

University of Tikrit

College of Education for Humanities

Department of English

Fourth Year



English Grammar

Phrasal Verbs in English

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1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs are among the most distinctive and challenging features of the English language. They occur frequently in both spoken and written English and are particularly common in informal communication. Native speakers use phrasal verbs naturally in everyday conversation, making them an essential component of communicative competence.

Consider the following examples:

- Please turn off the light.
- The meeting was called off.
- She looked after her younger brother.

In each sentence, the meaning of the combination differs from the meaning of the individual words. Consequently, learners of English often find phrasal verbs difficult because their meanings are not always predictable.

Mastering phrasal verbs enhances fluency, improves comprehension, and enables learners to communicate more naturally.

2. Definition of Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a combination of:

Verb + Particle

The particle is usually an adverb or a preposition.

The combination functions as a single semantic unit whose meaning may differ from the meanings of its individual parts.

Examples in Sentences

- She looks after her grandmother.
 - He gave up smoking.
 - We put off the meeting.
 - The plane took off on time.
 - Turn on the television.
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3. Types of Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs can be classified according to their grammatical behavior.

3.1 Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

These phrasal verbs do not require an object.

Examples

- The plane took off.
- The fire went out.
- The guests arrived and sat down.

Analysis

The meaning is complete without an object.

3.2 Transitive Phrasal Verbs

These phrasal verbs require an object.

Examples

- She turned off the light.
- They called off the match.
- We put off the meeting.

4. Separable and Inseparable Phrasal Verbs

One important grammatical characteristic of phrasal verbs is whether the object can separate the verb from the particle.

4.1 Separable Phrasal Verbs

The object may occur either between the verb and particle or after the particle.

Examples

- Turn off the light.
- Turn the light off.
- Pick up the book.
- Pick the book up.

Both structures are acceptable.

Pronoun Rule

When the object is a pronoun, separation is required.

Correct:

- Turn it off.

- Pick it up.

Incorrect:

- Turn off it.
- Pick up it.

4.2 Inseparable Phrasal Verbs

The object must follow the entire phrasal verb.

Examples

- Look after the children.
- Run into an old friend.
- Get over the illness.

Incorrect:

- Look the children after.
- Run an old friend into.

The object cannot separate the verb and the particle.

5. Literal and Idiomatic Phrasal Verbs

5.1 Literal Phrasal Verbs

The meaning remains relatively clear from the meanings of the individual words.

Examples

- Sit down.
- Stand up.
- Walk out.

The meaning is easily understood.

5.2 Idiomatic Phrasal Verbs

The meaning cannot be predicted from the individual components.

Examples

- Give up = stop doing something

- Bring up = raise a child
- Put off = postpone
- Run into = meet unexpectedly

Examples in Sentences

- He gave up smoking.
- She brought up three children.
- We put off the meeting.
- I ran into my professor yesterday.

These meanings must often be learned individually.

6. Summary

Phrasal verbs are combinations of verbs and particles that function as single semantic units. They are a vital aspect of English vocabulary and communication. Phrasal verbs may be transitive or intransitive, separable or inseparable, and literal or idiomatic.

Examples such as *turn off*, *put off*, *look after*, *give up*, and *carry out* illustrate the diversity and complexity of phrasal verbs. Because many phrasal verbs possess idiomatic meanings, learners must study them as complete lexical units rather than as separate words.

A strong command of phrasal verbs enables students to understand authentic English more effectively, communicate naturally with native speakers, and improve both their spoken and written proficiency.