WAYS OF TEACHING PHRASAL VERBS

Tatiana IAŢCU

Rezumat

Verbele frazale prezintă un capitol dificil în procesul de predare-învăţare a limbii engleze, deoarece au o sintaxă aparte şi complexă pe de o parte, iar pe de alta nu au o regulă de formare sau interpretare. De asemenea nu au o formaţiune echivalentă în limba română, şi în general în celelate limbi de circualţie mondială. Prima parte a lucrării prezintă structura şi contextul sintactic al verbelor frazale. A doua parte a lucrării se axează pe tipuri de exerciţii şi numeşte câteva tehnici folosite în studierea şi predarea verbelor frazale.

Phrasal verbs are idiomatic combinations of a verb and adverb (*get by*), or a verb and a preposition (*call for*), or a verb and an adverb and a preposition (*call down on*).

Most of these combinations also have a lexical meaning that can be understood from the component parts: *breathe out*, as a non-idiomatic construction means 'to let out air through the nose or mouth', e.g.

The doctor asked me to breathe in, then to breathe out fully.

As an idiomatic construction it means 'to express something', e.g.

He stood with his arms raised to the sky, breathing out curses.

Phrasal verbs raise problems for the foreign students not only because of their meanings, which cannot be predicted from the meaning of the verb and its following particles, but also because of their grammar. Sometimes the parts of the phrasal verbs can be separated:

*Try to **blow** it **up**.*

Some phrasal verbs are always used without being split:

*He **left off** working.*

Others must always be used separated:

*She **kept** the door **open**.*

The grammar of phrasal verbs is quite complex and it is usually shown in dictionaries (see Courtney 1994). Thus phrasal verbs can consist of:

1. A transitive verb with two objects - a direct noun object and a noun indirect object,

   e.g. **help to** (v + p), 'to serve (sm. or oneself) with (sth.):

   Those thieves helped themselves to my whiskey.

   v obj. p obj.

2. A transitive verb with two objects: a direct object, which is a *that*-clause and a noun indirect object, e.g. **represent to** (v + p), 'to express (an idea) to (sm.)':
   I represented to her that she had better have an ID.

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

v + p obj. *that*-clause →

3. A transitive verb with two objects: a direct object, which is a clause that begins with a *wh*-word, *how* or *as if*, and a noun indirect object, e.g. **dictate to** (v + p), 'to enforce (sth. over which one has power) on (sm.)':
No one is going to dictate to me what to say.

v + p obj. *wh*-clause

4. An intransitive verb, which is not followed by anything, e.g. **get in** (v + adv.), 'to take part in (sth.)':
It's a good idea to get in at the start, whatever you're doing.
v + adv.

5. An intransitive verb followed by a verb in the *to*-infinitive, e.g. **set out** (v + adv.), 'to intend (to do sth.)';
I set out to write an essay on Shakespeare.

v + adv. *to*-v

6. An intransitive verb followed by the *-ing* form of a verb, e.g. **go on** (v + adv.), 'to continue doing the same thing or action';
They went on climbing the steep slope of the mountain.

v + adv. *-ing*-form

7. An intransitive verb followed by a *that*-clause, e.g. **look out** (v + adv.), 'be watchful, to take care';
Look out that you don't lose your papers at the airport.

v + adv. *that*-clause →

8. An intransitive verb followed by a clause beginning with a *wh*-word, e.g. **mind out** (v + adv.) 'to take care, move out of';
Mind out where you're crossing the street, as the traffic is very busy here.

v + adv. *wh*-clause →

9. A linking verb with a complement (an *-ing* form) that refers to the subject, e.g. **end up** (v + adv.) 'to finish by (doing sth.)';
She ended up getting married to that horrible Jackson guy.
v + adv. *-ing*-form

10. A linking verb with a complement (an adjective) that refers to the subject, e.g. **come in** (v + adv.), 'to serve a purpose';
These warm clothes will come in very useful in the mountains.
v + adv. adj.

11. A linking verb with a complement (an adverbial) that refers to the subject, e.g. **end up** (v + adv.), 'to arrive at or in (a place) after time or events';
She will end up in hospital if she will drive so fast.

v + adv. adverbial

12. A transitive verb followed by either an adverb, preposition or adverb and preposition with a noun direct object, e.g. a) **flood out** (v + adv.) 'to make sm.

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

homeless by flooding'; b) **fly at** (v + prep.) 'to attack (sm. or an animal) with blows or words'; c) **get abreast of** (v + adv. + prep.) 'to reach a position of being well-informed about (sth. in advance).

a) The angry river flooded out half of the village.

v + adv. dir. obj

b) *Jane flew at Margaret when she realized her betrayal.*

v + p dir. obj.

c) *Helen always tries hard to get abreast of the latest gossip.*

v + adv. + p dir. obj.

13. A transitive verb followed by a direct object and its particle (adverb or adjective) always separated from it, e.g. **get off** (v + adv.) 'to learn sth.'
I've got this poem off by heart already.

v dir. obj. adv.

14. A transitive verb with a direct object (a verb in *-ing* form), e.g. **get near to** (v + adv. + p.) 'to be very near or like, reach';
I never seem to get near to writing a good essay.

v + adv. + p *-ing* form

15. A transitive verb and an adverb or adjective followed by a *that*-clause as the direct object, e.g. **make certain/sure**, 'to feel sure';
Make certain that you answer all the questions.

v adj. *that*-clause →

16. A transitive verb followed by a direct object clause beginning with a *wh*-word, e.g. **make certain/sure,** 'to be sure of the truth of sth.',
Make sure what you'll say about the accident.

v + adj. *wh*-clause →

17. A transitive verb with a noun direct object and verb in the *to*-form, e.g. **lead on** (v + adv.) 'to influence sm. to do sth.';
The thief denied that he had been led on to steal the painting by his best friend.

v + adv. *to*-inf.

18. A transitive verb with a noun direct object and a verb in the *-ing* form, with the preposition coming after the verb or being separated from it, e.g. **result in** (v + prep.) 'to have sth. as a result, end in';
The snowfall resulted in his house being covered up to the eaves.

V + prep. dir. obj. *-ing* form

Phrasal verbs are now part of the discourse, and many of them are no longer considered as belonging to slang. They are used in everyday speech, in radio and television programs, to make the speech more vivid and colourful. As they are based mainly on words of Anglo-Saxon origin, they do not have a counterpart in languages whose vernaculars are based on Latin and Greek words. Romanian being a Romance language, the student will often resort to

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

the word he knows better, that is a Latin-based one, than to an Anglo-Saxon one, who he can easily misinterpret due to the many-folded meanings. Thus, if we want our students to use as many phrasal verbs as the natives do, the only thing to do is to teach them phrasal verbs before their Latin-based synonyms.

Teaching phrasal verbs can imply at least three criteria: one syntactic, one semantic and the third methodological. The syntactic criteria are applied to the word order, that is by what especially are the verbs from the combinations followed, either an adverb, a preposition, an adverb and a preposition, an *-ing* form, an infinitive or a *that*-clause. This is difficult enough as not to form the base for many exercises. Usually, they are mingled through the other types of exercises and criteria. Most exercises are based on semantics and teaching methods.

An example of exercise based on syntactic criteria is the following:

- Match each phrasal verb in column A with a word or phrase in column B to give a common phrase. Then find a verb in column C which defines each phrasal verb:

1. come in for - a. a lot of criticism - vii. receive.

From a semantic point of view, phrasal verbs can be learned taking into account their three components: the verb, the preposition, the adverb, or adverb and preposition. Thus verbs can be grouped according to their surface structure, the exercises being conceived either around the verb or around the particles.

I. Some types of exercises that take into account the whole combination:

A.

1. Explanations of phrasal verbs are given from a-j, and they have to be matched with sentences containing phrasal verbs from 1-10:

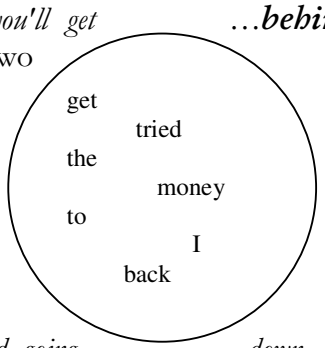
   a. to be rejected or disapproved matches with no. 7 *"Whether you like it or not, passing the death sentence on an internationally known writer is a bit extreme, if not absolutely out."*
2. Matching up the beginnings of sentences in the left hand column with suitable endings in the right hand column:

   1. He broke it down → b. when he heard the scream from inside.
3. Matching up the split exchanges in Section A and B:

   a. "He's brought about a bloodless revolution in Eastern Europe" → 4. "You mean Gorbachev?"
4. Replacing one word with a phrasal verb and observing the right tense:

   "You'll never believe this!" ~ "Believe what? No, don't tell me, interest rates are <u>falling</u>." (**coming down**)
5. Filling in the gaps with suitable prepositions/adverbs after a certain verb (e.g. **get**):

   *Unless you attend the course regularly, you'll get …**behind**…with your studies.*
6. Ordering the words in a circle to make two sentences with a separable and unseparable phrasal verb:



a. I tried to <u>get</u> the money <u>back</u>.

b. I tried to <u>get back</u> the money.

7. Rewriting sentences and replacing phrasal verbs with verbs and phrases which are similar in meaning:

   When the bomb <u>went off</u>, the ship started <u>going</u> <u>down</u>.
   When the bomb exploded, the ship started sinking.

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

8. Trying to work out the connection between phrasal verbs in the left hand column and the people in the right hand column:
   a. put across → a scientist/a politician.
9. Headlines - based on incorrect spelling, where one letter was replaced with another:

   MINISTERS PROMISES TO ROO*F* OUT CORRUPTION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. (ROO*T*)
10. Word square - words are to be found in the letters that form a square:

S H O W D O W N N A E S
E F F O E D A R T U Y W
---

11. Filling the gaps with a suitable passive verb in such a way that the new sentence is as similar in meaning as possible to the sentence above it:
    The two sides came to an agreement after hours of negotiations.
    Agreement was reached after hours of negotiations.
12. Finishing each of sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible to the sentence before it.
    I grew up in a village on the Scottish border. I was …brought up in a little village on the Scottish border.
13. Writing a new sentence as similar as possible in meaning to the original sentence, using the word given:
    Many of us were shocked when a former actor took the oath as President of the United States.
    Many of us were shocked when a former actor was sworn in as President of the United States.
14. Choosing the most suitable words underlined:

    I really should get down to my homework/the weather.

B.

Exercises with synonyms and antonyms:

1. Form synonyms for the phrasal verbs in the left hand column by filling in the spaces in the right hand column with suitable verbs, prepositions, or adverbs:
   make out = take in
2. Replace the phrasal verbs in the sentences with a suitable phrasal verb from the box:

   I'm feeling rather tired, so I can't take in half of what you're saying. (make out)
3. Provide the missing phrasal verbs which are antonyms of the phrasal verbs given:

   bring forward ≠ put off
4. Complete each sentence by providing a suitable phrasal verb antonym for the phrasal verb underlined:
   He rang her up, but before he could apologise she …rang off…
5. Exercises based on synonyms opposed to one odd item:

   call on - drop by - get round - look up. Three phrasal verbs are synonyms, meaning 'visit' and the fourth doesn't match.
6. Crosswords;

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

7. Quizzes: based on answering questions using phrasal verbs formed with the verbs in capital letters:
   What can you say about the engine of your car when it stops working in the middle of the street? (BREAK)
8. Puns with homonyms: based on at least two interpretations for one phrasal verb:

   "What about this patient, nurse?" ~ "Run down, doctor."
   "Vitamin deficiency?" ~ "No, doctor, a bus."

   a. run down = hit by a vehicle; b. run down = unhealthy because of tiredness

II. Exercises that centre upon the verb of the combination:

1. Complete the sentences by adding the correct particle from the list (*about, after, away, from* etc.). The verb here is *to be*.
   "Haven't you finished yet?" ~ "Don't worry, I'm nearly …" (Through)
2. Error correction - when a verb is used instead of another:

   Can you <u>make</u> up my dress, please? (Correct verb: do)
3. Match the phrasal verbs (all formed with *call*: *call at, call back, call for* etc.) with one of the definitions given:
   I'll call at the travel agency to collect our tickets. (To visit briefly)
4. Fill in the blanks with a suitable verb. A list of verbs can be given or the students rely only on the context and the particle:
   Sitting in the bar afterwards, they all felt pleases that they hadn't been hurt. 'It's lucky,' Philippa said, 'that we were …up in a corner, where no one noticed us.' (Huddled)
5. Underline the word that best fits the sentence.

   I was completely …over by their warm reception.
   ***a** pushed* ***b** run* ***c** <u>bowled</u>* ***d** thrown*

III. Exercises that focus on the particles and their meanings.

These are the most numerous as particles combine with practically all the verbs. When the stress is placed on the particle and its meaning, usually the verb of the combination loses its meaning, and becomes a semantically empty verb. For example, if we take *get* (main meaning = 'come into possession') and its combinations with adverbial particles and prepositions we have: *get by* = 'survive'; *get down to* = 'begin'; *get in on* = 'share'; *get off* = 'fall asleep'; *get round* = 'spread (of news)'; *get through* = 'finish' etc. Many of the times the particle preserves its meaning(s), but there are instances where they change their meanings completely and fuse with the verb, forming together one semantic unit, quite different from the original meanings.

Some authors, such as Britten and Dellar, or Goodale, base their exercises mainly on the distinction made among the meanings of particles. Each chapter focuses either on a certain semantic domain, as in Britten's *Using Phrasal Verbs*, or on a certain particle, as in Goodale's *Phrasal Verbs Workbook*. The first principle of dealing with phrasal verbs is also applied in Acklam's *Help with Phrasal Verbs* and in Workman's *Phrasal Verbs and Idioms*. In these books exercises are centred round a certain subject, such as in Britten's book: departure (*off, out*) or arrival (*in*); construction (*up*) or demolition (*down)*. In Acklam's book: "Picking Up - Learning a new language"; "Cracking Down - The problem of violence at football matches". In Workman's book: "Looking round a flat" or "Family relationships". Most of the chapters base

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

their introduction of phrasal verbs and their study on contexts. Some types of exercises included in this way of approaching the study of phrasal verbs are[1]:

- True or false, where a text contains phrasal verbs and is followed by questions that have their one-word counterpart.
- Putting the sentences containing phrasal verbs in the right order, the first being already in the correct position, e.g.

1. *Marie was in Anna's room to borrow a cardigan. She had been cold in the conference room. 'I think they've been messing about with the air-conditioning.'*
2. *'No, keep it on. The afternoon session starts in a minute.'*
3. *'It looks much too big for me. Do you remember that time you lent me a pair of jeans, when we cut down a tree in your garden?'*
4. *'I'd forgotten about helping to fix up your sauna. What ages ago that was! Gosh, I'm hot in this cardigan. Let me take it off again.'*
5. *'Here, take this heavy one. You won't be cold with that on.'*
6. *'Yes, when we were putting up our new sauna. Well, be quick. Try it on. You see? It fits perfectly. I'm not so enormous.'* (Britten 1991: 24)

- What should they have done? Use a suitable verb and *on/off/up/around/about*;

Some dresses were stolen from Madame Olivier's boutique because she left it open all night. <u>She should have locked it up</u>.

- Give your opinion on each of these questions. The questions are given first and have to be answered. The text follows and the student checks up his responses.
- What would you say to a friend who…Use *up/off/on* and the se verbs or others: *break, cut, come, go, mess.*
  …was being very slow or timid? ~ 'Come on!'
- A part of the conversation is given and the student has to provide one speaker's questions using a suitable verb and a particle (*up/in/out/over/through*):
  L.: …? (Possible question: Did you get through your wife?)
  G. Yes, in the end, but I had to go through the operator.
- Compositions: write a paragraph on the topic of student's choice (or given, according to the title of the unit or chapter), including at least one example of each of the phrasal verbs just studied.
- One way of consolidating phrasal verbs is made with the help of filling in the letters missing:
  W..*ith*..**dr**..*au*..**ing and S**…**p**…**ating** (Seaparating): b..*rea*..k away
- Some sentences are grammatically correct and others are not. Correct the wrong ones:

  I've been trying to get you through for ages but the line's always engaged! (Not correct)

  I've been trying to <u>get through</u> to you for ages but the line's always engaged!

IV. Some ways of teaching phrasal verbs.

Using patterns of exercises mentioned above a teacher can construct his/her lesson on phrasal verbs using different techniques, according to the topic of the lesson, the age of the

[1] Types of exercise already mentioned (like replacing, matching, fill in etc.) are not included.

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

pupils, their knowledge of English and their interest in the matter. Lately teaching English has centred upon the student and not on the teacher. So work can be done individually, with exercises or tests, usually used for a checking up. A better way, in my opinion, is working in pairs, groups or teams. The students are encouraged to talk, to improvise conversations based on a certain topic and making use of phrasal verbs related to it, and already explained to them. A model of such a lesson can be taken either from Workman or from Acklam. Both books are based on group work and use audio-cassettes.

In Unit 1, "Getting down to work", pairs have first to discuss some problems given in a box, connected with students' performance at school and outside it. Then there comes a text with the same topic, which uses phrasal verbs related semantically. The students have to underline the phrasal verbs and then find out their meanings. After this introductory part, there are exercises, like matching, completing sentences with the help of pictures. All units have listening exercises: a sentence is uttered and students have to replace the one-word verb with a phrasal verb just studied. Exercises also comprise dialogues, which use the topic of the unit but is adapted to the students' personal experience. Then phrasal verbs are shown in different idioms and expressions, where the case appears, and students are asked either to do exercises with them or to write compositions of their own. Grammar of phrasal verbs is given in a nut-shell, and at approximately half of the unit, many times unstressed from a teaching viewpoint, as we all know that grammar is considered somewhat boring. Units also make use of pictures and jokes.

Another way of studying phrasal verbs is accessing the Internet where you can find up to 36800 entries (February 2003). An interesting fact noticed about these entries is that scores of dictionaries for phrasal verbs are provided by British and American printing houses, while exercises are mainly provided by people from non-English-speaking countries. Thus we have translations of phrasal verbs in Russian, Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, Polish, German etc. Many exercises are of the types already mentioned, especially matching games, quizzes and tests. Phrasal verbs can be found grouped by topic, theme and semantic field, or centred upon one verb or a certain adverb or preposition. An example is given from the following entry:

"*Phrasal Verbs Through Lexis* focuses on high frequency use, presenting the phrasal verbs as they would occur in a Lexicon. The 14 practice texts provide memorable contexts for learning Phrasal Verbs since they each relate to distinct themes. The verb components introduced in the worksheets are deliberately limited to the 19 most common ones - *BRING CARRY COME CUT DO FALL GET GIVE GO HOLD KEEP LAY LOOK MAKE PASS PULL TAKE and TURN*. All these verb components combine with particles to form meanings, which are difficult for ESL learners to guess, yet very important for them to know. The *thematic approach* illustrates the appropriate use of Phrasal Verbs and non-use (in favour of Latinate verbs) with sensitivity to degrees of formality in spoken discourse or written prose. After using the "A" and "B" texts for practice, learners should be encouraged to write a "C" text with the right mix of verbs.

10A. Cause and Effect

Rewrite the text using PHRASAL VERBS to replace the underlined words:
Failing schools

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

Greater scrutiny of schools that are failing their pupils is expected to result from the league tables that have now been published for some years. Once the news spreads that the local Comprehensive School is near the bottom of the tables, rumours are set in circulation relating to poor teaching, failure to maintain discipline and bad management. Whether or not these rumours prove to be true, this is what arises from comparing the nation's children without reference to the social problems which schools have to deal with. In extreme cases, a government inquiry follows and some staffing changes are often caused to happen. An experienced official may act as substitute for the school's head-teacher, who may have to undergo retraining to avoid taking early retirement.
The new manager may ask staff and parents to make a concerted effort to stamp out truancy, to clamp down on bad behaviour and to see that homework is completed on time. Close monitoring behaviour and performance may continue for some time until the new manager is convinced that pupils are giving serious attention to the core components of the national curriculum. If all goes well, the next set of league tables will show improvements, which will have been caused by the new policy of targeting schools which are under-performing.

Cause, cause to arise:	bring on	Be the result of:	arise from
Cause to happen:	bring about	Result from:	come out of
Happen, take place, continue:	go on	Spread:	get about
Happen, follow:	come about	Set in circulation:	put about
Prove:	turn out	Give serious attention to:	get down to
Avoid doing something:	get out of	Make a concerted effort:	pull together
Act as substitute for:	stand in for."		

These exercises are provided mostly because phrasal verbs have proved to be very difficult to master by foreign learners of English. Their number has increased as they are frequently used by native speakers of English and knowing them makes the understanding of the discourse easier and the foreign speaker closer to the colloquial register used in everyday speech.

List of abbreviations

adj. = adjective

adv. = adverb

dir. obj. = direct object

ESL = English as a Second Language

obj. = object

p = preposition

sm. = someone

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)

sth. = something
v = verb

Bibliography

Acklam, Richard (1992) *Help with Phrasal Verbs*. Great Britain: Heinemann
Allsop, Jake (1990) *Test Your Phrasal Verbs*. England: Penguin Books
Blackman, Daniel (1999) *Test Your Phrasal Verbs*. Romania: Teora
Britten, Donard & Dellar, Gwendolyn (1991) *Using Phrasal Verbs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Courtney, Rosemary (1994) *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*. England: Longman Group UK Ltd.
Evans, Virginia (2000) *CPE: Use of English*. England: Express Publishing
Goodale, Malcolm (1995) *Phrasal Verbs Workbook*. Birmingham: HarperCollins Publishers
Side, Richard & Wellman, Guy (2001) *Grammar and Vocabulary for Cambridge Advanced and Proficiency*. England: Longman
Vince, Michael (1994) *Advanced Language Practice*. Great Britain: Heinemann
Workman, Graham (1993) *PhrasalVverbs and Idioms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
***Collins Paperback English Dictionary* (1999). Great Britain: HarperCollins Publishers

BDD-A2962 © 2003 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:29 UTC)