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**BOOST YOUR ENGLISH:  
PHRASAL VERBS**

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## **Preface**

Phrasal verbs are verbs that form a combination (a phrase) with postpositions or prepositions and nouns. Such structures are usually idiomatic in meaning, and should be memorized as such.

For the purpose of study, phrasal verbs can be divided into two basic structures:

1. Verbs with prepositions and nouns;
2. Verbs with postpositions.

English prepositions and postpositions are the same in form but different in function. Some prepositions are not used as postpositions, e.g.: at, for, from, into, onto, of, with. Some postpositions are not used as prepositions, e.g.: ahead, apart, aside, away, back, forward. But some of them can function as prepositions or postpositions depending on the structure in which they are used, e.g.: about, across, along, around, behind, by, down, in, off, on, out, over, through, under, up. It is necessary to understand the difference between them.

A preposition is used with a noun (or its substitute), stands before it, and is not stressed. A preposition is part of a prepositional noun phrase, which means that a preposition always needs a noun. A postposition is used with a verb, stands after it, usually forms an idiom with this verb (it changes the meaning of the verb), and is always stressed. A postposition is part of the predicate, which means that a postposition always needs a verb. Some linguists call them adverbs, adverbial particles or preposition-adverbs, because postpositions are adverbial in character. Compare these sentences:

*How did he get in? - How did he get in the house / into the house?*

In the first sentence, the postposition “in” is part of the phrasal verb “get in”, is stressed, and in this sentence receives the falling intonation. In the second sentence, the preposition “in” or “into” belongs to the noun “the house” and is not stressed.

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## TO BE

**to be about** – to be nearby, to be in the vicinity: *I have just seen him. He must be somewhere about.*

**to be above** – to rise superior: *You should have been above underhand tricks.*

**to be after** – to try to get or do sth: *I can never make him out. I wonder what he is after. Interpol have been after him for years. Bob will be so pleased that I managed to find this book. He's been after it for years.*

**to be against** – not to be in favour of sth/ to think that sth is wrong (**to be all for sth**: strongly support sth): *I'm totally against fox-hunting. I think it should be banned. I'm all for the government privatizing the railways.*

**to be at** – to be busy with, to be doing sth: *What are you at?*

**to be away** – to be gone, to be out of town: *You'll have to call again. The director is away on business.*

**to be back** – to (have) return(ed): *I have to go out now, but I'll be back soon.*

**to be behind** – a) to be in arrears: *I am behind in the rent for my flat.*

b) to be late, not to keep up with: *It's five o'clock and the train is leaving in a quarter of an hour. I am afraid we are behind. He is behind the group.*

**to be down** – to decrease in amount, number, price, in density, etc (**to be/ look/ feel down**: to be/ look/ feel depressed): *Don't worry, the temperature is down now, he is getting over it. There were fluctuations in the prices but on the whole they are down. Jim looks really down.*

**to be down and out** – to be in a state of poverty, not to have what is necessary for life: *He is down and out now.*

**to be for** – to be in favour of sth: *I am all for what you say.*

**to be in** – to be at home, at the office, on the premises

**to be in for** – to expect sth (**sb is in for it**: sb is going to be in trouble): *We are in for a cold winter. If he thinks getting into university is going to be easy, then he's in for a big surprise. "Now I'm in for it," he thought. He'd forgotten to get her the library books.*

**to be into** – to like, to be very interested in and enthusiastic about sth (**I'm not into sth**: I don't particularly like sth): *My son is into thrash metal at the moment. I'm not really into classical music.*

**to be off** – a) to go away: *I must be off. I'm off to Rome on Saturday.*

b) to be free from work: *I am off for the afternoon today.*

c) to be cancelled, finished: *The meeting is off.*

d) to be no longer on: *The electricity was off yesterday.*

e) to go bad: *Don't use milk. It is/ smells off.*

**to be on** – a) to be functioning, to be switched on: *The light has been on since 7.*

b) to be happening, to take place: *What's on? The exhibition will be on next week.*

c) to be shown (of films, plays): *There is a good film on at our club.*

d) **not on**: not to be acceptable or reasonable: *She expects me to work for four more hours a week without any extra pay. It's not on, is it?*

**to be on about sth** – to talk about sth, often for a long time or in a boring/ annoying way. (**what are you on about?** is used in response to an accusation introducing your denial; alternatively, if the word *are* is stressed in the question, it shows that you do not understand what sb is talking about?): *What are you on about?*

**to be out** – a) become known to be revealed: *It's no use trying to keep it back. The news will be out anyway.*

b) (of) to be away; not to be at home, at the office: *He is out at the moment. He is out of Kyiv today.*

c) (of) to be short of sth, to lack sth: *The money is out. I am out of cigarettes.*

**to be out and about** – to be well: *I hope she will be out and about before long.*

**to be over** – to have finished: *I can't believe our holiday is over already.*

**to be up** – a) to be out of bed: *I am always up at seven o'clock.*

b) to rise, to be in a higher place, position: *The prices are up now. He is up in the world now.*

c) to expire (of time, holiday, agreement): *The time is up..*

d) to be going on: *I'm afraid I can't come today. What's up?*

**to be up against sb** – to be facing a competitor (in a sports match, an election or for a business deal): *The government will be up against some strong competition in the next election.*

**to be up to** – a) to play pranks: *What are the children up to?*

b) to be one's responsibility or duty; to rest with sb: *It's up to parents to bring up their children properly. I believe. It's up to them to decide that.*

**to be with** – to be together with sb, to join sb: *I'll be with you in all your misfortunes.*

## **Word Combinations and Idioms**

• **be that as it may** – (formal) used to say that even though you accept that sth is true, it does not change a situation: *'He was only joking.'* *Be that as it may, silly remarks like that can do a lot of harm.'*

• **be yourself** – to behave in a natural way, rather than trying to pretend to be different: *Don't try too hard - just be yourself.*

• **not be yourself** – to be behaving in a way that is unusual for you, especially because you are ill or upset: *Sorry - I'm not myself this morning.*

• **the be-all and end-all** – the most important part of a situation or of someone's life: *For Jim, making money was the be-all and end-all of his job.*

• **to be all ears** – to listen with interest

• **to be (feel) at home**: *The boy was not (didn't feel) quite at home in such a splendid house.*

• **to be (feel) at home in (a subject)**: *It's difficult to be (feel) at home in a foreign language.*

• **to be at a loss** – to be in a difficult situation: *He's is never at a loss for an appropriate word (in speaking he never needs to hesitate and wait for the appropriate word to come into his head)*

• **to be at one's wit's (wits') end** – not to know what to do, to be embarrassed: *I didn't know what to do, I was therefore at my wits' end.*

• **to be down in the mouth** – to be in a bad mood: *He's down in the mouth because he has failed in the exam.*

• **to be in high (fine) feather** – to be in good health, mood

• **to be in a mess**: *I want your advice. I don't say I'll take it, but it may suggest sth to me. You see, I'm in a mess.*

• **to be on the verge of (doing sth)** – to be going to do sth