

Multi-word Verbs

Multi-word verbs are verbs that consist of more than one word. There are three types of multi-word verbs: **prepositional verbs**, **phrasal verbs**, and **phrasal-prepositional verbs**.

Many multi-word verbs serve an **idiomatic** purpose. This means that they should not be taken literally; rather, they have a figurative or metaphorical meaning. Examples:

Run into means “encounter”: *I ran into an old friend at the reunion.*

Come by means “visit”: *She came by the store this morning.*

Put up with means “tolerate”: *I shouldn’t have to put up with this nonsense.*

You will have to memorize the idiomatic meanings of most multi-word verbs in order to learn how to use them.

Prepositional Verbs

Prepositional verbs consist of a main verb and a preposition. A **preposition** links a noun or pronoun to other words in a sentence. Prepositions are often used to show relationships (often in logic, space, or time) between the noun and the rest of the sentence. Prepositions introduce a prepositional phrase, which consists of the preposition and an object.

I ran into my roommate on my way to class.

In this example, *ran* is the main verb, and *into* is the preposition which introduces the prepositional phrase *into my roommate*. Together, they make up the prepositional verb *ran into*.

Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs consist of a main verb and a particle. A particle is a function word that does not have meaning on its own and depends on the main verb to have meaning.

Our car broke down on the way home from Tulsa.

In this example, *broke* is the main verb, and *down* is the particle. Notice that *down* cannot be a preposition in this case because there is no following prepositional phrase—there is no object of the preposition.)

Phrasal-prepositional Verbs

Phrasal-prepositional verbs consist of a main verb, a particle, and a preposition—in that order.

*The attendees grew restless when they learned we had **run out of** pizza.*

In this example, *run* is the main verb, *out* is the particle, and *of* is the preposition which introduces the prepositional phrase *of pizza*.

Common Multi-word Verbs and their Meanings

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| Add up to = cost | All the groceries added up to \$50.00. |
| Back up = reverse | The car backed up before speeding out of the parking lot. |
| defend or support | Rob backed up Sally's alibi. |
| Break down = stop working | Our garbage disposal broke down yesterday. |
| divide into parts | The teacher broke down the assignment part-by-part. |
| Call off = cancel | Andy called off the meeting after he got sick. |
| Calm down = relax | Calm down and take a deep breath. |
| Come across = find | Walking on the shore, I came across a message in a bottle. |
| Come by = visit | I just came by to say hello. |
| Dress up = put on nice clothes | You should dress up for your job interview. |
| put on a costume | The kids dressed up as ghosts for Halloween. |
| Drop in/drop by = visit | My aunt Sally dropped in on her way home. |
| Figure out = come to understand | It took us two hours to figure out the answer to his riddle. |
| Fill in/fill out = complete a form | You have to fill out a lot of paperwork to run for president. |
| Find out = discover | Will we ever find out the meaning of life? |
| Get away with = avoid punishment | The thief came close to getting away with his crime. |
| Get rid of = dispose of | This bug spray should get rid of your roach problem. |
| Give away = reveal a secret | Don't give away the ending to the movie. |
| Give in/give up = concede | After hours of fighting, the boxer finally gave in. |
| Go over = review | The professor went over the answers to the exam. |
| Hand in/turn in = submit | The students were asked to hand in their homework. |
| Hang out with = join | Ask Jerry if he wants to hang out with us tonight. |
| Keep up = continue | Keep up the good work! |
| Let down = disappoint | Don't let me down by dropping out of school. |
| Load up on = stockpile | Before you go hiking, load up on food and water. |
| Look after = supervise | Who will look after the kids? |
| Look down on = think less of | You shouldn't look down on people with less money. |
| Look forward to = anticipate | I look forward to meeting you in person. |
| Look into = investigate | The chief promised he'd look into the charges of bribery. |
| Look out for = protect | The babysitter promised he would look out for the kids. |
| be vigilant about | If you go surfing, look out for sharks. |
| Look over = examine | Have an editor look over your draft before you turn it in. |



Look up to = respect

Make up = fabricate, invent
forgive (each other)

Pass away = die

Pass out = faint
distribute

Pick out = choose

Put off = postpone

Put up with = tolerate

Run into = encounter

Run out of = be depleted

Set up = organize

Sit in for = substitute

Split up = divide

Stand by = defend or support

Think over = consider

Throw away = dispose of

Try out = test

Turn down = refuse

Use up = deplete

I look up to the hard-working executive.

He made up that story about the haunted house.

We had a nasty fight, but we made up the next morning.

She passed away at the age of 99.

Taylor passed out after spending too much time in the heat.

The professor passed out a study guide for the exam.

Pick out your favorite t-shirt and I'll buy it for you.

He put off the meeting until he started feeling better.

I can only put up with so much misbehavior.

I ran into an old friend at the reunion.

You don't want to run out of gas around here.

We set up a club devoted to studying Shakespeare.

Ms. Brown is sitting in for Mr. Jones at the meeting.

Ms. Maple split up the class into three groups.

We stand by our decision.

You should think over your decision.

Throw away your trash before you leave the park.

Try out this new vacuum cleaner on your carpet.

Joe surprised us all by turning down the promotion.

The planet used up all of its uranium reserves.