type of phrasal verb is also called a "**phrasal-prepositional verb**". The structure of a phrasal-prepositional verb is:

verb + adverb + preposition

Look at these examples of phrasal-prepositional verbs:

	example sentence		
get on with	have a friendly relationship with	direct object 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.
run out of	use up, exhaust	We have run out of	eggs.

Because phrasal-prepositional verbs end with a preposition, **there is always a direct object**. And, like prepositional verbs, phrasal-prepositional verbs **cannot be separated**. Look at these examples:

✓ We **ran out of** gas.

✓ We **ran out of** it.

✗ We ~~ran~~ gas ~~out of~~.

✗ We ~~ran out~~ gas ~~of~~.

It is a good idea to write "something/somebody" in your vocabulary book when you learn a new phrasal-prepositional verb, like this:

- **get on with** somebody
- **put up with** sthg/sby
- **run out of** something