

Separable or inseparable phrasal verbs

CEFR B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

A noun object can often move, but a pronoun cannot. It must sit between the verb and the particle in a separable phrasal verb.

The rule

The pronoun test

- Replace the object with it, them, him or her and try both positions.
- If the pronoun can go between the verb and the particle, the verb is separable: pick it up works.
- If the pronoun cannot go between, the verb is inseparable: look after it works only after the particle.
- With a noun object, many separable verbs allow both orders: turn off the light and turn the light off.

Common separable verbs

- Everyday actions: turn on, turn off, put on, take off, pick up, write down, throw away.
- Work and study: fill in, look up, hand in, cross out, sort out, figure out.
- With a pronoun, the object always goes in the middle: turn it on, fill it in, figure it out.
- A long noun object usually follows the particle: "She threw away all the old newspapers."

Common inseparable verbs

- Care and search: look after, look for, wait for (a verb plus preposition group).
- Relations and luck: get on with, run into, come across, break into.
- The object always follows the whole phrasal verb: look after the children, run into an old friend.
- You cannot say look the children after or run an old friend into.

Three-word phrasal verbs

- Some verbs carry two particles: put up with, look forward to, get on with, come up with, get away with.
- The object always follows all the particles: put up with the noise, look forward to the weekend.
- These verbs are always inseparable, and the pronoun goes at the end: put up with it.
- Look forward to takes a noun or a gerund: look forward to the trip, look forward to meeting you.

How to record a new phrasal verb

- Write the verb with two example sentences: one full noun, one pronoun.
- Mark the type in your notes: separable, inseparable or no object needed.
- Learn the meaning group with it, so the verb has an anchor.
- When you are unsure, use a full noun object after the particle. That order is safe with most phrasal verbs.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. Please turn ___ the radio.

2. Please turn ___ off.

3. She ___ her little brother every afternoon.

4. I ___ an old friend at the market.

5. Can you help me ___ this form?

6. Can you help me fill ___ ?

7. I cannot ___ this noise any longer.

8. We are ___ the holiday.

9. I ___ the word in the dictionary.

10. Do not ___ ; it may be useful later.

11. She ___ her coat and left.

12. She ___ and left.

13. He ___ a rare bird in the forest.

14. He came ___ in the forest.

15. I need to ___ what happened.

16. I need to figure ___ quickly.

17. She ___ her assignment late.

18. She handed ___ on Friday.

19. We ___ our neighbours very well.

20. Nobody can ___ cheating in the exam.

Answer key

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1. **on** — Turn on is a separable phrasal verb, and the particle on follows the verb in this sentence.
2. **it** — The pronoun it must sit between the verb and the particle in a separable phrasal verb.
3. **looks after** — Look after is inseparable, so the object follows the whole phrasal verb.
4. **ran into** — Run into is an inseparable phrasal verb and means meet by chance.
5. **fill in** — Fill in is separable; with the noun this form, the particle follows the verb.
6. **it in** — The pronoun goes between the verb and the particle: fill it in.
7. **put up with** — Put up with is a three-word phrasal verb, so the particles stay together before the object.
8. **looking forward to** — Look forward to is inseparable and keeps its fixed word order.
9. **looked up** — Look up is separable, and a noun object can follow the particle.
10. **throw it away** — Throw away is separable, so the pronoun it goes between the verb and the particle.
11. **put on** — Put on is separable, and here the noun coat follows the full verb.
12. **put it on** — The pronoun goes between put and on, because put on is separable.
13. **came across** — Come across is inseparable, so the object follows the particle.
14. **across it** — In an inseparable phrasal verb, the pronoun follows the particle: came across it.
15. **figure out** — Figure out is separable, and the clause what happened follows the particle.
16. **it out** — The pronoun goes between the verb and the particle: figure it out.
17. **handed in** — Hand in is separable, and the noun assignment follows the full verb.
18. **it in** — The pronoun goes between hand and in, following the separable rule.
19. **get on with** — Get on with is a three-word phrasal verb with fixed particle order.
20. **get away with** — Get away with keeps its three particles together before the gerund cheating.