# 15

# Phrasal Verbs and Prepositional Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb plus one or two particles whose combined meaning is often not predictable from the parts: *give up* (= quit), *put off* (= postpone), *run into* (= meet by chance). They dominate informal English; mastering them transforms fluency.

## 15.1 The four structural types

| Type | Examples |
|---|---|
| 1. Intransitive (no object) | *The car **broke down**. Please **sit down**. The plane **took off**.* |
| 2. Transitive, separable | *She **turned down** the offer / **turned** the offer **down** / **turned it down**.* |
| 3. Transitive, inseparable | *He **takes after** his mother. We're **looking into** the matter.* |
| 4. Three-part (verb + adverb + preposition) | *I won't **put up with** this. She **came up with** a brilliant idea. We've **run out of** milk.* |

**Key Point**

With separable phrasal verbs, a *pronoun* object must go between verb and particle: ✓ *turn it down*, ✗ *turn down it*. A noun object may go on either side, but long objects go after the particle: *She turned down **the most generous offer the firm had ever made**.*

## 15.2 Common particles and their core meanings

Particles carry recurring meanings that make new phrasal verbs guessable:

- *up* — completion or increase: *eat up, use up, finish up, speed up, turn up* (the volume), *grow up*
- *down* — reduction or to the ground: *slow down, calm down, cut down, burn down, note down*
- *off* — departure, separation, disconnection: *set off, see someone off, cut off, switch off, wear off*
- *on* — continuation or connection: *carry on, keep on, move on, switch on, get on (with)*
- *out* — outward, completely, to disappearance: *find out, work out, run out, put out* (a fire), *die out, sort out*
- *over* — transfer or repetition: *take over, hand over, think over, start over* (AmE)
- *through* — from start to finish: *read through, get through, think through*

## 15.3 Fifty phrasal verbs you must know

- *break down* — stop working; lose control emotionally
- *break up* — end a relationship
- *bring up* — raise a child; mention a topic
- *call off* — cancel
- *carry out* — perform, conduct
- *catch up (with)* — reach the same level
- *check in/out* — register at / leave a hotel
- *come across* — find by chance
- *come up with* — think of (an idea)
- *cut down on* — reduce consumption of
- *deal with* — handle
- *drop off* — deliver; fall asleep
- *end up* — finally be/do
- *figure out* — understand, solve
- *fill in/out* — complete (a form)
- *find out* — discover
- *get along/on with* — have a good relationship
- *get over* — recover from
- *get rid of* — dispose of
- *give up* — quit
- *go on* — continue; happen
- *go over* — review
- *hang up* — end a phone call
- *hold on* — wait
- *keep up with* — maintain the pace of
- *let down* — disappoint
- *look after* — take care of
- *look for* — search for
- *look forward to* — anticipate with pleasure
- *look into* — investigate
- *look up* — search for (in a reference)
- *make up* — invent; reconcile
- *make up for* — compensate for
- *pick up* — collect; learn casually
- *point out* — draw attention to
- *put off* — postpone
- *put on* — dress in; gain (weight)
- *put up with* — tolerate
- *run into* — meet by chance
- *run out of* — exhaust the supply of
- *set up* — establish
- *show up* — arrive, appear
- *sort out* — resolve, organize
- *take after* — resemble (family)
- *take off* — leave the ground; remove; succeed suddenly
- *take over* — assume control of
- *take up* — start (a hobby); occupy (space/-time)
- *turn down* — refuse; reduce (volume)
- *turn out* — prove to be
- *work out* — exercise; find a solution; turn out well

**Style & Register**

Phrasal verbs are neutral-to-informal; most have a single-word, Latin-origin synonym that suits formal writing: *put off* → *postpone*, *find out* → *discover*, *look into* → *investigate*, *carry out* → *conduct*, *get rid of* → *eliminate*, *come up with* → *devise*. Match register: *The experiment was* ***carried out****...* is fine in a paper, but *We* ***postponed*** *the barbecue* may sound stiff at home.

**Common Error**

- ✗ *Turn off it.* → ✓ *Turn it off.*
- ✗ *She looks after very well her patients.* → ✓ *She looks after her patients very well.* (inseparable — nothing between verb and preposition)
- ✗ *I look forward to see you.* → ✓ *I look forward to seeing you.*
- Beware of literal vs. idiomatic readings: *She* ***ran into*** *the room* (literal) vs. *She* ***ran into*** *an old friend* (idiomatic).

## Exercises

**Exercise 15.1** Replace with a phrasal verb

Replace the underlined verb with a phrasal verb from this chapter.

1. The meeting was cancelled at the last minute.
2. I encountered my old teacher at the market.
3. They established a small software company.
4. Could you complete this form, please?
5. We must reduce the amount of sugar we eat.
6. The detective promised to investigate the complaint.

**Exercise 15.2** Particle choice

Complete with the correct particle(s).

1. I can't put _____ his rudeness any longer.
2. We've run _____ coffee — can you pick some _____ on your way home?
3. She takes _____ her grandmother — the same smile.
4. The concert turned _____ to be the best I've ever seen.
5. He never lets his friends _____.

**Exercise 15.3** Pronoun placement

Rewrite each sentence replacing the noun object with a pronoun.

1. Please switch off the lights.
2. She brought up three children alone.
3. They called off the strike.
4. I'll look into the problem tomorrow.