

## PHRASAL VERBS

A phrasal verb is a verb that consists of two (or three) parts. The first part is always a verb. The next part is called a **particle**, and is a word that we often consider to be a preposition, such as “across,” “after,” “away,” “back,” “down,” “in,” “into,” “off,” “on,” “out,” “over,” or “up.”

When I clean my sofa cushions, I come across dog hair. (come across = find)

Due to the bad weather, the school called off the game. (called off = canceled)

**Note:** Phrasal verbs present a vocabulary challenge to ESL writers because most phrasal verbs are idioms. The meaning of a phrasal verb is usually very different from the meanings of the individual verb and particle. In the first example, the meaning of “come across” (to find) is not equal to the meanings of the separate words “come” (to move toward something) and “across” (from one side to the opposite side).

### TYPES OF PHRASAL VERBS

We cover three types of phrasal verbs in this handout. The best way to recognize which phrasal verb is which is to consult a dictionary.

#### Separable Phrasal Verbs

The verb and particle in a separable phrasal verb can be separated when there is a noun as the object. If there is a pronoun as the object, the phrasal verb must be separated. Separable phrasal verbs often use these nine particles: “up,” “down,” “on,” “off,” “in,” “out,” “away,” “back,” and “over.”

Phrasal verb	Phrasal verb + noun	Phrasal verb + pronoun
Hand over (give something)	Hand over the cash Hand the cash over	Hand it over
Figure out (find the answer to a problem)	Figure out the answers Figure the answers out	Figure them out
Give away (give something to someone)	Give away the prize Give the prize away	Give it away
Look up (look for information)	Look up these words Look these words up	Look them up
Put off (postpone)	Put off the test Put the test off	Put it off
Pay back (repay)	Pay back my aunt Pay my aunt back	Pay her back
Turn down (lower)	Turn down the volume Turn the volume down	Turn it down

#### CONTACT US:

(702) 895-3908 | writingcenter@unlv.edu  
unlv.edu/writing-center



## Non-separable Phrasal Verbs

Non-separable phrasal verbs cannot be separated, regardless of whether the object is a noun or a pronoun. Common particles for non-separable phrasal verbs include: “across,” “after,” “into,” or “with.”

Phrasal verb	Phrasal verb + noun	Phrasal verb + pronoun
Call on (ask a question)	Call on the student	Call on him
Check into (register at a hotel, investigate)	Check into the hotel	Check into it
Get along with (be friends with)	Get along with Susan	Get along with her
Run out of (not have anymore)	Run out of gas	Run out of it
Watch out for (be careful)	Watch out for that dog	Watch out of it

## Phrasal Verbs without an Object

Some phrasal verbs are intransitive verbs and don't require an object to complete the meaning. For example: V. S. Naipaul passed away (died). My car broke down (stopped functioning).

Phrasal verb	Verb + no object
Break down (stop functioning)	My car broke down.
Break up (end a relationship)	Ahmed and Sara broke up yesterday.
Catch on (begin to understand)	It took me a long time to catch on.
Come on (stop delaying)	Come on! We're going to be late.
Eat out (eat at a restaurant)	It's expensive to eat out every day.
Get up (leave bed)	What time do you usually get up?
Give up (stop trying)	I was learning French, but I gave up.
Go off (make a noise)	My alarm went off at 4:30.
Hold on (wait)	Hold on a minute.
Keep on (continue)	He kept on talking.
Show up (appear at a place)	Not many people showed up.
Take off (leave the ground)	The plane didn't take off on time.
Wake up (stop sleeping)	I woke up when I heard the noise.