

Module: Oral Expression

Level: First year, groups: 01,02,03,04,05&06

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Phrasal Verbs

1. What is a phrasal verb?

A phrasal verb combines a normal [verb](#) with an [adverb](#) or a [preposition](#), referred to as the **particle** of the phrasal verb, to create an entirely new verbal phrase—the phrasal verb. The meaning of a phrasal verb is usually unrelated to the meanings of the words that compose it, so think of a phrasal verb as an entirely new and independent word.

When used in a sentence, phrasal verbs act the same as other verbs for [conjugation](#) and placement purposes, although they do have special [grammatical](#) rules regarding word order, which we talk about below. Phrasal verbs can be conjugated into [every type of verb form](#), so you can use them anywhere you could use a normal verb.

Let's look at the phrasal verb *get over* as an example. The verb *get* alone means to acquire, and the preposition *over* alone usually refers to being higher than or going above something. However, put them together and the phrasal verb *get over* means to recover from or overcome something, a completely new definition that's separate from the definitions of *get* and *over*.

You can use *get over* just like a normal verb, in any form or tense. Here are some quick examples:

Simple past tense:

*I had the flu last week but **got over** it.*

Infinitive:

*He wrote a song **to get over** his grandmother's death.*

Gerund:

Getting over prejudice at work is never easy.

Past participle:

*Having finally **gotten over** the breakup, they were ready to return their partner's things.*

2. How to conjugate phrasal verbs

When a phrasal verb is used as the [main verb](#) of a sentence, you conjugate the verb part and leave the other word or words as they are. Simply use whatever form of the verb you would use if it were alone.

*I **get up** at noon during the summer.*

*However, this morning I **got up** at sunrise.*

*I **have gotten up** early too many times this month.*

Notice how only the word *get* changes, while the word *up* remains the same. Also notice how *get*, an [irregular verb](#), uses its irregular forms to fit whichever tense it needs.

In this way, you can use phrasal verbs in [all the verb tenses](#) so that you're able to communicate anything you want. Conjugation is also important for maintaining [verb tense consistency](#) if you're using phrasal verbs in a list with other verbs.

3. Types of phrasal verbs

To better understand phrasal verbs, it helps to organize them into two kinds of pairs: transitive and intransitive; separable and inseparable. A phrasal verb can belong to only one type within each pair (and *all* separable phrasal verbs are transitive).

3.1. Transitive phrasal verbs

Transitive phrasal verbs use a direct object, just like normal [transitive verbs](#).

*Charlie couldn't **put up with** the meowing cats any longer.*

3.2. Intransitive phrasal verbs

Intransitive phrasal verbs do *not* use an object.

*The regional director was late, so the sales team **went ahead** without her.*

3.3. Separable phrasal verbs

With transitive phrasal verbs, you can sometimes put the direct object between the verb and the particle, as in “pick *you* up,” for example. There are, however, a few rules to follow with separable phrasal verbs, so pay attention to our next section, about word order.

He forgot to shut the lights off before he left.

3.4. Inseparable phrasal verbs

Inseparable phrasal verbs cannot be split up; the verb and the particle must stay together. All intransitive phrasal verbs are inseparable.

The wayward son carried on without his father.

Some transitive phrasal verbs are also inseparable.

They went over the contract meticulously before signing it.

4. Word order with phrasal verbs

Most of the time, the words in a phrasal verb stay together. For intransitive and inseparable transitive phrasal verbs, the verb and the particle *must* go next to each other and should never be split up.

Separable phrasal verbs follow different rules, however. For starters, separable phrasal verbs are always transitive, so they always have a direct object. **You can put the direct object in the middle of separable phrasal verbs**, between the verb and the particle:

Augustus never let Hazel down.

This remains true when the direct object is a noun phrase; you can put all the words of the noun phrase between the verb and the particle of a separable phrasal verb:

You never let any of your friends down.

With some separable phrasal verbs, putting the direct object between the verb and the particle is not just an option, it's required. For example, let's look at the phrasal verb *get down*.

The beginning of the movie Up gets down everyone.

The beginning of the movie Up gets everyone down.

With other separable phrasal verbs, it doesn't matter whether the direct object comes in the middle or at the end. Both options are acceptable. Unfortunately, there's no method for determining which phrasal verbs are separable and which are not; you just have to memorize them and practice until they come naturally. Both of the following examples using the separable phrasal verb *pick up* are correct:

Pick the box up and carry it to the kitchen.

Pick up the box and carry it to the kitchen.

However, pronouns do follow a special rule when it comes to separable phrasal verbs: **If the object is a pronoun, it must always be placed in the middle of a separable phrasal verb.** Pronoun direct objects cannot after the phrasal verb.

Pick up it and carry it to the kitchen.

Pick it up and carry it to the kitchen.

Remember that **not all transitive phrasal verbs are separable.** Transitive phrasal verbs can be either separable or inseparable, so be careful of where you put your object. For example, the transitive phrasal verbs *get through*, *come between*, and *go against* are all inseparable, so the direct object comes after them every time.

Nothing comes us between.

Nothing comes between us.

5. Common phrasal verbs (with meanings and examples)

back [x] up

To support or defend someone

*E.g. when the class was making fun of me, only the teacher **backed me up**.*

break down

To stop working, especially in reference to machines

*E.g. the ice cream machine at McDonald's **often breaks down**.*

call around

To contact multiple people

*E.g. Roy **called around** to find a nearby mechanic.*

call [x] off

To cancel a planned event

*E.g. we **called the party off**. / We **called off the party**.*

calm down

To relax after an energetic or irritated state

*E.g. I need a few minutes to **calm down** after that match.*

check [x] out

To examine a person or thing; when used in reference to a person, can connote looking at them with romantic or sexual interest

*E.g. I'll **check the contract out**. / I'll **check out the contract**.*

cheer [x] up

To make someone happy, especially if they were previously sad

*E.g. Reading always **cheers me up** on a rainy day.*

clean up

To be extremely successful in an endeavor such as business, sports, or gambling

*E.g. our hockey team **cleaned up** at the tournament and went home undefeated.*

To stop engaging in questionable behavior, such as consuming drugs or alcohol

*E.g. her boss said she had to either **clean up** or find a new job.*

clean [x] up

To tidy an area

*E.g. John **cleaned the living room up**. / John **cleaned up the living room**.*

come around

To change one's opinion or see a new point of view

*E.g. I never liked seafood but **came around** after trying fried calamari.*

come between [x]

To interfere with a relationship between two people

*E.g. after more than fifty years of partnership, nothing could **come between them**.*

come down with [x]

To catch an illness

*E.g. after traveling, Chandra **came down with a cold**.*

come out of [x]

To happen as a consequence of another event

*E.g. we missed a day of school, so at least some good **came out of our boring class trip**.*

come up

To arise as a topic of discussion or receive attention

*E.g. everyone talked about how much they enjoyed the movie, but the run time never **came up** in the conversation.*

To approach

*E.g. While I was walking along the fence, a cow **came up** and licked my face.*

To present itself or occur, as of an event or situation

*E.g. don't worry about a problem until it **comes up**.*

come up with [x]

To think of an idea, especially as the first person to do so, or to produce a solution

*E.g. Sahar **comes up with her best story ideas** at night, so she writes them down before she forgets them.*

count on [x]

To rely or depend on someone or something)

*E.g. If I'm ever making a mistake, I can **count on my friends** to warn me.*

crack down on [x]

To attack or punish someone harshly; to penalize a behavior

*E.g. Ever since last month's accident, police **have been cracking down on drunk driving**.*

dive into [x]

To eagerly begin a pursuit or activity

*E.g. I'll **dive into that new TV show** later tonight.*

dress up

To put on nice clothes

*E.g. Abed **dressed up** for the award ceremony.*

end up

To eventually reach some conclusion or destination

*E.g. after thinking for a day, he **ended up** taking the job.*

fall apart

To break into pieces

*E.g. My new dress completely **fell apart** after just two washes.*

To experience acute mental or emotional distress

*E.g. He endured all kinds of harassment at work without flinching but **fell apart** when his cat got sick.*

fill [x] up

To put into a container as much as it can contain

*E.g. Bruce **filled his water bottle up** to the brim. / Bruce **filled up his water bottle** to the brim.*

find out [x]

To discover or learn something

*E.g. We **didn't find out the news** until we got back from dinner..*

get [x] across

To successfully communicate or explain something

*E.g. The professor spoke for hours, but they **didn't get anything across** to the students.*

get ahead

To succeed or progress

*E.g. you'll never **get ahead** at this company unless you follow the rules.*

get along with [x]

To be on harmonious terms with someone

*E.g. my dog **gets along with everyone** as long as they're not a cat.*

get around

To travel from place to place

*E.g. in this city, it's impossible to **get around** without a car.*

get around to [x]

To do something eventually

*E.g. I'll **get around to that project** after the playoffs.*

get at [x]

To reach or gain access to something

*E.g. I can't quite **get at this itch** on my back.*

To indicate or suggest something

*E.g. these graphs **are getting at the fact** that we'll be bankrupt by next week.*

get away

To escape or depart

*E.g. Lucio liked to go to the lake every weekend, just to **get away**.*

get away with [x]

To commit a crime or misdeed without incurring any negative consequences

*E.g. the boss's nephew **gets away with things** that none of the other employees would.*

get [x] back

To retrieve something

*E.g. Rodger **got his pencil back** from Greta. / Rodger **got back his pencil** from Greta.*

get back at [x]

To take revenge on someone

*E.g. Laila promised herself that she would **get back at whoever** had started the rumor.*

get by

To survive or manage at a minimum level

*E.g. When Sheila lost her job, the family **got by** with only their savings.*

get down

To enjoy oneself without inhibitions, especially with music or dancing

*E.g. Vicente may be formal at work, but he sure knows how to **get down** to hip-hop.*

get [x] down

To depress or discourage someone

*E.g. Kima always **gets everyone down** with her stories from the hospital.*

To record something by taking notes

*E.g. the president spoke quickly at the press conference, and reporters were struggling to **get all his comments down**. / The president spoke quickly at the press conference, and reporters were struggling to **get down all his comments**.*

get down to [x]

To begin or start something, especially something basic or fundamental

*E.g. Once everyone arrives, we'll **get down to picking teams**.*

get in on [x]

To join an activity

*E.g. after the value of Bitcoin started going up, lots of people wanted to **get in on cryptocurrency**.*

get into [x]

To discuss something thoroughly

*E.g. I don't want to **get into our finances** now; we'll talk after our guests leave.*

get [x] out of [x]

To take some benefit from a situation

*E.g. Babysitting the Cohles was a nightmare, but at least Jabar **got some money out of it**.*

get over [x]

To recover from or overcome something

*E.g. drinking a lot of water helps in **getting over an illness**.*

get through [x]

To complete or endure an unpleasant experience

*E.g. Alessandra can't **get through a morning** without coffee.*

get to [x]

To annoy or bother someone

*E.g. People who don't clean up after their dogs really **get to me**.*

get together

To gather socially

*E.g. the volleyball team is **getting together** for dinner after practice.*

give [x] away

To donate something or give something for free

*E.g. Mindy **gave her prized doll collection away**. / Mindy **gave away her prized doll collection**.*

give up

To accept defeat, quit, or surrender

*E.g. Carin felt like **giving up** every time she saw the scoreboard.*

give [x] up

To stop consuming or doing something, often a habit

*E.g. Minh gave **chocolate up** because of his migraines. / Minh gave **up chocolate** because of his migraines.*

go against [x]

To disobey, contradict, oppose, or fight something

*E.g. a group of students **went against the school dress code** yesterday and wore ripped jeans.*

go ahead

To proceed or move forward

*E.g. Because of the snow, we can't **go ahead** with the festival.*

go along with [x]

To agree with or pretend to agree with

*E.g. Even though Cedric hated weight lifting, he **went along with it** because his coach suggested it.*

go for [x]

To try to achieve something

*E.g. Carlos trains so hard because he is **going for an Olympic gold medal**.*

go on

To continue

*E.g. the workers will **go on** digging until they hit a water pipe.*

go over [x]

To review or look at something

*E.g. Marie **went over the study guide** one last time before the test.*

hand in [x]

To submit something, especially an assignment

*E.g. the teacher wants us to **hand in our essays** by email.*

hold [x] back

To prevent someone from doing something

*E.g. I wanted to become an architect, but my bad grades **held me back**.*

keep [x] up

To continue doing something

*E.g. **keep this pace up** and you'll set a new record!*

leave [x] out

To omit something

*E.g. Orna **left the graph out** of the presentation. / Orna **left out the graph** from the presentation.*

let [x] down

To disappoint someone

*E.g. Kamal **let Marco down** when he arrived late. / Kamal **let down Marco** when he arrived late.*

let go of [x]

To release or free something

*E.g. **don't let go of the rope** until I'm safe.*

let [x] in

To allow something or someone to enter

*E.g. **Close the door or you'll let the flies in!** / **Close the door or you'll let in the flies!***

let [x] know

To tell someone something

*E.g. **let me know** as soon as Leslie texts back.*

look after [x]

To take care of someone or something

*E.g. **thank you for looking after me** when I was sick.*

look up to [x]

To admire or idolize someone

E.g. I looked up to this YouTuber until I read about their scandal.

mix up [x]

To confuse two or more things with one another

E.g. it's easy to mix up Chris Pine and Chris Pratt.

pull [x] up

To retrieve or bring something nearer

E.g. Eugene pulled the document up on his computer. / Eugene pulled up the document on his computer.

put [x] on

To dress oneself in

E.g. I always put my backpack on before leaving the house. / I always put on my backpack before leaving the house.

put up with [x]

To tolerate or condone something

E.g. Somehow Paz could put up with Janice's cynical attitude.

run out of [x]

To use all of or drain the supply of something

E.g. Isabella ran out of toilet paper at the worst possible time.

see to [x]

To make sure something is done

E.g. I'll see to watering the plants while you're gone.

set [x] up

To arrange or organize something

E.g. since no one had invited me to join their study group, I set a group up myself. / Since no one had invited me to join their study group, I set up a group myself.

show off

To display abilities or accomplishments in order to impress others

*E.g. Panya didn't need to shoot so many three-pointers; she **was just showing off**.*

shut [x] off

To turn off, especially a machine

*E.g. don't forget to **shut the water off** after your shower. / Don't forget to **shut off the water** after your shower.*

take after [x]

To resemble someone, especially of children about their parents

*E.g. Li **takes after his father** when it comes to politics.*

take [x] out

To move something outside

*E.g. please **take the garbage out** before dinner. / Please **take out the garbage** before dinner.*

think [x] over

To consider something

*E.g. when his parents suggested selling his Pokémon cards, Yosef **thought the idea over**. / When his parents suggested selling his Pokémon cards, Yosef **thought over the idea**.*

throw [x] away

To dispose of something

*E.g. could you **throw that old burrito away**? / Could you **throw away that old burrito**?*

top [x] off

To refill something to the top; to complete something in a special or spectacular way

*E.g. May I **top your beverage off**? / May I **top off your beverage**?*

turn [x] down

To reject or say no to someone

*E.g. my crush **turned me down** after I asked them out.*

wait on [x]

To serve someone, especially at a restaurant

*E.g. Billie eagerly **waited on the table** of new customers, hoping for a big tip.*

wait out

To wait until an event or period is over

*E.g. they decided to **wait out** the rain before going on a walk.*