

20 essential phrasal verbs

Apr. 04, 2022

carry out

1. to go through the steps of (something) and bring to completion; do (a task, experiment, study, or the like).

The team of researchers carried out two important studies last year.

The first task was easy to carry out, but the second was more difficult.

The experiment was carried out over the course of two years.

2. to make (something) into a reality, execute.

They carried out their plan very carefully.

3. to comply with; obey; follow.

The lieutenant carried out the captain's orders.

You must carry out the instructions exactly; otherwise, you will fail.

catch up

1. to reach the same distance or level as another or others who are further ahead (usually followed by "to" or "with").

Stop and let me catch up with you!

Because she was ill for a week, she needed some extra help to catch up to the rest of the students.

2. to reach a stage of completeness or full satisfaction, but later than originally required or intended (usually followed by "on" or "with").

She uses the weekends to catch up on her sleep.

He fell behind in his work because of his vacation, but he's catching up with everything now.

3. to learn what has been happening in the lives of others after a period of having lost communication (often followed by "with").

Let's get together over coffee and then we can catch up.

So nice to see you again! It's been great to catch up.

I hadn't seen her in a long time, but we spoke the other day and caught up with each other.

figure out

to find an answer to a problem or puzzling question by using the power of the mind.

It's a complex game, and it took us some time to figure out how to play it.

He figured out that he could save time by walking up the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator.

I can't figure out why she wants to quit; she never even complained about her job before.

fill out

1. to complete by providing missing information.

Please fill out this form and bring it back to the desk.

The application was so confusing that I couldn't fill it out by myself.

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2. to become physically larger, especially through adequate nutrition and natural development.

The baby has filled out nicely in the last few months.

3. of one's physical self, to take up the space within (clothing).

I don't fill out these jeans anymore. I must be losing weight.

find out

1. to discover; learn; ascertain.

Did you find out her name yet?

I found out that she is very wealthy.

We should call and find out if the restaurant is still open.

They finally found out where he hid the money.

I don't know where to park downtown these days, so I'll have to find out.

2. to discover or confirm (a misdeed, secret, character flaw, crime, or the like).

Somehow his crime was never found out.

grow up

to move from childhood to adulthood.

I had no idea these things existed when I was growing up.

My daughter wants to be an astronomer when she grows up.

hold on

1. to wait or stop.

Tell them to hold on. I'm not ready yet.

Hold on! Don't eat that! It's moldy.

2. to hold an object for the support or safety of your body or because you do not want to lose it.

She held on to the strap as she stood in the subway car.

The child held on tight to her teddy bear.

Hold on now, or you'll fall!

3. to retain (something or someone) in one's employ, possession, or social relationship.

With the other companies offering higher wages, it's hard to hold on to workers.

She couldn't hold on to her money because she was too fond of gambling.

He had a few girlfriends, but he was never able to hold on to them.

4. to remain on the telephone line.

Could you hold on a moment while I check that information for you?

5. to keep oneself going; survive; endure.

Hold on, dad! The ambulance is here now; you're going to be all right!

With so little food or fuel, I don't know how we held on through that winter.

keep up

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1. to continue with (some activity).
I started playing the clarinet when I was ten, and I kept it up until I was eighteen.
2. to proceed at the same rate as someone or something else (often followed by "with").
You're going too fast. I can't keep up with you.
The class was very advanced and he was unable to keep up.
3. to maintain (something) at a high or desired level.
I hope they can keep up this wonderful effort.
You need to eat more to keep up your strength.
We've kept up our friendship for twenty years now.
You're doing a great job. Keep it up!
4. to stop or hinder someone from going to bed or to sleep.
Don't keep your brother up too late with your game. He needs his sleep.
That dog's barking kept me up till two in the morning.
5. to continue to make (payments) regularly.
They took the car away because he couldn't keep up the payments.
6. to stay informed (often followed by "with").
There is so much happening, it's hard to keep up with all the news.
I don't read the newspaper every day, but I do try to keep up.
7. to maintain contact with someone.
I haven't kept up with Brian. Do you know what he's doing these days?

leave out

- to not put in or not include (something); omit.
- She made a cake, but she left out the sugar by mistake.*
My doctor says I should eat less salt, so I try to leave it out when I cook
You left out a period at the end of the sentence.

line up

1. to form a line, one person after the other.
People were already lining up in front of the theater to buy tickets.
2. to put (things or people) into a line.
The little girl examined each of the the toy train cars and then she lined them up.
The captain lined up his soldiers.
3. to make (two or more things) even with each other along a certain line, or make (one thing) even with another thing.
The cereal boxes were a little out of place, so the store manager lined them up straight.
You need to line up this table with that one.
4. to be even with each other or with other things; be located along the same line.
These edges don't line up. They need to be even with each other.

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look for

1. to attempt to find (something or someone); seek.
I found a set of keys, but they were not the ones I was looking for.
They looked for the child everywhere and finally found where he was hiding.
2. to expect.
If you decide to go ahead with this crazy plan, don't look for any help from me.

make up

1. to constitute or compose.
Fifty states make up the United States of America.
The U.S. Senate is made up of one hundred senators, two from each of the states.
2. to prepare or put together.
I'll make up a lunch bag you can take with you.
You should make up a list of everything you'll need to bring.
3. to invent (a story, excuse, or the like) using one's mind.
He made up an excuse to stay home from work.
The teacher made up an example to help the students understand.
4. to pay back or compensate.
When you've hurt someone's feelings to that extent, it's difficult to make up for it.
5. to do at a later time in order to compensate for something not done earlier.
I asked the instructor if I could make up the exam I missed because of being sick.
He missed some piano lessons, so his teacher is having him make them up.
6. to compensate for something lost.
I couldn't work the full forty hours last week, so I'm making up the time this week by working forty-five.
7. to reconcile after a quarrel.
The couple had a bitter argument, but the two made up the next day.

pick up

1. to take up (something) using one's hand or hands.
He dropped his wallet and I picked it up for him.
She picks up the baby every time he cries.
2. to take into one's vehicle passengers or items to be transported.
The movie starts at seven-thirty, so I'll pick you up at your place at seven.
The van driver picked up the freight at the airport.
3. to buy (something) in a quick or casual manner.
If you're going to the store, could you pick up a loaf of bread?
I need to stop at the store to pick up a few things before we get on the road.
4. to make (a living space) neat by putting objects in order.
You'd better pick up the living room before the guests arrive.

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5. to acquire or learn (something).
He picked up a lot of Spanish when he was traveling in South America.
She quickly picked up an understanding of how the computer works.
6. to begin again after an interruption.
Let's pick up where we ended last time.
7. to accelerate after a decline.
With the return of summer, business has been picking up.
8. to increase (the speed, pace, or tempo of something).
If we're going to finish this by five, we need to pick up the pace.
The tempo is slow through this part, then we pick it up.

put on

1. to put (clothes or accessories) on one's body.
He put on his suit and tie and went to work.
Put these shoes on and see if they fit.
She was having trouble with her necklace, so he helped her put it on.
2. to add (weight) to one's body.
I've put on five pounds over the last few months.
Yes, I've gained weight; I put it on over the holidays.
3. to cause (something mechanical) to operate.
I overslept because I forgot to put on my alarm.
She put on the kettle for tea.
4. to give a telephone over to (another person) so that that person may speak with the person on the other end of the line.
Did you want to talk to your grandmother? I'll put her on now.
5. to start the playing of (something recorded, such as music or video).
The deejay put on some upbeat music.
This CD is really good; why don't you put this on?
She put on her exercise video and worked out for half an hour.
6. to start the cooking of (something).
I forgot to put on the potatoes, so we'll just have to start without them.
7. to perform (a show).
The children at the school put on play for their parents.
8. to temporarily adopt (a certain facial expression, manner, or accent in one's speech).
He's very funny when he tries to put on a Scottish accent.
The child really wasn't hurt, but she put on a tearful expression.
I wasn't happy about their decision, but I tried to put on a smile for them.
9. to engage in (behavior that is deceptive or purely pretense).
He's not really upset; he's just putting on an act.
We never normally eat like this; my parents are just putting on a show for the guests.
10. (informal) to deceive or mislead (someone), especially as part of a joke.
He's not really going to snitch on you to your parents; he's just putting you on.

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run out

1. to use something to the point where there is nothing left even though it is still needed or desired (often followed by "of").
We're running out of milk, so we need to go to the store.
I thought I had enough gas to get me there, but I ran out on the highway.
He ran out of paper and had to borrow some from his roommate.
The kids ran out of money at the amusement park and couldn't go on any more rides.
2. to disappear because of use; to become used up or spent.
When the olive oil ran out, we used butter instead.
Time is running out and we need to finish this by tonight.
3. to stop being valid; expire.
They're going to move to another place when their lease runs out next month.
4. to force (someone) out of an area; expel.
The gangsters ran him out of town.

set up

1. to make (something) ready for use or operation by assembling or arranging the parts.
She set up the game board for chess, but her friend didn't feel like playing.
I watched them set up a new display in the store window.
He set up an art studio in his garage.
2. to establish; to do what needs to be done in order to begin (something).
It took some months to set up the business, but she's finally making some money now.
I'll call everyone and set up a meeting for Friday.
3. to put someone in a position to receive blame.
He was not responsible for the crime; his so-called friends had set him up.
4. to provide the money for (someone) to enter into business or into a business venture.
His wealthy father set him up in a business of his own.
He was lucky to be set up in business; we had to struggle very hard to raise money to get started.
5. to place (someone) in power.
The former premier set up his brother as the new head of government after he himself was forced to resign.
6. to arrange for (two people) to meet so that they might become romantically involved, or to arrange for (one person) to meet another for the same purpose.
She thought her roommate would like her brother, so she set them up.
My mother is always trying to set me up with the sons of her friends.

show up

1. (informal) to appear in a place.

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*We waited, but he never showed up.
Everyone was surprised that his ex-wife showed up at the wedding.
Why does her name still show up on the list if she isn't part of the group anymore?*

2. to appear visible.

The coin is so old that the date doesn't show up anymore.

stand for

1. to symbolize or represent.

"ATM" stands for "Automated Teller Machine."

In the equation, the letters stand for numbers.

As a politician, he wanted his name to stand for lasting reform.

2. to tolerate.

How can we continue to stand for such injustice?

She won't stand for that kind of disruptive behavior in her classroom.

turn over

1. to move so that the part that previously faced down is now facing up.

The car went off the road, hit something, and turned over.

2. to move (something) so that the part that was previously facing down is now facing up.

You should turn over the burgers now.

I noticed that the cushion had a stain, so I turned it over to hide it.

3. to move one's body so that one is facing in the opposite direction from before, or in the opposite direction from what is usual.

She turned over so that she could get tan on her other side.

The poor turtle had turned over, so I put it back onto its feet.

4. to transfer (someone or something) to another person or organization.

The officer who captured the suspect turned him over to the other officers.

The local police turned over the case to the county sheriff's office.

5. (informal) to rob (a place).

The gang intended to turn over the cocktail lounge that night.

write down

- to write (something) in order to make a record of it or study it at a later time.

I'd better write down that number before I forget it.

Many students try to write down nearly everything the professor says.