

Phrasal verbs are two or more words that together act as a completely new verb with a meaning separate from those of the original words. For example, *pick up* means to grab or lift, very different from the definitions of *pick* and *up* alone.

Popular in spoken English, phrasal verbs can be quite confusing because their definitions aren’t always easy to guess—and there are thousands of them. In fact, many of the base verbs used to form phrasal verbs are used in multiple different phrasal verbs with distinct meanings, which can add to the confusion.

**What is a phrasal verb?**

A phrasal verb combines a normal[verb](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/verbs/) with an[adverb](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/adverb/) or a[preposition](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/prepositions/),. The meaning of a phrasal verb is usually unrelated to the meanings of the words that compose it, so think of a phrasal verb as an entirely new and independent word.

Let’s look at the phrasal verb *get over* as an example. The verb *get* alone means to acquire, and the preposition *over* alone usually refers to being higher than or going above something. However, put them together and the phrasal verb *get over* means to recover from or overcome something, a completely new definition that’s separate from the definitions of *get* and *over*.

You can use *get over* just like a normal verb, in any form or tense. Here are some quick examples:

[**Simple past tense**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/infinitives/)**:**

*I had the flu last week but****got over****it.*

[**Infinitive**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/infinitives/)**:**

*He wrote a song****to get over****his grandmother’s death.*

[**Gerund**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/gerund/)**:**

***Getting over****prejudice at work is never easy.*

[**Past participle**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/participle/)**:**

*Having finally****gotten over****the breakup, they were ready to return their partner’s things.*

## How to conjugate phrasal verbs

When a phrasal verb is used as the[main verb](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/main-verb/) of a sentence, you conjugate the verb part and leave the other word or words as they are. Simply use whatever form of the verb you would use if it were alone.

*I****get up****at noon during the summer.*

*However, this morning I****got up****at sunrise.*

*I****have gotten up****early too many times this month.*

## Types of phrasal verbs

### Transitive phrasal verbs

Transitive phrasal verbs use a direct object, just like normal[transitive verbs](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/transitive-and-intransitive-verbs/).

*Charlie couldn’t****put up with****the meowing cats any longer.*

### Intransitive phrasal verbs

Intransitive phrasal verbs do *not* use an object.

*The regional director was late, so the sales team****went ahead****without her.*

### Separable phrasal verbs

With transitive phrasal verbs, you can sometimes put the direct object between the verb and the particle, as in “pick *you* up,” for example. There are, however, a few rules to follow with separable phrasal verbs, so pay attention to our next section, about word order.

*He forgot****to shut****the lights****off****before he left.*

### Inseparable phrasal verbs

Inseparable phrasal verbs cannot be split up; the verb and the particle must stay together. All intransitive phrasal verbs are inseparable.

*The wayward son****carried on****without his father.*

Some transitive phrasal verbs are also inseparable.

*They****went over****the contract meticulously before signing it.*

## common phrasal verbs (with meanings and examples)

**back [*x*] up**

to support or defend someone

*When the class was making fun of me, only the teacher****backed me up****.*

**2 break down**

to stop working, especially in reference to machines

*The ice cream machine at McDonald’s****often*** ***breaks down****.*

**3 call around**

to contact multiple people

*Roy****called around****to find a nearby mechanic.*

**4 call [*x*] off**

to cancel a planned event

*We****called the party off****.* / *We****called off the party****.*

**5 calm down**

to relax after an energetic or irritated state

*I need a few minutes to****calm down****after that match.*

**6 check [*x*] out**

to examine a person or thing; when used in reference to a person, can connote looking at them with romantic or sexual interest

*I’ll****check the contract out****.* / *I’ll****check out the contract****.*

**7 cheer [*x*] up**

to make someone happy, especially if they were previously sad

*Reading always****cheers me up****on a rainy day.*

**8 clean up**

to be extremely successful in an endeavor such as business, sports, or gambling

*Our hockey team****cleaned up****at the tournament and went home undefeated.*

to stop engaging in questionable behavior, such as consuming drugs or alcohol

*Her boss said she had to either****clean up****or find a new job.*

**9 clean [*x*] up**

to tidy an area

*John****cleaned the living room up****.* / *John****cleaned up the living room****.*

**10 come around**

to change one’s opinion or see a new point of view

*I never liked seafood but****came around****after trying fried calamari.*

**11 come between [*x*]**

to interfere with a relationship between two people

*After more than fifty years of partnership, nothing could****come between them****.*

**12 come down with [*x*]**

to catch an illness

*After traveling, Chandra****came down with a cold****.*

**13 come out of [*x*]**

to happen as a consequence of another event

*We missed a day of school, so at least some good****came out of our boring class trip****.*

**14 come up**

Don’t worry about a problem until it comes up.

**15 count on**

to rely or depend on someone or something)

*If I’m ever making a mistake, I can****count on my friends****to warn me.*

**16 Dress up**

to put on nice clothes

*Abed****dressed up****for the award ceremony.*

**17 End up**

to eventually reach some conclusion or destination

*After thinking for a day, he****ended up****taking the job*