

21 Phrasal Verbs to Make You Sound Smart

Roadmap: We're going to go over 20 advanced phrasal verbs and their definitions, whether they are separable or inseparable, and give you examples and quizzes along the way!

These specific phrasal verbs on this list are important if you want to apply for a job, work at a company, take your TOEFL test, or just sound more like a native speaker. So, let's get into it!

First, a word about phrasal verbs

If you know a bit about phrasal verbs, you know that it takes a **verb** and a **particle** to make a phrasal verb. For example, if we take the verb "take" and the particle "off" and put them together, you get "take off". A phrasal verb.

Phrasal verbs can be separable or inseparable, depending on whether you can use other words between the verb and the particle.

With separable phrasal verbs you can use other words between the verb and the particle, while with inseparable phrasal verbs you cannot insert other words between them.

For example: in this sentence "**Look** the word **up!**" **look up** is a separable phrasal verb.

second, "You should **look into** the matter." In this sentence, **look into** is an inseparable phrasal verb.

Now that we've covered the basics, let's move on to the phrasal

verbs! **Adhere to**

To adhere to means to "obey". For example, you adhere to the rules.

And it is inseparable. You adhere to something. You don't adhere to something.

You know?

Something you might hear when signing a contract is "You must adhere to the terms of the contract."

Allude to

When you allude to something, you mention something in an indirect way.

When something is indirect, it's talked about in a non straightforward way.

For example, "She kept alluding to our agreement, but she didn't want to reveal it."

Oh, this phrasal verb is also inseparable. I am a very direct person, so I don't like it when people just allude to something. I want them to tell me directly!

Account for

Next we have account for, which means "To explain the reason for something".

For example, if you say something like "Increased pollution may **account for** climate change." you're saying that pollution is the possible reason for climate change.

This phrasal verb is inseparable too!

Bring on

To bring on means: "To cause something bad to happen". This phrasal verb is commonly used when you have an illness.

For example: "it was his lack of exercise that brought his heart condition on ". Based on that last example, is this phrasal verb separable or inseparable? (gives a few seconds). It's separable! Since you can place other words between brought and on.

Bring up

To bring up means to "To start discussing a subject". I personally use this phrasal verb all of the time.

Maybe you bring up an issue at a work meeting, or you bring up a solution to a problem. For example, "She **brought** the matter **up** very late, so they didn't have time to discuss it properly."

Based on that last sentence, is "bring up" separable or inseparable? (waits a few seconds). It's separable! Since the object is placed in between "brought" and "up."

Come about

To come about means "To happen, especially by chance". By chance in this definition means "accidentally. Without planning".

For example, I could say that "some of my best ideas come about by chance." - like getting bangs. I just woke up one morning and decided to get bangs without planning it. And this phrasal verb is inseparable.

Cut back

Now, when you cut back on something, you reduce it. Reduce in this definition means "to make smaller" or "lessen".

One time I tried to cut back on eating sugar since I was consuming so much! I actually felt a lot better after doing that.

In more professional English you might hear something like "They are cutting back expenses", meaning they are reducing expenses. And this phrasal verb is inseparable.

Do without

When you do without something, you succeed in living or working without... something.

For example, if you're working on a class project, and someone is wondering if you need any help, you can say "We can do without help from you."

This phrasal verb is inseparable. I used to think I could do without studying on my tests

when I was in college and boy was I wrong. I needed as much studying as I could get.

Embark on

When I think of this phrasal verb, I think of going on a journey because when you embark on something, you start a new project or activity, usually one that will be difficult or take time.

A good example for this in a more professional setting is "After graduating from university, she embarked on a career in banking." Embark on is also inseparable.

Follow through

When you follow through on something, you "continue doing something until it has been completed".

For example, if I was in a class, I could say, "I need to follow through on all of my assignments if I want to pass this class". This phrasal verb is also, you guessed it! Inseparable.

Get across

If you're on FluentU, the first thing you're going to want to do is look up the definition on FluentU by going to the top search bar and typing "get across". The phrase should come up with the definition which is "to communicate successfully".

You can also listen to or read the 2 examples that go along with it which are "he struggled to get his meaning across" and "I couldn't get across what I wanted to say". You can also see that the phrasal verb is separable since it separates in the first example sentence.

Next, you can watch a video example of it being used in real life so you can get more context. And last, but not least, you can add it to a flashcard set that will actually quiz you on the phrasal verb!

Frown upon

When you frown upon something, it's not good. It means you do not approve of something.

Let's continue with our school theme. A lot of teachers in schools might say something like "Failure to attend classes is frowned upon." This phrasal verb is also inseparable.

Get around

When something gets around, it means that it's heard by a lot of people. Rumors and news can often get around. For example "News of his promotion got around very fast."

The phrasal verb "get around" is also inseparable.

Get back

When you get back at something, you start doing something again after not doing it for a period of time.

You can get back to singing, get back to working on that school project of yours, or get back to going on dates after a breakup.

Another example could be, " Let's get back to discussing how this happened." This phrasal verb is inseparable.

Look forward to

When you look forward to something, it means "you feel happy about something that is going to happen".

If you just got a job, you could say "I'm looking forward to working with you" to let them know that you're happy to get the job and to work at the company.

This phrasal verb is especially good to know because it's like an alternative more formal way to say "I'm excited!" This phrasal verb is inseparable.

Look into

For this phrasal verb, let's say that my boss asked me "can you look into the missing reports case and let me know what you find?"

Based on that example, can you guess what "look into" means? "Look into" means "to try to discover facts about something." This phrasal verb is inseparable.

Make of

This phrasal verb sounds weird when you say it on your own: Make of. Right? But what about when it's used in this sentence?

"What do you **make of** the teacher's decision to shorten this course?"

"Make of" means To understand someone or something in a certain way. It's kind of like "what do you think of this? How do you think of this?" It's the same as "what do you make of this?" And this phrasal verb is inseparable.

Map out

When you hear "map out", you probably think of maps or creating some sort of map, right? When we map out something, we "plan in detail how something will happen". And it is separable.

When I was younger, I wanted to study abroad in Korea. So, I was like "let's map out a plan of action" and I mapped out everything I needed to make it happen.

And then it happened! That's the power of mapping something

out. Narrow down

When you narrow something down, it means "to reduce the number of possibilities".

If a few detectives were working on a crime for example, I could say "The detectives narrowed down the list of suspects to just two." And this phrasal verb is separable.

Put forward

Put forward is a phrasal verb you'll often hear in work settings. It means "To suggest an idea or an opinion so that it can be discussed".

In work meetings you can put forward ideas to your boss. You also may hear your boss or team lead say something like "The proposals were put forward last week, but the committee didn't have time to discuss them."

And "put forward" is separable.

Resort to

This isn't the happiest of phrasal verbs because when you resort to something, it means you need "To do something unpleasant in order to solve a problem". This is also inseparable.

For example, "We must resort to legal action if they don't offer compensation."

The thing they are resorting to in this sentence is "legal action", which implies that they don't want to take legal action, but it might be the last option. It's unpleasant. But they might have to do it.