

break¹

S1 W1

/breɪk/

verb

(*past tense* **broke** /brəʊk \$ broʊk/, *past participle* **broken** /'brəʊkən \$ 'broʊ-/)

1 IN PIECES | **separate into pieces**

a) [transitive] BREAK

if you break something, you make it separate into two or more pieces, for example by hitting it, dropping it, or bending it:

I had to break a window to get into the house.

Don't lean on the fence like that – you'll break it!

break something in half/two

He broke the biscuit in half and handed one piece to me.

Break the chocolate **into** small **pieces** and melt it over a gentle heat.

b) [intransitive] BREAK

if something breaks, it separates into two or more pieces:

He kept pulling at the rope until it broke.

The frames are made of plastic and they tend to break quite easily.

2 PART OF YOUR BODY | **bones** [transitive] BREAK to damage a bone in your body by making it crack or split:

She fell downstairs and broke her hip.

3 NOT WORKING | **machines**

a) [transitive] BREAK

to damage a machine so that it does not work properly:

Don't mess about with my camera – you'll break it.

Someone's broken the TV.

b) [intransitive] BREAK

if a machine breaks, it stops working properly:

The washing machine's broken again.

4 RULE/LAW ETC **rules/laws** [transitive] DISOBEY to disobey a rule or law:

*They're **breaking the law** by employing such young children.*

*If you **break the rules**, you will be punished.*

*The cameras catch motorists who **break the speed limit**.*

5 PROMISE/AGREEMENT **promise/agreement** [transitive] NOT DO SOMETHING to not do something that you have promised to do or signed an agreement to do:

*I never **break my promises**.*

*You betrayed me. You **broke your word**.*

break an agreement/contract

*He was worried that he might be **breaking his contract**.*

6 **stop/rest** [intransitive] to stop for a short time in order to have a rest or eat something:

break for

*Shall we **break for lunch** now?*

7 END A SITUATION **end something** [transitive] CHANGE/MAKE SOMETHING DIFFERENT to stop something from continuing:

*We need to **break the cycle of poverty and crime in the inner cities**.*

*We took turns driving, in order to try and **break the monotony**.*

*New talks will begin on Monday in an effort to **break the deadlock**.*

8 FAIL **defeat somebody** [transitive] to make someone feel that they have been completely defeated and they cannot continue working or living:

*Losing his business nearly **broke him**.*

*I won't give in. I won't be **broken by him**.*

9 **destroy an organization** [transitive] to damage an organization so badly that it no longer has any power:

*The government succeeded in **breaking the unions**.*

10 DAY/DAWN **day/dawn** [intransitive] HAPPEN when the day or the DAWN breaks, the sky gets light:

Dawn was breaking by the time we arrived home.

- 11** STORM **storm** [intransitive] START TO HAPPEN, EXIST ETC if a storm breaks, it begins:

We were keen to get back to the hotel before the storm broke.

- 12** WEATHER **weather** [intransitive] CHANGE/BECOME DIFFERENT if the weather breaks, it suddenly changes and becomes cold or wet:

The following day the weather broke and we had ten days of solid rain.

- 13** WAVE **waves** [intransitive] FALL when waves break, they fall onto the land at the edge of the water:

We sat and watched the waves breaking on the shore

- 14** VOICE **somebody's voice** [intransitive] LOW SOUND OR VOICE

a)

when a boy's voice breaks, it becomes lower and starts to sound like a man's voice:

He was fifteen, and his voice was just beginning to break.

b)

if your voice breaks, it does not sound smooth because you are feeling strong emotions:

Her voice broke as she told us what had happened.

- 15** NEWS **news**

a) [intransitive] NEWS

if news about an important event breaks, it becomes known:

News of his resignation broke yesterday.

The minister has refused to give any interviews since the scandal broke.

b) [transitive]

if you break unpleasant news to someone, you tell it to them:

*I didn't know how I was going to **break the news** to my mother.*

The doctor finally broke it to me that there was no cure.

- 16** **break a habit** STOP DOING SOMETHING

to stop doing something that you do regularly, especially something that you should not do:

a new drug which helps smokers to break their habit

17 **break a record** BEST

to do something even faster or even better than the previous best time, amount etc:

an attempt to break the 10,000-metres world record

18 **break a journey** (BrE)

to stop somewhere for a short time during a long journey:

We decided to break our journey in Oxford.

19 **break somebody's heart**

to make someone very unhappy by ending a relationship with them or doing something that upsets them a lot:

He broke my heart when he left me.

It'll break your father's heart if you tell him you're giving up college.

20 **break a strike** STOP WORKING/GO ON STRIKE

to force workers to end a STRIKE:

The government has threatened to bring in the army to break the 10-month-old strike.

21 **break a link/tie/connection** STOP DOING SOMETHING

to end a relationship with a person or organization:

The US has now broken all diplomatic links with the regime.

Sometimes it is necessary to break family ties in order to protect the child.

22 SURFACE/SKIN **break the skin** BREAK

to cut the skin on your body:

Their teeth are sharp enough to break the skin.

23 **break the back of something** FINISH DOING SOMETHING

to finish the main or worst part of something:

I think we've broken the back of the job now.

24 **break the bank**

to cost a lot of money, or more money than you have:

A new hard drive doesn't have to break the bank.

25 break somebody's concentration INTERRUPT

to interrupt someone and stop them from being able to continue thinking or talking about something:

The slightest sound would break his concentration.

26 break the silence TALK TO SOMEBODY LOUD/NOISY

to end a period of silence by talking or making a noise:

The silence was broken by a loud scream.

27 break somebody's spirit FORCE SOMEBODY TO DO SOMETHING

to destroy someone's feeling of determination:

They could not break her spirit.

The spirit of our soldiers will never be broken.

28 break somebody's power

to take away someone's position of power or control:

At last the power of the Church was finally broken.

29 break the ice (informal)

to make people feel more friendly and willing to talk to each other:

Sam's arrival broke the ice and people began to talk and laugh.

30 CODE UNDERSTAND **break a code**

to succeed in understanding something that is written in a secret way:

Scientists worked day and night to break the code.

31 break wind

to allow gas to escape from your bottom, making a noise and an unpleasant smell

32 break (somebody's) serve

to win a game in tennis when your opponent is starting the game by hitting the ball first:

Hewitt broke serve twice in the second set.

33 break a leg (spoken)

used to wish someone luck, especially just before they perform on stage

COLLOCATIONS – Meaning 5**break + NOUN**

break your promise *I'll never forgive him for breaking his promise to me.*

break your word (= break your promise) *I've promised to do it and I never break my word.*

break your vow (= break a serious or formal promise) *He accused her of breaking her marriage vows.*

break (off) your engagement *In the end she decided to break their engagement.*

break a contract *He took the company to court for breaking the contract.*

break an agreement *This action broke the international agreement of 1925.*

THESAURUS

to break something

break **verb** [transitive] to damage something and make it separate into pieces, for example by dropping it or hitting it: *Careful you don't break the chair. | He broke his leg.*

smash **verb** [transitive] to break something with a lot of force: *A policeman smashed his camera.*

snap **verb** [transitive] to break something into two pieces, making a loud noise – used especially about long thin objects: *He snapped the sticks in two.*

split **verb** [transitive] to separate something into two pieces along a straight line: *Using a sharp knife, split the melon in half.*

fracture **verb** [transitive] to damage a bone, especially so that a line appears on the surface: *I fell over and fractured my wrist.*

tear /teə \$ ter/ **verb** [transitive] to damage paper or cloth by pulling it so that it separates into pieces: *She tore up the letter and put it in the bin. | I tore my jacket.*

to become broken

break **verb** [intransitive] to become damaged and separate into pieces: *Plastic breaks quite easily.*

smash **verb** [intransitive] to break after being hit with a lot of force:

The bowl smashed as it hit the floor.

shatter **verb** [intransitive] to break into a lot of small pieces: *The glass shattered all over the pavement.*

crack **verb** [intransitive] if something cracks, a line appears on the surface, which means that it could later break into separate pieces: *The ice was starting to crack.*

burst **verb** [intransitive] if a tyre, balloon, pipe etc bursts, it gets a hole and air or liquid suddenly comes out of it: *She blew up the balloon until it burst.*

split **verb** [intransitive] to break in a straight line: *The damp had caused the wood to split.*

crumble **verb** [intransitive] to break into a powder or a lot of small pieces: *The cork just crumbled in my hand.*

break away

phrasal verb

1 LEAVE A JOB OR ORGANIZATION to leave a group or political party and form another group, usually because of a disagreement:

More than 30 Labour MPs broke away to form a new left-wing party.

break away from

They broke away from the national union and set up their own local organization.

→ [BREAKAWAY](#)²

2 to leave your home, family, or job and become independent:

break away from

I felt the need to break away from home.

3 MOVE/CHANGE POSITION to move away from someone who is holding you:

She started crying and tried to break away.

break away from

She broke away from him and ran to the door.

4 to move away from other people in a race or game:

Radcliffe broke away 200 metres before the finish.

5 to become loose and no longer attached to something:

Part of the plane's wing had broken away.

break down

phrasal verb

1 MACHINEBROKEN if a car or machine breaks down, it stops working:

The car broke down just north of Paris.

The printing machines are always breaking down.

→ BREAKDOWN

2 FAILFAIL to fail or stop working in a successful way:

Negotiations broke down after only two days.

I left London when my marriage broke down.

→ BREAKDOWN

3 DOOROPEN **break something ↔ down**

if you break down a door, you hit it so hard that it breaks and falls to the ground:

Police had to break down the door to get into the flat.

4 CHANGE FIXED IDEASCHANGE/MAKE SOMETHING DIFFERENT **break something ↔ down**

to change or remove something that prevents people from working together and having a successful relationship with each other:

*Getting young people together will help to **break down the barriers** between them.*

It takes a long time to break down prejudices.

5 CHANGE CHEMICALLYCHANGE FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER if a substance breaks down, or something breaks it down, it changes as a result of a chemical process:

break something ↔ down

Food is broken down in the stomach.

Bacteria are added to help break down the sewage.

6 CRYCRY to be unable to stop yourself crying, especially in public:

He broke down and cried.

*She **broke down in tears** when she heard the news.*

7 MAKE SOMETHING SIMPLE/SEPARATE break something ↔ down

to separate something into smaller parts so that it is easier to do or understand:

He showed us the whole dance, then broke it down so that we could learn it more easily.

The question can be broken down into two parts.

→ BREAKDOWN**break for something**

phrasal verb

RUN to suddenly run towards something, especially in order to escape from someone:

He broke for the door, but the guards got there before he did.

break in

phrasal verb

1 ENTER to enter a building by using force, in order to steal something:

Thieves broke in and stole £10,000 worth of computer equipment.

→ BREAK-IN

2 INTERRUPT to interrupt someone when they are speaking:

break in on

I didn't want to break in on his telephone conversation.

break in with

Dad would occasionally break in with an amusing comment.

3 WEAR CLOTHES **break something ↔ in**

to make new shoes or boots less stiff and more comfortable by wearing them:

I went for a walk to break in my new boots.

4 USED TO/ACCUSTOMED TO **break somebody in**

to help a person get used to a certain way of behaving or working:

She's quite new to the job, so we're still breaking her in.

5 break something ↔ in

to teach a young horse to carry people on its back:

We break the horses in when they're about two years old.

break into something

phrasal verb

- 1** STEALENTER to enter a building or car by using force, in order to steal something:

Someone broke into my car and stole the radio.

Her house was broken into last week.

- 2** NEW BUSINESS ACTIVITYTAKE PART/BE INVOLVED to become involved in a new job or business activity:

She made an attempt to break into journalism.

It's a profession that is very hard to break into.

Many British firms have failed in their attempts to break into the American market.

- 3** MONEYSPEND MONEY to start to spend money that you did not want to spend:

I don't want to break into my savings unless I have to.

- 4 break into a run/trot etc** START DOING SOMETHING

to suddenly start running:

He broke into a run as he came round the corner.

- 5 break into a smile/a song/applause etc** START DOING SOMETHING

to suddenly start smiling, singing etc:

Her face broke into a smile.

The audience broke into loud applause.

break somebody of something

phrasal verb

STOP DOING SOMETHING to make someone stop having a bad habit:

*Try to **break** yourself **of** the **habit** of eating between meals.*

break off

phrasal verb

- 1** PAUSE to suddenly stop talking:

She started to speak, then broke off while a waitress served us coffee.

He broke off in mid-sentence to shake hands with the new arrivals.

break something ↔ off

I broke off the conversation and answered the phone.

2 RELATIONSHIP **break something ↔ off**

to end a relationship:

*She **broke off** their **engagement** only a few weeks before they were due to be married.*

*The US has **broken off** diplomatic **relations** with the regime.*

3 BREAK if something breaks off, or if you break it off, it comes loose and is no longer attached to something else:

One of the car's wing mirrors had broken off.

break something ↔ off

He broke off a piece of bread.

break out

phrasal verb

1 WAR/FIRE ETC START TO HAPPEN, EXIST ETC if something unpleasant such as a fire, fight, or war breaks out, it starts to happen:

I was still living in London when the war broke out.

Does everyone know what to do if a fire breaks out?

Fighting broke out between demonstrators and the police.

→ OUTBREAK

2 ESCAPE ESCAPE to escape from a prison:

break out of

Three men have broken out of a top-security jail.

→ BREAKOUT

3 CHANGE YOUR LIFE CHANGE/MAKE SOMETHING DIFFERENT to change the way you live because you feel bored:

break out of

She felt the need to break out of her daily routine.

4 **break out in spots/a rash/a sweat etc** ILLNESS/DISEASE

if you break out in spots etc, they appear on your skin:

I broke out in a painful rash.

My whole body broke out in a sweat.

break through

phrasal verb

1 ATTACK **break through (something)**

to manage to get past or through something that is in your way:

Several demonstrators broke through the barriers despite warnings from the police.

After hours of fierce fighting, rebels broke through and captured the capital.

2 SHOW/LET SOMEBODY SEE SOMETHING **break through (something)**

if the sun breaks through, you can see it when you could not see it before because there were clouds:

The sun broke through at around lunch time.

The sun soon broke through the mist.

3 DEAL WITH to manage to do something successfully when there is a difficulty that is preventing you:

He's a very talented young actor who's just ready to break through.

break through into

It is possible that at this election some of the minority parties might succeed in breaking through into parliament.

→ BREAKTHROUGH

break up

phrasal verb

1 BREAK INTO PIECES BREAK if something breaks up, or if you break it up, it breaks into a lot of small pieces:

It seems that the plane just broke up in the air.

break something ↔ up

Use a fork to break up the soil.

2 SEPARATESEPARATE **break something ↔ up**

to separate something into several smaller parts:

There are plans to break the company up into several smaller independent companies.

You need a few trees and bushes to break up the lawn.

3 FIGHTSTOP SOMETHING THAT IS HAPPENING **break something ↔ up**

to stop a fight:

Three policemen were needed to break up the fight.

4 **break something ↔ up**

to make people leave a place where they have been meeting or protesting:

*Government soldiers **broke up the demonstration.***

*Police moved in to **break up the meeting.***

5 MARRIAGE/ORGANIZATIONFINISH/COME TO AN END if a marriage, group of people, or relationship breaks up, the people in it separate and do not live or work together any more:

*He lost his job and his **marriage broke up.***

The couple broke up last year.

Many bands break up because of personality clashes between the musicians.

break up with

Has Sam really broken up with Lucy?

→ [BREAKUP](#)

6 CROWDCROWD if a meeting or party breaks up, people start to leave:

The party didn't break up until after midnight.

The meeting broke up without any agreement.

7 SCHOOL (BrE)FINISH/COME TO AN END when a school breaks up, it closes for a holiday:

School breaks up next week.

break up for

When do you break up for Easter?

8 MAKE SOMEBODY LAUGH **break somebody up** (AmE) (informal) FUNNY
 to make someone laugh by saying or doing something funny:
He breaks me up!

break with somebody/something phrasal verb

1 LEAVE A JOB OR ORGANIZATION to leave a group of people or an organization, especially because you have had a disagreement with them:
She had broken with her family years ago.
They broke with the Communist Party and set up a new party.

2 break with tradition/the past TRADITION
 to stop following old customs and do something in a completely different way:
Now is the time to break with the past.
His work broke with tradition in many ways.

Word origin

Language: Old English

Origin: *brecan*

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

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