

Webinar: 10 Phrasal Verbs with Multiple Meanings

Phrasal verbs in English can be confusing because not only are they very similar to each other (take off, take out, take away, take over, etc.) but also each phrasal verb can have two, three, four, or more definitions.

Look at the example of **take off**:



In today's class, you'll learn ten very common phrasal verbs with multiple meanings. Some of the phrasal verbs you probably already know, but you might learn new ways to use them!

And if you'd like to learn 500 phrasal verbs in the context of conversations, check out the [Phrasal Verbs in Conversation Course](#):

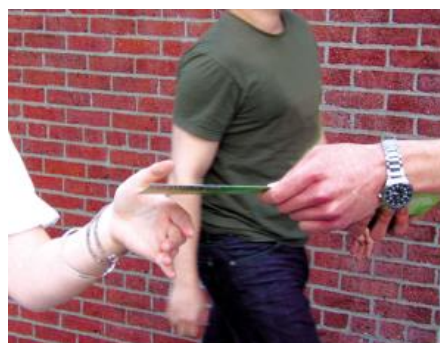
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#1 – PASS OUT

A - "The teacher **passed out** the tests to the students."

Pass out = give, distribute

Ex) flyers, coupons, free samples



B – “It was so hot in the classroom that I felt like I was going to **pass out**.”

Pass out = faint, lose consciousness

Ex) from shock, fear, nervousness, medical problems

When there’s an impact – when you get hit on the head and lose consciousness – we say you are **knocked out**.



#2 – BRING UP

A – “Her parents died when she was very young, so her grandparents **brought her up**.”

Bring up = raise, care for, educate a child

Not formal education – instead, it’s teaching the child good behavior.

Don’t get **bring up** confused with **grow up**. A child **grows up** – gets bigger, older, taller. The parents (or adults) **bring up** the child.



B – “That’s a great idea. You should **bring it up** at tomorrow’s meeting.”

Bring up = introduce a topic into a conversation or discussion

Ex) bring up an idea, suggestion, objection, problem



#3 – TAKE OUT

A – “He **took** his phone **out** of his pocket.”

Take out = remove something from inside a place

Ex) When you get to school, you **take your books out** of your backpack.

When you buy a new product, you **take the product out** of the box.



B – “I **took out** ten library books.”

Take out = borrow

We *only* use **take out** in this way for taking out books from the library and taking out a loan (money) from the bank.



C – “John is **taking** my sister **out** to dinner on Friday.”

Take out = bring someone on a social encounter (may or may not be romantic)

Ex) Take your girlfriend out to the movies, take your colleague out to lunch, take your kids out to the park

This usually implies that you not only invite the person, but also pay for their meal, ticket, etc.



#4 – TAKE UP

A – “There’s no room for a bookcase because the couch **takes up** too much space.”

Take up = fill or occupy time or space

B – “I’ve just **taken up** skiing – I’ve had two lessons so far.”

Take up = start a sport, activity, or hobby



#5 – BACK UP

A – “You should **back up** your files so you won’t lose them if your computer crashes.”

Back up = make an extra copy of computer data

You can back up information onto a server, another computer, a CD, an external hard drive, a USB drive, etc.



Back up (two words) is the verb, and **backup** (one word) is the noun referring to the extra copy of the information.

B – “He crashed his car into a tree while **backing up**.”

Back up = move backwards, in reverse

You can **back up** in a car or while walking.

For walking, we can also use **back away** – usually to move away from danger. You would **back away** from an angry dog so that it won’t bite you.



C – “My coworkers **backed me up** when I complained that the boss was giving us too much work.”

Back up = give moral/emotional support for someone’s position

D – “There’s a ton of traffic. The highway is **backed up** for miles.”

Back up = accumulate and delay due to excess

A road can be backed up, a toilet can be backed up (blocked so that the water can’t go down), or a schedule can be backed up.

For example, if you have a store that gets a LOT of orders around Christmastime, the extra volume may “back up” the schedule so that there are delays in shipping out the orders.



#6 – BLOW UP

A – “The factory **blew up** due to a gas leak – three people were killed.”

Blow up = explode

B – “The CEO **blew up** when he found out that his mistake had lost the company a billion dollars.”

Blow up = “explode” in anger; get extremely angry very quickly



#7 – GIVE AWAY

A – “If you haven’t worn a piece of clothing in more than a year, you should **give it away**.”

Give away = give something to someone for free



B – “I don’t want to **give away** the end of the movie; you’ll have to see it for yourself.”

Give away = reveal secret information

Typically used for giving away the ending to movies/books, or giving away company secrets.



#8 – WORK OUT

A – “I need to lose weight, so I’m going to **work out** at least three times a week.”

Work out = exercise

Can refer to any type of exercise – done with only your body, or with weights or machines, or running, sports, etc.



B – “There were a number of problems during the project, but everything **worked out** in the end.”

Work out = resolve, have a positive outcome (usually after difficulties/challenges)



#9 – MAKE UP

A – “I didn’t know the answer to the question, so I just **made** something **up**.”

Make up = invent a story (not true)

Children often make up stories and imaginary friends; journalists should not make up facts – they should only report what’s true and confirmed!



B – “After not speaking to each other for a month, my daughter and her best friend finally **made up**.”

Make up = restore a good relationship after an argument or fight



C – “I bought my mother a nice gift to try to **make up** for missing her birthday party.”

Make up = compensate (for an error, bad behavior, etc.)

You can **make up for** a mistake or something bad you did; you can **make it up to** a person. If someone does something that upsets you, they might say, “How can I make it up to you?” wanting to do something good to balance out the bad thing.



*Note: The word **makeup** (one word) refers to cosmetics.*

#10 – PICK UP

A – “I **picked up** the toys that my kids left all over the floor.”

Pick up = take something with your hand and bring it up from a surface



B – “I’ll be back in an hour. I need to **pick up** a few things at the store.”

Pick up = buy (informal)

We use **pick up** for buying small, casual things. You pick up food, household items, etc. but you don’t pick up a new car or a diamond necklace, because those are major purchases that you need to think about and research.



C – “Sure, I can give you a ride. The concert starts at 8, so I’ll **pick you up** around 7:15.”

Pick up = get someone in your car, in order to take them to a place

The opposite is **drop off**. If your friend is arriving from a trip, you would **pick him up** at the airport and **drop him off** at his house.



D – “When we moved to Spain, my kids **picked up** Spanish within 3 months.”

Pick up = learn (usually quickly and casually, not in a formal classroom environment)

E – “Sales are slow over the summer, but they usually **pick up** around September.”

Pick up = increase/improve, usually after a period of decrease or no change.

Typically used for economy, sales, growth, speed



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