

The Grammar of Phrasal Verbs

There are four different types of phrasal verbs.

TYPE 1: intransitive

These verbs do not have a direct object.

take off (= leave the ground)

- The plane took off.

break down (= stop working)

- My car broke down.

get up (= get out of bed)

- I got up very early yesterday.

TYPE 2: transitive and separable

These verbs need a direct object, and the preposition can be separated from the main verb. If the object is a noun it can go before or after the preposition. BUT if the object is a pronoun, it must go before the preposition.

pick up (= get someone from a place)

- I picked my sister up.
- I picked up my sister.
- I picked her up.

- NOT: ~~I picked up her.~~

clean up (= clean completely)

- I cleaned the kitchen up.
- I cleaned up the kitchen.
- I cleaned it up.
- NOT: ~~I cleaned up it.~~

TYPE 3: transitive and inseparable

The phrasal verb again needs a direct object, but this time the preposition cannot be separated from the main verb. The object goes after the preposition always.

look after (= take care of a child)

- I looked after my nephew.
- I looked after him.
- NOT: ~~I looked my nephew after.~~
- NOT: ~~I looked him after.~~

come across (= find by chance)

- I came across your glasses.
- I came across them.
- NOT: ~~I came them across.~~

TYPE 4: verbs with two prepositions

These are easy because they are always transitive and inseparable. The object goes at the end.

run out of (= finish our supply of)

- We have run out of milk.
- We have run out of it.
- NOT: ~~we have run out it of.~~

look forward to (= wait for with excitement)

- I'm looking forward to the party.
- I'm looking forward to it.
- NOT: ~~I'm looking forward it to.~~