

Phrasal Verb

Definition of Phrasal Verb

A phrasal verb is a compound verb that contains a verb and a prepositional [adverb](#) or particle. Together, these form a semantic unit. A phrasal verb may also appear as an idiom.

Phrasal verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, separable and inseparable, which is why they are often referred to as “two-part verbs.” The English language contains a number of phrasal verbs, such as “tear off,” “pull through,” and “run out.” Almost all of these phrasal verbs have multiple meanings. In the [sentence](#) “Put out the light, and then put out the light.” (*Othello*, by William Shakespeare), Shakespeare has used the phrasal verb “put out” twice.

Common Uses of Phrasal Verbs

“She turned down the job offer.”

“It is the right time now to think this over.”

“You should back me up on this.”

“You need to check the item out before continuing to the shipping screen.”

“She throws the football up in the air.”

“He is so disgusted that he feels like throwing up.”

Difference between Phrasal Verbs and Prepositional Verbs

A phrasal verb is the combination of a verb and its particles. It may have a transitive or intransitive verb and/or particle. Some phrasal verbs are not separable, which means that an [object](#) can appear between the verb and its preposition/adverb. For example:

“He gave me my money back.”

A prepositional [phrase](#) contains a verb followed by a preposition. It contains a [direct object](#), which means that the prepositional verb is actually a [transitive verb](#). This verb is not separable, which means that an object cannot appear between the verb and its preposition. For example:

“They are knocking at your door right now.”

Examples of Phrasal Verbs in Literature

Example #1: *The Complete Neurotic's Notebook* (by Mignon McLaughlin)

“What you can't get out of, get into wholeheartedly.”

The underlined words “out” and “into” are both particles. The first particle is a phrasal verb (“get out of”), while the second particle (“get into”) is prepositional verb.

Example #2: *Responsibilities of the Novelist* (by Frank Norris)

“I never truckled; I never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies. By God, I told them the truth.”

In this example, the phrasal verbs “took off” and “held out” are separable and convey different meanings from the original verbs, while both “off” and “on” are particles.

Example #3: *The Catcher in the Rye* (by J.D. Salinger)

“The reason I was standing up on Thomsen Hill, instead of down at the game ... I forgot to tell you about that. They kicked me out. I wasn't supposed to come ... She hung up my coat in the hall closet.”

Salinger has used three phrasal verbs here: “standing up,” “kicked out,” and “hung up.” All of them are separable and make complete semantic

units by themselves.

Example #4: *Catch-22* (by Joseph Heller)

“Major had never played basketball or any other game before, but his great, bobbing height and rapturous enthusiasm helped make up for his innate clumsiness and lack of experience.”

In this passage, the verb is “make,” while “up” is used as a particle but not as a preposition. Both verbs makes the combination complete.

Example #5: *The Old Man and the Sea* (by Earnest Hemingway)

“The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords ... The successful fishermen of that day were already in and had butchered their marlin out and carried them laid full length across two planks ...

“A small bird came toward the skiff from the north. He was a warbler and flying very low over the water. The old man could see that he was very tired.”

In this excerpt, Hemingway has used three phrasal verbs: “ran down,” “butchered,” and “flying over,” which include the verbs “ran,” “butchered,” and “flying,” as well as the particles “down,” “out,” and “over.”

Function

A phrasal verb plays the same function as does a simple verb. However, a phrasal verb conveys an idiomatic meaning. Phrasal verbs are commonly used in both writing and speaking, but they are more difficult for non-native speakers who rely solely on memorization to understand. The most important characteristic of a phrasal verb is that the meaning of the combined structure is different from the original meanings of the verbs used to create the phrasal verb

