

Multi-word verbs (Phrasal verbs)

Multi-word verbs are verbs that combine with one or two particles (a preposition **and/or** an adverb).

*I'm **looking for** my keys. Have you seen them?*
(verb + preposition)

***Look out!** There's a car coming!*
(verb + adverb)

*A snob is someone who **looks down on** people of a lower social class.*
(verb + adverb + preposition)

Literal meaning

Look at the following example, where the verb and particle keep their separate literal meaning.

*He **looked up** and saw a plane.*

Here the meaning of the verb and the particle have not changed.

*He **looked up** = He looked † up (in the direction of the sky).*

Non-literal meaning

Sometimes the addition of the **particle(s)** creates a multi-word verb that has a different meaning.

*He **looked up** all the new words in the dictionary.*

*In this sentence, *look up* = to **find** information in a reference book.*

Multi-word verbs are frequently used in everyday spoken English and they usually have an informal style. Quite often there is no single word which has exactly the same meaning as the multi-word verb, but for some of them there is a Latin-based verb which has an equivalent meaning. However, these Latin-based verbs tend to be used in more formal contexts.

The same multi-word verb can have several different meanings:

- 1 I finally *worked out* the answer to the problem.
- 2 I am fit and strong because I *work out* in the gymnasium for an hour every day.
- 3 I *worked out* how much it would cost me to travel across Europe by train.
- 4 He's a very strange person. I can't *work him out*.

Match the different meanings of *work out* in the sentences above with the definitions below.

- a. to do physical exercises
- b. to understand someone
- c. to calculate something
- d. to find a solution to something

The four basic types

Type 1 multi-word verbs

Some multi-word verbs are intransitive (i.e. they don't take an object). We can use these multi-word verbs in a sentence on their own or continue the sentence in any way we like in order to add further information:

John called round.

John called round last night.

John called round to see you.

John called round because he wanted to borrow some sugar.

It is impossible to separate the verb and the particle.

~~Not John called last night round.~~

~~Not John called to see you round.~~

Type 1 multi-word verbs: intransitive + inseparable

Type 2 multi-word verbs

Type 2 multi-word verbs are transitive (i.e. they take a direct object) and separable (i.e. it is possible to separate the verb and the particle). For example, these two sentences have the same meaning:

He looked up the word in the dictionary.

He looked the word up in the dictionary.

If an object pronoun is used (*me/you/him/her/it/us/them*), the particle must always come after the object pronoun:

He looked it up. Not ~~He looked up it.~~

In other words, you have to separate the verb and the particle when you use an object pronoun.

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| Type 2 multi-word verbs: transitive + separable |
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Write your own example sentences with the following Type 2 multi-word verbs.

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| to work something out | to switch something off |
| to turn something on | to run someone over |
| to ask someone round | to fill something in |

Use both noun objects and pronoun objects to show that the particle can be separated from the verb.

I worked out the meaning of the word from context. I worked it out.

Type 3 multi-word verbs

Type 3 multi-word verbs are transitive and it is impossible to separate the verb and the particle by the noun object or the pronoun object:

I'm looking for my keys. Not ~~I'm looking my keys for.~~

I'm looking for them. Not ~~I'm looking them for.~~

Type 3 multi-word verbs: transitive + inseparable

| | | |
|----------|--|---------|
| look for | | my keys |
| | | them |

Type 3 multi-word verbs are written with *someone* and/or *something* after the particle to show that they are transitive and inseparable: *to look for someone/something.*

Look at the following sentences and decide if the multi-word verbs are Type 1, Type 2, or Type 3.

- a. I haven't got time to read your report now, so I'll look through it later.
- b. The children woke up several times in the night.
- c. I don't like getting up very early in the morning.
- d. It's very dark in here. Can you put the light on, please?
- e. I work out in a gymnasium because it helps to reduce stress.
- f. She went over it several times but I still didn't understand.
- g. The wind was so strong it almost blew me over.
- h. I think the committee should look into it.
- i. I'm afraid I've broken the vase. I knocked it over while I was polishing the table.
- j. On Saturday we'll drop round to see if you need anything.

Type 4 multi-word verbs

Type 4 multi-word verbs are always transitive and have two particles which are inseparable.

He looks down on other people.

Not ~~He looks down other people on.~~

Not ~~He looks other people down on.~~

He looks down on them.

Not ~~He looks down them on.~~

Not ~~He looks them down on.~~

Type 4 multi-word verbs: transitive + two inseparable particles

Type 4 multi-word verbs are written with *someone* and/or *something* after the two particles: *to look down on someone.*

George had problems with studying, so he wrote to a magazine problem page for advice. Find out what his study problems are and tell your partner about four of them.

Dear Marjorie

I'm having problems with my studies at school. I find it difficult to get down to work in the evenings and I can't concentrate on anything at the moment. I spend most of my time listening to records or watching TV instead of doing my homework. The other students in my class are much better than I am and I have difficulty in keeping up with them. I sometimes have problems with following the lessons as well. I can't always take down the important things my teacher says because I write so slowly. She has told me that I'm falling behind with my studies. I'm not good at writing essays and I usually hand in my homework late because I put off doing it

until the last minute. So I often have to invent silly excuses to explain why I haven't done the work.

I'm sure I'm not going to get through my final exams in June. I scraped through the mock exams last February with 54% – all the other students passed with flying colours. I'm now so far behind that I don't know how I'm going to catch up with them. My teacher spent some time going through my homework with me but she found so many mistakes that I felt even more depressed. What do you suggest I do?

Yours desperately

George.

Work with your partner. Underline the multi-word verbs in the letter and try to work out what they mean.

1 Match the multi-word verbs in A with the definitions in B.

A

- 1 to get down to doing something
 - 2 to keep up with someone/something
 - 3 to take something down
 - 4 to fall behind (with something)
 - 5 to hand something in
 - 6 to put something off
 - 7 to get through (something)
 - 8 to scrape through (something)
 - 9 to catch up (with someone/something)
 - 10 to go through something
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B

- a. to be behind with something, not at the level expected
 - b. to start work on something
 - c. to postpone, to decide to do something at a later date
 - d. to pass an exam or test
 - e. to check that something is correct, to examine something
 - f. to reach the same standard or position as someone else
 - g. to give something to someone in a position of authority
 - h. to remain at the same standard or position as someone else
 - i. to record in writing what someone is saying
 - j. to pass an exam but with a very low grade
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Ask your partner the questions below. Try to use the multi-word verbs from this unit in your questions and answers.

A *How are you **getting on** with your studies?*

B *At the moment I'm **falling behind** a little, so I'll have to work harder to **catch up** with the rest of the class.*

a. How are you getting on with your studies?

b. What things do you write down in lessons?

c. Do you always do your homework immediately?

d. How do you check there are no mistakes in your work before you give it to your teacher?

e. How do you think you will do in your future exams?

Complete the sentences below with suitable multi-word verbs. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

ADVICE ON DOING EXAMS

Many people don't _____ their exams or only manage to _____ them with a very low grade because they make two simple mistakes: they often choose the wrong questions to answer and they don't plan their essays in sufficient detail. So here is some advice.

- 1 When you get your exam paper, _____ all the questions before you choose which ones you want to answer
- 2 When you have done this, _____ on a spare piece of paper any relevant ideas that come to mind.
- 3 Next, _____ what you want to say in your essay before you begin writing.
- 4 Make a plan and then start your essay.

This advice does not guarantee you will _____ all your exams without any difficulties at all, but it will help you to avoid making major mistakes.