

Grammar Reference

Multi-word verbs

Meaning and use

A multi-word verb is a verb plus a word such as **in**, **on**, **out**, **up**, **away**, **off** and **down**. We often think of these words as prepositions, but here they behave like adverbs. The adverb sometimes extends the meaning of the verb on its own.

*It's so annoying. Jason **keeps** phoning me all the time.*

*It's so annoying. Jason **keeps on** phoning me all the time.*

Here, the phrasal verb **keeps on** means **continues**. It has the same meaning as **keeps** but is slightly stronger. Other phrasal verbs that extend the meaning of the main verb are **hurry up** and **sit down**.

Many verbs can go with different adverbs and the adverbs can completely change the meaning of the verb.

*'When did you **break up**?'*

*'Oh, I **broke off** our engagement ages ago. He **broke down** when I told him.'*

In this conversation, **break up** means **separate**, **broke off** means **ended** and **broke down** means **became very upset**. The meanings are different from the verb **break**.

Some phrasal verbs are intransitive (they have no object) for example: **keep on** and **hurry up**. Other phrasal verbs are transitive: they can be followed by a direct object, but not an object pronoun.

*I **broke off** our engagement ages ago*

***NOT:** I broke off it.*

However, you can often put an object pronoun in the middle of a phrasal verb, between the verb and the adverb.

*'Guess what! Rob **asked me out** yesterday!'*

Some verbs have three parts to them, an adverb and a preposition.

*'Ah! I've seen you talking to Rob a lot recently. You seem to **get on with** him really well.'*

Form

No object

*My car **broke down**.*

No object

*My car **broke down**.*

Noun object

*Mark **broke out of** prison.*

Object pronoun after the verb

*Last week Ismail **broke up with** her.*

Object pronoun in the middle

*They were engaged, but they **broke it off**.*

Take note: phrasal verbs with direct objects

With phrasal verbs, (but not prepositional verbs), the noun object can usually go before or after the adverb.

*I **broke off** our engagement. / I **broke** our engagement **off**.*

Pronunciation

For most phrasal verbs, the main stress is on the adverb.

*When did you **break up**?'*

*'Oh, I **broke off** our engagement ages ago. He **broke down** when I told him.'*

This is the same for three-part verbs.

*I'm so **looking forward to** it!*

But for prepositional verbs, the stress is often on the main verb, not on the preposition.

*I really can't **deal** with it.*

