Phrasal verbs

This is a list of some common English phrasal verbs. Note that it ISN'T a complete list – there are always more to learn! And some of these have additional meanings not listed here.

For more information on structure, see the grammar rule.

Intransitive verbs -- verbs that don't take an object

Verb	Meaning	Examples
add up	to seem reasonable or likely	James said he was at a meeting when the money was stolen, but the police said his story didn't add up.
blow up	to suddenly become very angry	The boss blew up when we told him we'd lost the contract.
break down	to fail because of a problem or disagreement (a relationship or discussion, etc.)	Unfortunately, the negotiations broke down on the second day.
break down	to stop working (a machine or vehicle)	Sorry I'm late – my car broke down.
break off	to suddenly stop talking	She was complaining to a colleague but broke off when her boss walked in.
butt in	to interrupt someone who is talking	I was trying to explain something to Carla but Simon kept butting in.
call in	to briefly and informally visit someone	Why don't you call in on your way home from work?
carry on	to continue an activity	I need to leave. Can you carry on without me?
catch on	to become fashionable or popular	It's an unusual product but we hope it will catch on!
catch up	to reach someone or something by moving faster than them	She's running too fast – I can't catch up with her.
catch up	to do something you should have done earlier	I'm going to try to catch up with my emails today – I've got 150 in my inbox!
catch up	to reach the same standard as someone or something else	I don't think our company will ever catch up with the innovations of Japanese manufacturers.
close down	to permanently stop operating [a business]	The shop closed down because it wasn't getting enough customers.
come to	to regain consciousness	When I came to after the operation, I didn't know where I was!
come across	to behave in a way that makes people believe you have a particular characteristic	I hope I didn't come across as too serious.
come out	to be published, or become available for people to buy or see [a book, magazine, film, etc.]	When does their new catalogue come out?
come up	to be mentioned or talked about in conversation, perhaps unexpectedly	Which points came up at the meeting

cut back	to spend, do or use less of something	If exercise is causing you pain, you should cut back.
cut down	to do or use less of something	He eats too much sugar – he needs to cut down.
dress up	to wear formal or special clothes for a particular occasion	There's no need to dress up for the party – jeans will be fine.
dress up	to wear a special costume for fun	My children dressed up as vampires for Halloween.
drop by/in	to briefly and informally visit someone	My daughter's dropping by later so I'm making her favourite cake.
eat out	to eat in a restaurant	I'm too tired to cook; let's eat out tonight.
end up	to finally be in a place or situation	We couldn't get a table anywhere so we ended up ordering a pizza!
fall off	to become smaller or lower [amount, rate or quality of something]	Sales have been falling off recently.
find out	to get information because you want to know more about something	Can you find out when the next train leaves, please?
find out	to learn a fact for the first time	I just found out that Bill's leaving the company.
get about/around	to be able to go to different places without difficulty, perhaps if you are old or ill	It's easier to get around in this town now there are more buses. My grandmother's finding it harder to get about these days.
get away	to leave or escape from a person or place, sometimes when it is difficult to do this	We walked to the next beach to get away from the crowds. I worked through my lunch break so I can get away early tonight.
get away	to go somewhere to have a holiday, often because you need to rest	I just needed to get away for a few days, so we had a long weekend in Prague.
get back	to return	We got back from our holiday late last night.
get by	to be able to deal with a situation, but with difficulty because you only just have enough of what you need	We don't earn much money but we get by; we can't afford holidays but we always pay our bills!
get off	to leave a bus, train or plane, etc.	You need to get off at the next stop and change to Line B.
get off	to leave a place, usually in order to start a journey	Let's try to get off by 7.00, the roads will be clearer.
get off	to leave work, usually at the end of the day	What time can you get off this afternoon? It would be nice to go for a drink.
get off	to escape (severe) punishment for something that you have been accused of in court	He was accused of dangerous driving but got off with a £100 fine.
get on	to enter a bus, train or plane etc.	They got on the wrong bus and ended up in the town centre!
get on	to have a (good) relationship	She doesn't get on with her sister at all.
get on	to manage or deal with a situation, especially successfully	How are you getting on in your new job?
get on	to give your time to something and make progress with it, perhaps after stopping	I'll leave you to get on then, shall I? We don't have all day to finish this job, so can we just get on with it, please?
get up	to leave your bed after sleeping	I always get up later at the weekend.

get through	to succeed in talking to someone on the phone	I tried to call her but couldn't get through.
give in	to finally agree to what someone wants, after refusing for a period of time	OK, I give in! I don’t agree with you but I don’t have the energy to argue.
give up	to stop trying to do something before you have finished, usually because it is too difficult	I tried everything to fix it myself but no luck. So I gave up and called technical support.
go ahead	to start to do something	The management told us we can go ahead with the new system.
go on	to continue	Let’s go on to the next item.
go without	to experience a lack or be deprived of something	I’m sorry but we’ve run out of sugar, so you’ll have to go without for now.
hand over	to give someone else control of or responsibility for something	He decided to hand over to a new director.
hang on	to wait for a short time	We hung on for a while but Jack didn’t turn up so we started without him.
hang up	to end a phone call	He started shouting so I hung up!
hold on	to tell someone to wait for a short time	Hold on, I’ll just find out for you.
keep on	to do something repeatedly, or to persist	The phone just keeps on ringing today! If you keep on trying, I’m sure you’ll succeed.
keep up	to stay level or equal with someone or something	You run too fast – I can’t keep up!
keep up	to understand or deal with something that is happening or changing quickly	I can’t keep up with new technology – as soon as I learn something new, something else changes.
kick off	to start [informal]	Our marketing campaign kicked off last week.
log in/on	to start using a computer system or program by giving a password	I can’t log on – I’ve forgotten my password!
log out/off	to stop a computer being connected to a system or program, usually when you want to stop working	For security purposes, make sure you log off when you’ve finished.
look on	to watch something happen but not become involved in it	She looked on in surprise when her shy colleague stood up and spoke at a meeting for the first time.
look out	to be careful and take notice	Look out when you go in – there are some loose cables on the floor.
pick up	to increase or improve	Sales aren’t good at the moment, but we expect things to pick up in the summer.
pop in	to briefly and informally visit someone	If you have time later, pop in for a coffee.
pull out	to stop being involved in an activity	A lack of funding leaves us with no choice but to pull out.
press on	to continue doing something in a determined way	Gerald could tell that the manager didn’t like his suggestions but he pressed on anyway.
run out	to finish, use or sell all of something, so that there is none left	I need to get more coffee – we’ve run out.

show off	to do something in order to attract attention or admiration, possibly something that others will find annoying	She bought that sports car just to show off.
show up	to arrive somewhere in order to join a group of people, especially late or unexpectedly	We told everyone it started at 7.00 but most of them didn't show up until after 9.00.
slow down	to reduce speed	You need to slow down as you approach the traffic lights.
slow down	to be less active and relax more	The doctor told him to slow down or he'd have a heart attack.
switch off	to stop giving your attention to someone or something	The presentation was so long that eventually I just switched off. A lot of people in stressful jobs find it difficult to switch off when they get home.
take off	to suddenly start to be successful or popular	We were worried at the beginning of the year, but in March, sales really took off.
turn out	to happen in a particular way or to have a particular result, perhaps an unexpected one	The seminar turned out to be more enjoyable than we expected.
turn up	to arrive, either somewhere where people have been invited, or unexpectedly	How many people turned up at the meeting? You'll never believe who turned up in my office yesterday – Tim! I haven't seen him for years.
turn in	to go to bed at the end of the day	I'm really tired; I think I'll turn in.
wake up	to become awake after sleeping	It's difficult to wake up on Mondays.
wear off	to gradually disappear [a feeling or effect]	The anaesthetic wears off after about an hour.
work out	to happen or develop in a particular way	I hope your new job works out well for you.
work out	to exercise in order to improve the strength or appearance of your body	You look great. Have you been working out?

Transitive verbs -- verbs that take an object

NOTE THAT two-word transitive phrasal verbs vary according to where the object can or cannot be placed. There are three groups:

Group 1

The object can be placed between the verb and the particle, OR after the verb and particle.

- I picked my friend up from the station.
- I picked up my friend from the station.

Pronouns can only be used between the verb and the particle.

- I picked him up.
- I picked up him.

Verb	Meaning	Examples
block something out	to arrange to have time for something by planning in advance	She blocked out an hour every day in her diary to talk to her team.
block something out	to prevent the ability to receive or remember something	Some people are able to block out every sound and distraction when they're working.
break something down	to separate something into several parts	To make it easier to understand the statistics, I'm going to break them down into clear and specific units.
bring something about	to cause something to happen	We're working hard to bring about some changes in the company.
bring something or someone in	to attract someone or something to a place or business	We're hoping that the price reductions will bring more customers in. The new sales team has brought in a lot of new business.
bring something or someone in	to introduce something or someone new, often a law or a product	The government has brought in new tax rules. The company's getting bigger so we're bringing in an additional senior manager.
bring something off	to succeed in doing something difficult	Terry was nervous about giving the presentation but he brought it off without any problems.
bring something up	to introduce a topic in order to discuss it	We need some better equipment – let's bring that up at the next meeting.
buy someone or something out	to buy a part of a company or building from someone else so that you own all of it	The bank announced that it wanted to buy out the publicly owned shares of its stock. The group owns most of the five-storey building, and now they want to buy out the owner of the second floor.
call something off	to cancel an event or activity	They decided to call off the match because of the weather.
carry something out	to do or complete something, especially that you have said you would do or that you have been told to do	We're carrying out tests to find out what's causing the problem. We need to carry out a customer satisfaction survey.
chase someone up	to ask someone to do something that they promised to do but that have not yet done	If you don't hear from the builders this week, make sure you chase them up.
cross something off	to remove something from a list by drawing a line through it	Wendy can't go to the seminar after all so you can cross her name off.
cross something out	to draw a line through something you have written, usually because it is wrong	If you make a mistake on the form, just cross it out and write it again.
cut something out	to stop eating, drinking or doing something, usually to improve your health	Her doctor advised her to cut out caffeine.
draw something up	to prepare something, usually official, in writing	I've drawn up a list of candidates that I'd like to interview.

drop someone or something off	to take someone or something to a particular place, usually by car, as you travel to a different place	I'll drop you off at the station on my way to work.
even something out	to become equal, or to make something equal	It's not fair that Carl has more clients than you, so let's give you two more and even things out a bit.
fill something in/out	to write the necessary information on an official document	We asked our customers to fill in a questionnaire so we could get some feedback.
follow something up	to find out more about something, or take more action connected with it	The idea sounded interesting so I decided to follow it up.
give something away	to tell people something secret, often without intending to	His retirement party was supposed to be a surprise, but Simon gave it away.
give something up	to stop doing or using something, often a habit	He gave up smoking on his doctor's advice.
hand something in/out	to give something to someone in a position of authority for their attention	We handed in the report before the deadline.
hand something over	**to pass** responsibility for something to someone	The founder handed the company over to his sons.
keep something down	to control the amount or number of something and prevent it from increasing	We need to work hard to keep our prices down. I'm going to make a call, so can you keep the noise down, please?
keep something up	to make something continue at its present level and not allow it to fall	You're all doing a great job – keep it up!
kick something off	to start something	Let's kick the meeting off earlier today.
lay someone off	to stop employing someone, especially for reasons not connected to the worker's performance	The company reluctantly laid off 100 people when they had to move to smaller premises.
leave someone or something out	to not include something or someone; to omit	Leila feels that she's left out of all the major decision making. You can leave last year's figures out of the report – they're not relevant.
let someone down	to disappoint someone, often because you have failed to do what you promised	He said he'd come with me, but he let me down at the last minute!
look over something	to quickly examine something	I asked Marie to look over these figures for me and see if there are any obvious mistakes.
look something up	to check a fact or get information about something from the appropriate place – a book or database etc.	If you're not sure what a word means, look it up in a dictionary.
make something out	Manage with some difficulty to see or hear something clearly	My doctor's handwriting is terrible; I can't make out what he's written. We were sitting at the back, so it was hard to make out what they were saying.
make something up	to invent something, such as an excuse or a story, sometimes in order to deceive	You don't have to tell the truth in a speaking exam – you can just make something up.

pass something on	to give something to someone, after someone else gave it to you, or tell someone something you have heard	Can you pass this report on to Amanda when you've read it, please? The senior managers told the team leaders but they didn't pass the news on to the workers.
pick someone or something up	to lift someone or something using your hands	I found a €20 note in the street and picked it up.
pick someone or something up	to collect, or to go and get, someone or something	I always pick the children up from school. I need to pick up a parcel from the post office.
point something out	to give someone information, sometimes because you think they don't know or have forgotten it	He was planning a meeting for next week until I pointed out that half the team will be on holiday.
put something back	to change the time or date of an event so that it happens later than originally planned	We've put the trip back until June now because two people will be on holiday in May.
put something back	to make something happen later than it should happen	The fire put back the opening of the factory by several months.
put someone down	to make someone feel silly or not important by criticising them	I know that Terry made a mistake, but his boss shouldn't have put him down in front of his colleagues.
put something off	to delay an event or activity until a later time or date	Can we put our meeting off until next week? I'm really busy at the moment.
put something in	to submit something, to offer it for consideration, often a request	She put in an application to attend the seminar.
put something down	to record something in writing	Can you all put down your ideas and let me have a list for the next meeting?
put something on	to place an item of clothing, jewellery etc. on your body	She put on a scarf before she left because it was colder.
put something together	to prepare a piece of work by collecting ideas and suggestions and organising them	The management are putting together a plan to rescue the company.
see someone off	Go to their point of departure with someone who is leaving	I saw off our visitors at the station.
see someone out	to go with someone to the door when they're leaving	I'll see you out – it's not easy to find your way back to reception from here.
set something aside	to save something for a particular purpose	He sets aside some time every day to talk to the new recruits.
set something up	to establish a new company, organisation, system, etc.	She plans to set up her own business.
set something up	to arrange for an event or activity to happen	We need to set up a meeting to discuss the changes.
show someone or something off	to show something or someone you are proud of to other people, so that they will admire it or them	He invited us to dinner because he wanted to show off his new car!
sort something out	to successfully deal with a problem or situation	There was a mix-up with the guest list but Molly sorted it out.
take someone on	to recruit someone	We've got too much work at the moment so we're taking on another assistant.
take something off	to remove an item of clothing or jewellery, etc. from your body	I took my coat off because it was really warm.

take something off	to remove something from something	I'm buying this as a gift so could you take off the price tag, please?
take something up	to take an interest in and start to do something [a sport or leisure activity]	I'm not very good at golf – I only took it up recently.
think something over	to consider an idea or plan carefully before making a decision	They offered him a job but he's going to think it over before accepting.
throw something away	to get rid of something you don't want any more	We threw away the old chairs and bought new ones.
turn something down	to refuse an offer	He decided to turn the job down because there was too much travelling.
switch/turn something off	to stop something working by using by a tap, switch or button etc.	Don't forget to turn off the lights before you go.
switch/turn something on	to cause something to start working by using by a tap, switch or button etc.	Can you turn the radio on? I want to listen to the news.
try something out	to use something to discover if it works or if you like it	Don't forget to try out the audio-visual equipment before the presentation.
try something on	to put on a piece of clothing to see if it fits you or if you like it	I loved the dress when I saw it but I tried it on and it wasn't the right colour for me.
use something up	to finish a supply of something	I can't take any more days off – I've used up all my holiday for this year.
wake someone up	cause someone to become awake after sleeping	It's difficult to wake my son up for school on Mondays.
wrap something up	to complete or conclude something such as a discussion [informal]	It's getting late so let's wrap it up now and make a decision.

Group 2

The object has to be placed BETWEEN the verb and particle.

- I backed my boss up because I think he's right.
- I backed up my boss because I think he's right.

Both nouns and pronouns can be used.

- I backed my boss up.
- I backed her up.

Verb	Meaning	Examples
back someone up	to support or help someone	I know you're nervous about telling the boss so I'll come with you and back you up.
back someone up	to say that someone is telling the truth	I know you don't believe me, but ask Claire – she'll back me up on this.
count someone in	to include someone in an activity or arrangement	If you're going out to lunch today, count me in.

draw someone into something / in	to make someone become involved in a conversation or situation, perhaps difficult or unpleasant [often passive]	They tried to draw me into their argument, but I refused. I tried not to watch the film but I got drawn in!
get something across	to manage to make someone understand or believe something	It's important that we get this message across to all the staff.
show someone round/around	to lead someone through a place	After lunch, I'll show you round the factory, and the town too later if you have time.

Group 3

The object has to be placed AFTER the verb and particle.

- I can count on Lucy to deal with the problem.
- I can count Lucy on to deal with the problem.

Both nouns and pronouns can be used.

- I can count on Lucy.
- I can count on her.

Verb	Meaning	Examples
break into something	to begin being successful in a particular type of work, activity or area	We're hoping to break into the Asian market next year. After a successful career as an actor, he broke into politics and became an MP.
come across something or someone	to find something or someone by chance	I was looking for my glasses when I came across some old photos.
come to something	to be a particular total when numbers or amounts are added together:	Altogether, the accommodation and food came to £600. When we added up the number of guests, it came to over 200.
count on someone	to be confident that you can depend on someone	I can always count on my team mates in an emergency
deal with something	to take action in order to achieve something or to solve a problem	General enquiries are dealt with by our head office.
deal with someone or something	to do business with a person or company	I prefer to deal with the same salesperson each time.
gain on someone or something	to get nearer to someone or something that is ahead in a pursuit or competitive situation	Our competitors are still selling more than us, but this month's figures show that we're starting to gain on them.
get at something	to suggest or express something in a way that is not direct or clear	You mean I shouldn't come tonight – is that what you're getting at?
get onto someone	to contact someone in order to ask them for help or to do something for you	Can you get onto the supplier? The delivery is two days late.
get onto something	to start talking about a subject	Let's get onto the next item on our agenda. How did we get onto cheese?!

get over something	to recover from an unusual or upsetting experience, or an illness	It took her a long time to get over the flu.
get through something	to use (all of a supply) of something	We're getting through a lot of coffee at the moment because we're working longer hours.
go after something	to try to get something	Are you planning to go after Paul's job when he leaves?
go over something	to examine or look at something in a careful or detailed way	I went over my report to check for spelling mistakes before I handed it in.
hang on something	to listen very carefully to someone's speech	She hung on every word of the presentation.
hang onto something	to keep something, often when you have to make an effort to do this	The President tried, but failed, to hang onto his reputation after the scandal.
look after someone or something	to take care of someone or something	We looked after their cat when they were on holiday.
look after something	to be in charge of something	John's going to look after the accounts while I'm away.
look for someone/something	to try to find something or someone	I'm looking for my keys – they're not where I usually keep them.
look into something	to investigate, or try to find out about something	I don't know why there was a delay, but I'm going to look into it.
look on/upon someone or something	to consider or think of someone or something in a certain way	Let's look on it as a challenge, rather than a problem!
look through something	to read something quickly, not every word, especially to find information you need	I looked through these files but I couldn't find the figures for January.
pop into somewhere	to visit there briefly, usually for a purpose	Can you pop into the post office on your way home and get some stamps?
rely on someone or something	to need a particular thing or the help and support of someone in order to continue, to work correctly, or to succeed	The success of this project relies on everyone making an effort. I'm relying on the garage to fix the car by tomorrow.
rely on someone or something	to trust someone or something or to expect him, her, or it to behave in a particular way	I can always rely on Jamie to cover for me when I'm on holiday – I never come back to any problems. Don't rely on finding me here when you get back – I might have to go out.
run into someone	to meet someone you know]] when you are not expecting to	I ran into an old school friend the other day.
see to something	to do something that has to be done	The printer's not working; Jeremy's going to see to it later.
stand by someone	to support or remain loyal to someone, especially in a time of difficulty	We all stood by our team leader when he had family problems and had to take some time off.

stand by something	to show that you still believe or support something	We stand by our view that rates may need to rise to 5% next year. The Government failed to stand by its election promises.
stand for something	to represent something	FYI stands for 'for your information'.
stand for something	to support or represent certain principles or values	This presidential candidate stands for diversity and opportunities for everyone. Our company stands for quality and affordability.
stick to something	to continue with a subject, activity, or plan without changing	He never sticks to the agenda at meetings – he always brings up new topics.
take after someone	to be similar to an older member of your family in appearance or character	He takes after his mum – they're both tall with brown hair.
turn over something	to make a certain amount of money during a stated period [a business]	We turned over £2m in our first year but there was very little profit because of the expenses.

Three-word phrasal verbs

Verb	Meaning	Examples
check up on someone	to make sure that someone is doing what they should be doing, or that everything is alright with them	I haven't heard from my son for a few weeks – I'm going to check up on him.
come down with something	to begin to suffer from an illness	I think I'm coming down with a cold.
come up with something	to suggest or think of an idea or plan	He came up with a great idea for a new marketing campaign.
get away with something	to escape blame or punishment when you do something wrong, or to avoid harm or criticism for something you did	She thought she could get away with cheating on her taxes
get back at someone	to punish someone because that person has done something wrong to you	I think he's trying to get back at her for what she said in the meeting.
get back to someone	to communicate with someone again in order to give information, or because you were not able to speak to them before	I couldn't answer her question so I'm going to look into it and get back to her later. Sorry I can't take your call; please leave a message and I'll get back to you.
get down to something	to start to direct your efforts and attention towards something	I've got a lot of work to do, but I can't seem to get down to it.
get out of something	to avoid doing something that you do not want to do, or to escape responsibility for something	If I can get out of going to the meeting tonight, I will.

get up to something	to do something, often something that other people would disapprove of [informal] ·	What did you get up to at the weekend? I wonder what the children are getting up to in the garden – let's go and see.
get round/around to something	to do something that you have intended to do for a long time	I still haven't got round to writing that report.
go along with something or someone	to support an idea, or to agree with someone's opinion	Katie's already agreed, but it's going to be hard to persuade Mike to go along with it.
grow out of something	to stop having an interest in something or stop doing it as you become older	My son said he wants to be an astronaut but I expect he'll grow out of it.
grow out of something	to become too tall or too big to wear or use something	I give my children's clothes to their younger cousins when they grow out of them.
look back on something	to think about past events	We can look back on our past mistakes and learn something from them.
look down on someone	to think that you are better than someone	His colleagues look down on him because he didn't go to one of the top schools.
look out for someone or something	to look carefully around you in order to try to find a specific person or thing	Take the second turning on the left and look out for a big red building on the right; my office is opposite that.
look out for someone	to take care of someone and make sure that they are treated well	My friend's son is starting at my company next week. It's his first job and she's asked me to look out for him.
look up to someone	to admire and respect someone, usually someone older	My children look up to their grandfather because he's had such an interesting and productive life.
look forward to something	to feel pleasure because an event or activity is going to happen	We're all looking forward to our holiday.
make up for something	to compensate for something missing, lost, or lacking	I've been working late most evenings but I'm taking two days off next week to make up for it.
put something down to something	to think that a problem or situation is caused by a particular thing	I put the failure of the project down to bad management.
put in for something	to make an official request to have or do something	I'm putting in for a job at the hospital. Richard's finally put in for his driving test.
put up with someone or something	to accept or tolerate an unpleasant situation or person ·	I don't know how you put up with your boss – he's so rude!

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