

# **Phrasal Verbs: Learning Meaning and Deciding Separability**



# Introduction

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Welcome to the world of phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs are a difficult part of English. Many people who study English have trouble with learning phrasal verbs. This lesson will help you to understand what phrasal verbs are and how to use them.

As an intermediate level English student, you have learned how to use basic verbs. You may already feel that you can comfortably use basic verbs in your daily conversations. In this lesson, we will use the knowledge that you already have about using basic verbs and add phrasal verbs to your vocabulary. This lesson has two sections that will help you to feel comfortable with using these phrasal verbs.

The first section will be recognizing phrasal verbs. What is a phrasal verb? Why is a phrasal verb different from a regular verb? These questions will be answered in the first section. You will learn how to recognize phrasal verbs.

The second section will talk about separability. You may not know what separability is yet, but you will after completing this section. Separability is important when using phrasal verbs with objects in a sentence. Don't worry if you don't understand separability yet. You will. That's why you're taking this lesson.

To complete this lesson, you will need a pen or pencil and access to the Internet.

## What is a Phrasal Verb?

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### Section 1

Do you remember what a verb does? A verb shows the action in a sentence. Can you find the verbs in the following story?

*Once there was a boy named Bill. He really liked a beautiful girl named Jill so he called her up. She answered the phone "what's up"? He said, "I've been checking you out and you turn me on". Her*

*friend Wil was with her so she said, “hold on”. She told her friend, “it’s Bill”. Wil said, “stop playing around. You’re with me so turn him down”. Then in her mind a thought popped up. She told Bill, “Get out to see your buddy Phil”. Wil heard and thought Bill struck out. Wil took off and Jill set out to visit Phil. That’s where she hooked up with Bill.*

Did you understand this story? It is full of phrasal verbs. A phrasal verb is the combination of a basic verb and a preposition. When a basic verb and a preposition are put together and the meaning of the verb changes we call that a phrasal verb. Here are examples:

Watch = to look at something for a long time

Out = the opposite of in

Watch out = To search

Do you see how the meanings of “Watch” and “Out” are changed when they are put together? Here’s another example:

Pick = to choose

Up = the direction of moving vertical

Pick up = to get someone or something from a location

Can you see the difference in the meaning for these two sentences?

1. My best friend watched out for my girlfriend out the window.
2. My best friend watched my girlfriend out the window.

The first sentence uses a phrasal verb. The best friend is searching for the girlfriend. In the second sentence, the best friend is just looking at the girlfriend for a long time out of the window.

The two parts of a phrasal verb are the verb and the particle. The particle is the preposition that has changed meaning. In sentence 1 above we have a phrasal verb. The out in “watch out” doesn’t mean the opposite of in. Together with “watch” it means to search. In sentence 2, “out” means the opposite of in. What direction was the friend looking through the window? He was looking out of the window, not in the window. It is still a preposition. Look at the next two sentences. See if you can find which uses a phrasal verb and which uses a verb and a preposition.

1. I put the bowling ball up in the closet.
2. I put up with the bowling ball in the closet.

Sentence 1 has a verb with a preposition. Where am I putting the bowling ball? I'm putting it "up" in the closet. Sentence 2 is a phrasal verb. I'm not putting the bowling ball anywhere. It's already in the closet. I'm "putting up with" it. That means that I allow it there even though I don't like it. The meaning is changed.

***Practice:***

*Circle the phrasal verbs in the following sentences. Be careful! Some do not have phrasal verbs.*

1. The police officer pulled me over for speeding.
2. I pulled the sweater over my head.
3. The boxer knocked out his opponent.
4. I knocked my elbow on the doorknob.
5. I drank some bad milk and threw up all over the floor.
6. I threw the ball up in the air.
7. The boy fell down the tree.
8. The chair I made fell apart when I sat on it.
9. I held up my pen to the tall basketball player for his autograph.
10. The robbers held up the bank to get the money.
11. I broke the piggy bank into many pieces to get my money out.
12. Robbers broke into my car and stole my stereo.
13. I ran over the hill.

14. I ran over the dog with my car.
15. I took off my shoes.
16. The plane just took off.
17. I put on makeup this morning.
18. I put on a show for the sick children.
19. If we keep walking, we will get over the mountain.
20. I can't get over the death of my dog.

### ***How do I know what a phrasal verb means?***

There is no easy way to know what a phrasal verb means. Phrasal verbs need to be memorized with their meanings. There are hundreds of phrasal verbs in English. It is easiest to memorize phrasal verbs just a few at a time. Here is a list of the phrasal verbs separated into small groups that we will use in the rest of this lesson: (All of these words and definitions come from <http://www.stuff.co.uk/phrasal.htm>)

#### ***Computers***

Back up - to make a copy of computer information so you do not lose it.

Log off - to finish using a computer system

Boot up - to start a computer so it is ready to use.

Hack into - to get into someone else's computer system without permission

#### ***Crime***

Beat up - to hurt someone badly by hitting or kicking them again and again

Bump off - to kill someone

Inform on - to give information about someone who has done something wrong to a person in authority

Get away with - to succeed in not being criticized or punished for something wrong that you have done

Hold up - to steal money from a building, a person or a vehicle, by using violence or by threatening to use violence.

Break into - to get into a building or car by using force, usually to steal something

Let off - to not punish someone who has committed a crime or done something wrong, or to not punish severely

### ***Emotions***

Cheer up - to start feeling happier

Wind up - to annoy someone

Snap out of - to force yourself to stop feeling sad or upset

Calm down - to stop feeling upset, angry or excited, or to make someone stop feeling this way

Tear apart - to make someone feel very unhappy

### ***Food***

Whip up - to make food for a meal very quickly and easily

Pig out - to eat a lot of food

Pick at - to eat only a small amount of a meal because you are not hungry or because you are feeling ill

Knock back - to quickly drink a lot of alcohol

Eat up - to eat all of the food you have been given

Bolt down - to eat food very quickly

### ***Health***

Get over - to feel better after having an illness

Come round - to become conscious again

Keep down - to be able to eat or drink something without vomiting

Pass away - to die

Look after - to take care of someone

Pick up - to get an infectious disease from someone or something

Fight off - to try hard to get rid of an illness

### ***Money***

Dip into - to spend part of a supply of money that you have been keeping or saving

Cough up - to provide money for something, especially when you are not very willing to do this

Get by - to have just enough money to pay for the things that you need, but nothing more

Pay back - to give someone the money that you owe them

Tide over - to help someone, usually by giving them money for a period of time when they have no money

Splash out - to spend a lot of money on something, which is very pleasant but which you do not need

### ***Travel***

Take off - (aircraft) to move from the ground and begin to fly

Touch down - (aircraft) to land on the ground

Set off - to start a journey

Check in - to show your ticket at an airport so you can be told where you are sitting and so that your bags can be put on the aircraft

See off - to go to the place that someone is leaving from in order to say goodbye

### ***Conversation***

Butt in - to rudely add a remark to someone else's conversation

Reel off - to say a long list of things quickly and without stopping (S)

Blurt out - to say something suddenly and without thinking, especially because you are nervous or excited (S)

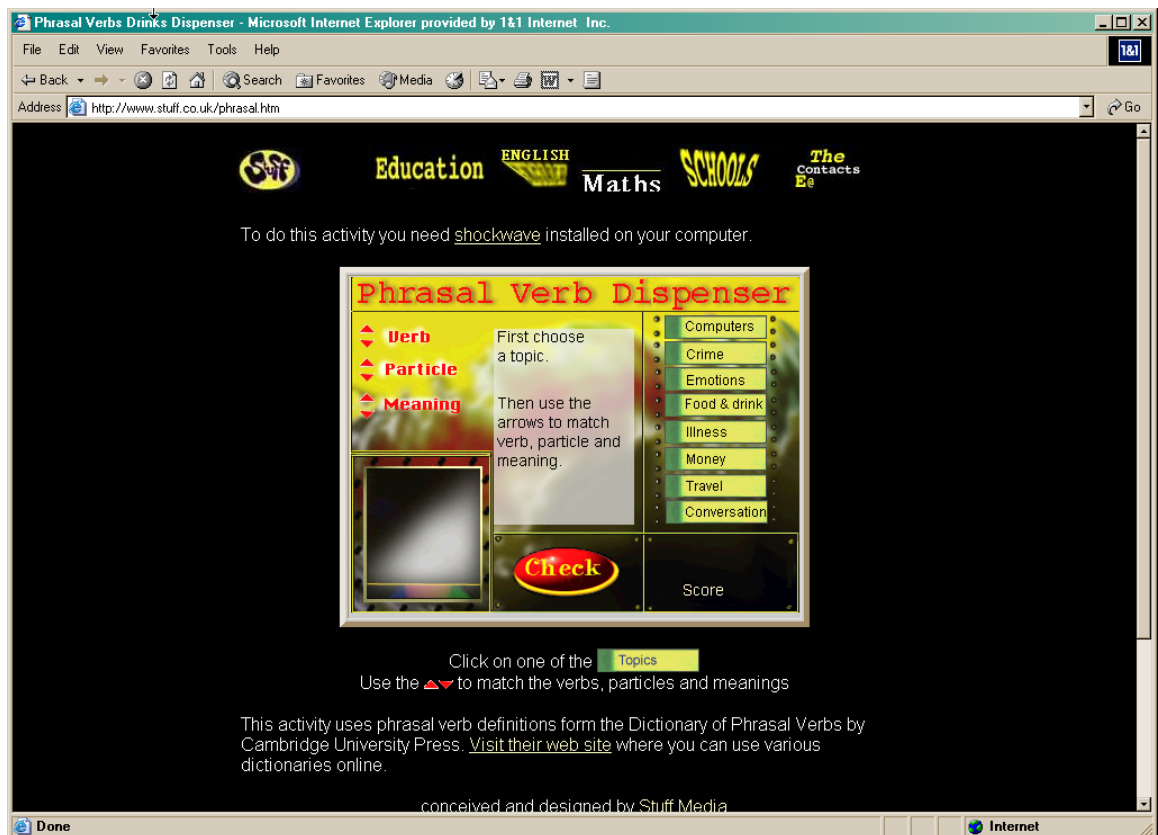
Shut up - to stop talking or to make someone else do this

Go on - to talk in a very annoying way about something for a long time

Clam up - to become quiet or refuse to talk about something, usually because you are shy or afraid

### ***Practice***

To practice matching the correct phrasal verbs to their meanings you will need to go to <http://www.stuff.co.uk/phrasal.htm> on the Internet. Once you are there, you will see the following screen:



Now, you will need to put together the phrasal verbs in each category and match them to the correct meaning. Once you have matched all

the phrasal verbs to their meanings, you can continue on to the second section of this lesson.

## What is Separability?

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### Section 2

Many sentences use a direct object. The direct object is the object that receives the action from the verb. Let's look at an example.

I ate the cookie off the floor.

In this sentence my verb was "ate". What did I eat? I ate the cookie. The cookie received the action of being eaten. The cookie was directly affected by my action of eating it. It's in my stomach now.

The direct object always follows the verb in a sentence.

I ate the cookie  
He kicked the ball  
She slapped him.

In all of these sentences, we can see that the direct objects (cookie, ball, him) follow the verb. In phrasal verbs, things get a little bit more difficult.

### *Separability*

Some phrasal verbs can separate to put the direct object between the verb and the particle.

- I picked up the cookie from the floor
- I picked the cookie up from the floor.

Both of these sentences are correct. The phrasal verb "pick up" is separable. We can either put the direct object (the cookie) between "pick" and "up" or we can put it after the phrasal verb.

Other phrasal verbs aren't separable.

- Watch out for the gun!

- Watch the gun out for!

“Watch out” is not a separable phrasal verb. The first sentence is correct but the second sentence is wrong. We cannot put anything between “watch” and “out” or the phrasal verb will lose its meaning.

### ***How do I know if a verb is separable or not?***

There is no rule to tell us if a phrasal verb is separable or not. The only way to learn if a phrasal verb is separable or not is by memorization. Below is the same list of words that you used before. The only change that is made is that there is a (S) placed next to each phrasal verb that is separable.

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### ***Crime***

Beat up - to hurt someone badly by hitting or kicking them again and again (S)

Bump off - to kill someone (S)

Inform on - to give information about someone who has done something wrong to a person in authority

Get away with - to succeed in not being criticized or punished for something wrong that you have done

Hold up - to steal money from a building, a person or a vehicle, by using violence or by threatening to use violence. (S)

Break into - to get into a building or car by using force, usually to steal something

Let off - to not punish someone who has committed a crime or done something wrong, or to not punish severely (S)

### ***Emotions***

Cheer up - to start feeling happier (S)

Wind up - to annoy someone (S)

Snap out of - to force yourself to stop feeling sad or upset (S)

Calm down - to stop feeling upset, angry or excited, or to make someone stop feeling this way (S)

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Knock back - to quickly drink a lot of alcohol (S)

Eat up - to eat all of the food you have been given (S)

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### ***Health***

Get over - to feel better after having an illness

Come round - to become conscious again

Keep down - to be able to eat or drink something without vomiting (S)

Pass away - to die

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### ***Money***

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Cough up - to provide money for something, especially when you are not very willing to do this (S)

Get by - to have just enough money to pay for the things that you need, but nothing more (S)

Pay back - to give someone the money that you owe them (S)

Tide over - to help someone, usually by giving them money for a period of time when they have no money (S)

Splash out - to spend a lot of money on something, which is very pleasant but which you do not need

### ***Travel***

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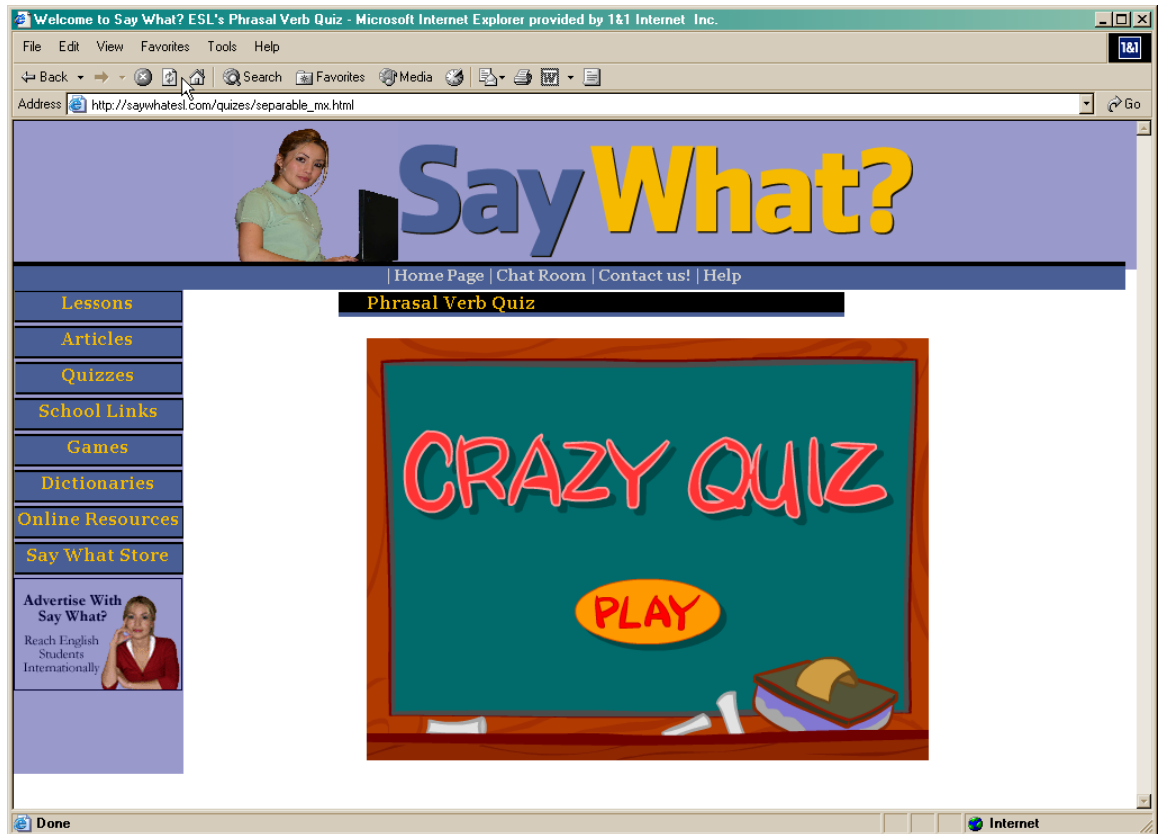
Set off - to start a journey (S)

Check in - to show your ticket at an airport so you can be told where you are sitting and so that your bags can be put on the aircraft (S)

See off - to go to the place that someone is leaving from in order to say goodbye (S)

### ***Practice***

To test your knowledge of which words are separable and which ones are not go to [http://saywhatesl.com/quizes/separable\\_mx.html](http://saywhatesl.com/quizes/separable_mx.html) on the Internet. When you are there, you should see the following screen:



Take the quiz as many times as you need to until you have received a 100% on it. Once you have completed the quiz with 100% you have finished the lesson.

## Conclusion

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You have finished this lesson on phrasal verbs. You should now know what a phrasal verb is, how to use a phrasal verb, and what is separability. Remember that phrasal verbs require a lot of memorization so although you now know many phrasal verbs, there are many more to learn.