

Idioms and Phrasal Verbs

What are idioms?

1. An idiom is a phrase with a meaning that is often difficult to understand by looking at the individual words. *For example:*

My uncle just arrived **out of the blue**

out of the blue – suddenly and unexpectedly

2. Not all idioms are so difficult to guess. Many phrases that are easier to understand are still listed as idioms in dictionaries because they have a fixed form. *For example:*

I ring my mother every day **without fail**

without fail – always

3. Most idioms have a fixed form. However, with some idioms alternative words are possible. *For example:*

Do you want to go out? – **That/it depends.**

that/it depends – used to say that you are not certain about sth.

Why on earth are you shouting? Be quiet!

why/how/where/who, etc. **on earth** used to emphasize a question when you are angry or surprised

4. Sometimes additional words can be used within an idiom, especially to change the emphasis. *For example:*

It **makes a lot of sense** to buy now while the houses are cheap

make sense – be practical and logical thing to do. (A lot of here adds emphasis.)

Types of idioms

Type of idiom	Example	Meaning
1) verb-based	take advantage of sth get nowhere	= make good use of sth = make no progress, or have no success
2) prepositional phrases	in that case in charge (of sb/sth)	= used to say what you will do sth = having control or command (of sb/sth)
3) noun phrases	a piece of cake	= a thing that is easy to do
4) sayings/proverbs	better late than never	= it is better to arrive late than not at all
5) fixed phrases with two key words, usually joined by <i>and</i> or <i>or</i>	bright and early more or less	= early in the morning = almost or approximately
6) idiomatic phrasal verbs	get through (to sb) laugh sth off	= make contact with sb by phone = joke about sth to show you think it is not serious or important
7) exclamations or short spoken phrases	don't ask me thank heavens	= used to say that you don't know the answer to sth = used to say that you are pleased and relieved about sth

What are phrasal verbs?

1. A phrasal verb is a verb plus a preposition or adverb which creates a meaning different from the original verb.

Example:

I ran into my teacher at the movies last night. RUN + INTO = MEET

He ran away when he was 15. RUN + AWAY = LEAVE HOME

2. Some phrasal verbs are intransitive. An intransitive verb cannot be followed by an object.

Example:

He suddenly showed up. "SHOW UP" CANNOT TAKE AN OBJECT

3. Some phrasal verbs are transitive. A transitive verb can be followed by an object.

Example:

I made up the story. "STORY" IS THE OBJECT OF "MAKE UP"

4. Some transitive phrasal verbs are separable. The object is placed between the verb and the preposition.

Example:

I talked my mother into letting me borrow the car.

She looked the phone number up.

What are phrasal verbs?

5. Some transitive phrasal verbs are inseparable. The object is placed after the preposition.

Example:

I ran into an old friend yesterday.

They are looking into the problem.

He looked after the baby.

6. Some transitive phrasal verbs can take an object in both places.

Example:

I looked the number up in the phone book.

I looked up the number in the phone book.

7. **WARNING!** Although many phrasal verbs can take an object in both places, you must put the object between the verb and the preposition if the object is a pronoun.

Example:

I looked the number up in the phone book.

I looked up the number in the phone book.

I looked it up in the phone book. CORRECT

I looked up ~~it~~ in the phone book. INCORRECT