Idioms or idiomatic expressions are ways of expressing ideas that over time become accepted as standard usage in language even though they are often not readily understandable from their grammatical construction or from the meaning of their parts. Many idioms are created by adding a preposition to a basic verb, which forms a verb phrase known as a phrasal verb that is different from the meaning of the verb alone. For example, the verb "to drop" means “to let something fall.” In contrast, as a phrasal verb "drop in" means “to visit someone without having received an invitation,” whereas "drop out" means “to stop doing what one usually does.”

You will find that many phrasal verbs have more than one meaning. For example, "turn in" means “to give something to someone,” as in "I turned in my test paper to the instructor." However, it can also mean “to go to sleep,” as in "Because it was late, I decided to turn in for the night." Sometimes a difference in syntax or word order of a phrasal verb can also result in different idiomatic meanings. Because idiomatic usage is quite irregular, it can be learned more efficiently by memorization and frequent practice than by learning rules. The following list of phrasal verbs will help you master a variety of idiomatic combinations. Each section presents a basic verb with several idioms that have been derived by choosing the right prepositions to form phrasal verbs.

COMMON PHRASAL VERBS

Idioms Using “Break”

- **break down**
  Meaning: stop working
  Example: I was late to school because my car broke down.

- **break even**
  Meaning: neither gain nor lose
  Example: I was lucky to break even at the casino last weekend.

- **break in**
  Meaning: initiate, train
  Example: The cowboy worked long and hard to break in the new horse.

- **break off**
  Meaning: end abruptly
  Example: She broke off the conversation by hanging up the telephone.
• **break out**
  Meaning: escape
  Example: Three prisoners broke out of jail.

  Meaning: happen suddenly
  Example: A huge fire broke out on the fifth floor.

• **break through**
  Meaning: penetrate
  Example: The explorer broke through the underbrush to find the temple.

• **break up**
  Meaning: end a relationship
  Example: Mary broke up with Joe more than a year ago.

  Meaning: end an event
  Example: The police broke up the demonstration.

**Idioms Using "Bring"**

• **bring about**
  Meaning: cause
  Example: She hopes to bring about a change in his attitude.

• **bring in**
  Meaning: yield, earn
  Example: His investments bring in a profit each year.

• **bring on**
  Meaning: cause
  Example: The assassination brought on the first world war.

  Meaning: cause to come forth, produce
  Example: Bring on the wine!

• **bring [something] on [oneself]**
  Meaning: cause problems for oneself
  Example: By refusing to listen to his teacher, he brought the failure on himself.

• **bring out**
  Meaning: emphasize
  Example: That blue shirt brings out the color of your eyes.

  Meaning: inspire
  Example: That teacher is able to bring out the best in her students.
• **bring to mind**
  Meaning: remind someone of
  Example: The smell of baking bread brings my mother's kitchen to mind.

• **bring up**
  Meaning: raise, rear
  Example: After my parents died, I was brought up by my grandmother.
  Meaning: introduce
  Example: She brought up the subject of having children.

• **bring down**
  Meaning: cause to fail
  Example: The war brought down the government.

**Idioms Using "Call"**

• **call it a day**
  Meaning: stop an activity
  Example: The ballet master told the dancers that it was time to call it a day.

• **call [something] off**
  Meaning: cancel [something]
  Example: The picnic was called off because of the rain.

• **call on**
  Meaning: visit
  Example: We plan to call on the Smith family when we visit Arizona.

  Meaning: select
  Example: The teacher called on Juan for an answer to her question.

• **call it quits**
  Meaning: stop an activity, end a relationship
  Example: Brenda and Eddie called it quits before their second anniversary.

• **call up**
  Meaning: telephone
  Example: A salesman called me up this morning.

  Meaning: induct, summon
  Example: The army called up twenty men from my home town.

• **call the roll**
  Meaning: take attendance
  Example: The professor stopped calling the roll after two weeks of class.
• **call out**
  Meaning: speak loudly
  Example: Call out your name when I point at you.

  Meaning: challenge
  Example: He called her out on her racist remark

**Idioms Using "Come"**

• **come about**
  Meaning: happen
  Example: The event you were waiting for has come about.

• **come across**
  Meaning: find unexpectedly
  Example: Reading a book I came across a photo of my hometown.

  Meaning: provide services on demand
  Example: She pressured her manager, but he didn't come across with her raise.

• **come across as**
  Meaning: give the impression of
  Example: He comes across as a reasonable man, but in fact, he is crazy.

• **come down with [an illness]**
  Meaning: get [an illness]
  Example: I don't feel well; I think I'm coming down with the flu.

• **come in handy**
  Meaning: prove useful
  Example: I knew the batteries would come in handy in an emergency.

• **come out**
  Meaning: be published, appear
  Example: The new issue of the magazine came out last week.

  Meaning: reveal one's homosexuality
  Example: His parents were shocked when he came out.

  Meaning: emerge
  Example: From our discussion it came out that we all disagreed on every point.

• **come through**
  Meaning: survive
  Example: She came through her illness at last.
• **come through for**
  Meaning: support through difficulty
  Example: He really came through for me when my daughter was in the hospital.

• **come up**
  Meaning: be mentioned
  Example: We were talking about students, and your name came up.
  Meaning: happen
  Example: I didn't know what to do because the situation had never come up.

**Idioms Using "Do"**

• **do away with**
  Meaning: dispose of, eliminate, abolish
  Example: To do away with social injustice was her goal.
  Meaning: kill
  Example: The villain decided to do away with his mother.

• **do over**
  Meaning: repeat
  Example: The only way to correct the mistakes was to do the assignment over.
  Meaning: redecorate, refurbish
  Example: It was very frustrating to wait six months to do my apartment over.

• **do without**
  Meaning: give up, forego
  Example: When my father lost his job, we had to do without many luxuries.

• **have nothing to do with**
  Meaning: shun, avoid
  Example: The new neighbors are unfriendly and will have nothing to do with us.

• **do in**
  Meaning: tire, exhaust
  Example: After running five miles without stopping, I was done in.
  Meaning: kill
  Example: I was so angry that I wanted to do him in, but I didn't.

**Idioms Using "Get"**

• **get ahead**
  Meaning: advance, prosper, succeed
  Example: He studied hard in order to get ahead.
• **get over**
  Meaning: overcome, recover
  Example: She got over her cold after two weeks.

• **get around**
  Meaning: travel widely, frequently
  Example: They get around a lot.
  Meaning: avoid, evade
  Example: They got around the high prices by growing their own vegetables.

• **get hold of (get ahold of)**
  Meaning: contact
  Example: I got hold of him by telephone.

• **get out of**
  Meaning: remove from
  Example: Get him out of here.

• **get up**
  Meaning: arise from a sitting or lying position
  Example: I get up every day at seven.

• **get after**
  Meaning: criticize
  Example: He will get after you if you don't do your work well.

• **get by**
  Meaning: pass
  Example: She was so pregnant that I couldn't get by her in the hall.
  Meaning: survive
  Example: Times are hard, but we will get by somehow.

**Idioms Using "Give"**

• **give and take**
  Meaning: compromise
  Example: We hope there will be some give and take at the conference table.

• **give in**
  Meaning: yield, accept a position or viewpoint one had opposed
  Example: We expected the other side to give in.

• **give out**
  Meaning: cease functioning because of age or deterioration
  Example: We were afraid that our tires would give out during the trip.
• **give way**
  - Meaning: collapse
  - Example: The town was flooded when the dam gave way.

  - Meaning: yield
  - Example: The boss refused to give way to the workers.

• **give up**
  - Meaning: surrender
  - Example: The soldiers gave up when they knew they were beaten.

  - Meaning: stop
  - Example: The dancers would not give up practicing despite being tired.

• **given to**
  - Meaning: in the habit of
  - Example: Because he was given to fast driving, his license was soon suspended.

**Idioms Using "Keep"**

• **keep house**
  - Meaning: manage a home
  - Example: He found it hard to keep house when his wife left him.

• **keep out of**
  - Meaning: stay away from
  - Example: Last year he was warned several times to keep out of trouble.

• **keep [one's] word**
  - Meaning: fulfill a promise
  - Example: John has lied to me so often that I will never trust him to keep his word.

• **keep track of**
  - Meaning: stay in touch with, find the whereabouts of
  - Example: Unfortunately, I can never keep track of my glasses.

• **keep up**
  - Meaning: maintain, preserve
  - Example: We can no longer afford to keep up the stables and the formal garden.

• **keep up with**
  - Meaning: stay abreast of
  - Example: The third runner kept up with the second one.

• **keep still**
  - Meaning: be quiet
  - Example: He told his little girl to keep still during the performance.
**Idioms Using "Let"**

- **let alone**
  Meaning: stop disturbing
  Example: Tell Charles to let that boy alone.

- **let down**
  Meaning: disappoint, fail
  Example: Mrs. Smith is so reliable that I know she will never let me down.

- **let go**
  Meaning: release
  Example: The police told the terrorist to let the hostages go.

- **let off**
  Meaning: permit to leave
  Example: Ask the bus driver to let you off at Fifth Avenue.
  Meaning: to excuse
  Example: They caught me with the stolen items, but the judge let me off.

- **let pass**
  Meaning: overlook, disregard
  Example: I will let your remarks pass.

- **let up**
  Meaning: pause, decrease in intensity
  Example: The storm did not let up until the following day.

- **let out**
  Meaning: lengthen, expand
  Example: He had gotten taller and fatter, so I had to let out his pants.

**Idioms Using "Look"**

- **look after**
  Meaning: take care of
  Example: Someone has to look after the children while we are away.

- **look forward to**
  Meaning: anticipate with pleasure
  Example: I am really looking forward to meeting you!

- **look into**
  Meaning: investigate
  Example: Should the police look into the disappearance of your jewelry?
• **look like**  
  Meaning: resemble  
  Example: My dog looks like Lassie.

  Meaning: seem possible or probable  
  Example: It looks like we won't be going on vacation this year.

• **look out for**  
  Meaning: be careful of  
  Example: When you go on the hike, look out for bears.

  Meaning: be responsible for, tend  
  Example: Her big brother looked out for her when she started school.

• **look up to**  
  Meaning: admire  
  Example: Her students really look up to her.

• **look over**  
  Meaning: examine, inspect  
  Example: Look over the papers before you sign them.

**Idioms Using "Make"**

• **make up**  
  Meaning: invent  
  Example: As it turned out, he had made the whole thing up.

  Meaning: reconcile  
  Example: He tried to make up with his girlfriend by buying her flowers.

• **make a living**  
  Meaning: earn money, support oneself  
  Example: While I was a student, I made a living by babysitting.

• **make headway**  
  Meaning: progress  
  Example: There is less traffic in the evenings, so we should make better headway.

• **make up one's mind**  
  Meaning: decide  
  Example: I like both choices, so I can't make up my mind.

• **make room for**  
  Meaning: clear a space for  
  Example: By pushing our chairs together, we were able to make extra room.
• make sure
  Meaning: ascertain
  Example: Make sure you have your books with you before you leave.

• make good
  Meaning: succeed
  Example: Even as a young girl, she knew she would make good someday.

• make good time
  Meaning: get somewhere quickly
  Example: The trip only took us an hour because we made good time.

• make out
  Meaning: succeed
  Example: I made out pretty well on that test.
  Meaning: perceive, read
  Example: I can't make out the signature on this document.
  Meaning: engage in kissing and caressing
  Example: The teenagers were making out in the bushes during the party.

• make do with [something]
  Meaning: accept a substitute
  Example: I wanted steak, but I had to make do with peanut butter.

Idioms Using "Put"

• put off
  Meaning: postpone, delay
  Example: George put off writing his paper until the night before it was due.

• put on
  Meaning: dress oneself in
  Example: Put on your raincoat for the weather looks bad.
  Meaning: fool [someone]
  Example: He said he was a famous actor, but he was just putting us on.

• put out
  Meaning: annoyed, irritated
  Example: Because he lost the election, the candidate was put out at his staff.
  Meaning: have sex with someone
  Example: She thought she would be more popular if she put out on the first date.
• **put something over on [someone]**
  Meaning: trick [someone]
  Example: The dishonest merchant tried to put something over on us.

• **put up a fight**
  Meaning: resist
  Example: They may force me to leave school, but I will put up a fight before I go.

• **put across**
  Meaning: present or deliver convincingly
  Example: Jennifer got the job because she was able to put across her ideas.

• **put down**
  Meaning: insult, degrade
  Example: Edward was angry because his boss continued to put him down.

• **put away**
  Meaning: store in the proper place
  Example: Adrienne's father told her to put her toys away.

**Idioms Using "Run"**

• **run up**
  Meaning: accumulate
  Example: Alex ran up a large bill at the bar.

• **run across**
  Meaning: encounter, meet by chance
  Example: In London, we unexpectedly ran across our friends Beth and Hugh.

• **run out of**
  Meaning: use entirely
  Example: She came home because she ran out of money.

• **run an errand**
  Meaning: perform a task involving movement or travel
  Example: I was late because I had to run errands.

• **run low**
  Meaning: become scarce in quantity or supply
  Example: As we crossed the desert, our water began to run low.

• **run up against**
  Meaning: encounter unfavorably
  Example: We ran up against a problem with the telephone company.
• run for
   Meaning: campaign for
   Example: Bill Clinton ran for governor successfully before he ran for President.

• run along
   Meaning: go
   Example: I've got to run along now.

Idioms Using "Take"

• take a break
   Meaning: stop an activity briefly, rest
   Example: I need to take a break between classes.

• take care of
   Meaning: be responsible for, handle
   Example: Does this office take care of financial problems?

   Meaning: nurse, tend
   Example: My mother always took care of me when I was sick.

• take charge of
   Meaning: be responsible for, direct
   Example: Sandra decided to take charge of the campaign.

• take [something or someone] for granted
   Meaning: assume
   Example: He took it for granted that I would have enough money to pay the bill.

• take it easy
   Meaning: rest, relax
   Example: Peter has decided to take it easy by not working as much.

• take [something] out of
   Meaning: remove from
   Example: My supervisor asked me to take all the old files out of the file cabinet.

• take [someone] out
   Meaning: date [someone]
   Example: The handsome stranger wants to take Judy out on Saturday night.

• take up
   Meaning: begin an activity
   Example: Would you like to take up a new hobby?

   Meaning: use, consume
   Example: I'm sorry to take up so much of your time.
• **take over**
  Meaning: gain control of
  Example: The angry workers took over the boss's office.

• **take [something] back**
  Meaning: retract
  Example: I take back all the nasty things I have ever said about you.