**Phrasal Verbs**

**What is a phrasal verb?**

A phrasal verb is made up of verbs and particles. Usually, the verbs are simple, common verbs like make, come, take, put, run, go etc. Occasionally, we will use a less common verb to form a phrasal verb such as stem (stem from) or mull (mull over).

A particle is a preposition or an adverb that follows the verb. More than one particle can be used to create phrasal verbs, and we can even use both preposition and adverb particles in the same phrasal verb.

**Examples:**

take out (verb + preposition)

care for (verb + preposition)

come up with (verb + preposition + preposition)

fall apart (verb + adverb)

go on ahead (verb + preposition + adverb)

**Transitive and Intransitive Phrasal Verbs**

**Explanation**: When we talk about a phrasal verb being transitive or intransitive, we are simply stating whether that phrasal verb should have a direct object.

**Example of a transitive phrasal verb:**   
I picked up my brother from the airport.

direct object

phrasal verb

In this case, the object, my brother, directly follows the phrasal verb. If we finished our sentence after the phrasal verb and just wrote or said, “I picked up.” no one would understand what we are talking about, and it would be an incomplete sentence. This phrasal verb requires a direct object and in grammar that is called *transitive*.

**Example of an intransitive phrasal verb:**

I grew up in a small town in Wyoming.

phrasal verb

In this case, there is no object after the phrasal verb. If we finished out sentence after the phrasal verb and just wrote or said, “I grew up.” everyone would understand, and it is technically a complete sentence. However, it is not a very interesting sentence, so we added a preposition (in) and a location (a small town/Wyoming) to give context to our statement. The phrasal verb does not require a direct object so this is *intransitive*.

**Separable and Inseparable Phrasal Verbs**

When we talk about a phrasal verb being separable or inseparable, we are describing where the object of the phrasal verb can be placed. If a phrasal verb is separable, the direct object can go in the middle of the phrasal verb or after the phrasal verb. If a phrasal verb is inseparable, the direct object can only be placed after the phrasal verb.

I picked my brother up at the airport.

separable phrasal verb

I picked up my brother at the airport.

inseparable phrasal verb

I came up with a great idea.

There is one special rule that we need to remember with separable phrasal verbs. If we use a pronoun instead of a noun as our direct object, the pronoun must go in the middle of the phrasal verb. It cannot go after the phrasal verb. In our example, let’s change ‘my brother’ to ‘him’. The word *him* would need to go in the middle.

I picked him up at the airport

**Common Complaints When Learning Phrasal Verbs**

1. **There are too many phrasal verbs, and I can’t learn them all.**

**Suggestion**: Don’t worry about learning a lot of phrasal verbs all at the same time. Choose 1 or 2 that you like, research how they can be used and use them in your daily life. Once they have become part of your active vocabulary, learn a few more. You have probably already done this. For example, you probably know the phrasal verb ‘get up’ and you say things like “I got up at 5:30 this morning. I am so tired.” You use phrasal verbs without even thinking about it. Think of learning phrasal verbs just like learning new vocabulary. Go slow and practice a lot.

1. **The grammar rules (transitive/intransitive, separable/inseparable) seem too complicated to remember when I am speaking.**

**Suggestion**: Don’t worry too much about the grammar rules. If you learn the phrasal verb in context and how it is usually used, you will naturally learn the grammar. Let’s look at our sentence again. “I got up at 5:30 this morning. I am so tired.” You do not need to remember that *get up* is an intransitive, inseparable phrasal verb when you are speaking. The grammar rules will help you at the beginning to understand new phrasal verbs and place them in the correct context. After that, try to forget the grammar rules and just speak naturally. For example, let’s learn the phrasal verb “put off”. We could check in a dictionary and find out that *put off* is a transitive, separable phrasal verb. We could also learn that the main definition is “to postpose”. Try to think of situations in your own life where things are postponed and create some examples for yourself. “My boyfriend is always putting off our engagement. Does he really love me?” Then use it in your real life. The next time you have to postpone something, try to say *put off* instead.

1. **I thought I knew this phrasal verb, but then someone used it in a new way and now I am totally confused!**

**Suggestion**: You need to be flexible with phrasal verbs just like you are flexible with other English words that you learn. For example, you probably know that the word “date” has more than one meaning. We can ask, “Would you like to go on a date?” or “What’s the date?”. Phrasal verbs are like this too. The phrasal verb “put off” can be slightly changed and have an object pronoun put in the middle. Then the meaning changes to “cause someone to lose interest or enthusiasm”. For example, “When people chew with their mouth open, it really puts me off my food.”

**Discussion**

**Instructions**: The best way to learn phrasal verbs is to use them when we are speaking. Have a discussion with a classmate using the phrasal verbs from this lesson. Remember to use the phrasal verbs when you are answering the questions.

1. **take out (transitive, separable)**  
   What is worse, taking out the trash or taking a dog out so he can do his business\*?
2. **care for (transitive, inseparable)**Could you care for someone’s plants while they are on holiday? How about a pet? How about a baby?
3. **come up with (transitive, inseparable)**  
   Have you ever come up with a great idea for a new product or business?
4. **fall apart (intransitive, inseparable)**

Is there anything that you own that is falling apart right now? Why haven’t you bought a new one?

1. **go on ahead (intransitive, inseparable)**  
   If people are walking too slow, do you wait for them or just go on ahead?
2. **pick up (transitive, separable)**  
   Have you ever picked up a parking ticket or a speeding ticket?
3. **grow up (intransitive, inseparable)**Where did you grow up? What was the best and worst thing about that place?
4. **put off (transitive, separable)**The average age when people get married for the first time is 30. How long do you think people should put off getting married?

\*to do one’s business = (a polite term for) to defecate or urinate