

Phrasal Verbs: Using Your Dictionary

A phrasal verb is a combination of two or three words with a single meaning. One of the words is a common verb and the other word is a preposition or one of the common adverbs such as *up*, *down*, and *across*. Let's call the preposition or adverb a "particle." The problem with phrasal verbs is that some of them permit a noun or pronoun between the verb and the particle, and some of them don't. The rules for this are extremely complex, so it's much easier to just look up a phrasal verb in the dictionary.

Every time you learn a new phrasal, learn it the same way that you learn a single word. Look it up in the dictionary in order to find out what kind of phrasal it is. (You can find a link to a online phrasal dictionaries at E>G, under "Vocabulary.")

Let's see what we can find in the dictionaries for **SET UP**, first in *Collins Cobuild* and then in *Longman*.

COLLINS COBUILD

► set up

- 1 If you **set something up**, you create or arrange it. PHRASAL VERB
 □ *The two sides agreed to set up a commission to investigate claims. ...an organization which sets up meetings about issues of interest to women... Tell us when and why you started your business and how you went about setting it up.* ♦ **setting up** The British government announced the setting up of a special fund. V P n (not pron)
 2 If you **set up** a temporary structure, you place it or build it somewhere. □ *They took to the streets, setting up roadblocks of burning tyres... 200 peace activists are planning to set up a peace camp at the border.* PHRASAL VERB = erect V P n (not pron)
 3 If you **set up** a device or piece of machinery, you do the things that are necessary for it to be able to start working. □ *Setting up the camera can be tricky... I set up the computer so that they could work from home.* PHRASAL VERB V P n (not pron) Also V n P
 4 If you **set up** somewhere or **set yourself up** somewhere, you establish yourself in a new business or new area. □ *...the mayor's scheme offers incentives to firms setting up in lower Manhattan... He worked as a dance instructor in London before setting himself up in Bucharest... Grandfather set them up in a liquor business.* PHRASAL VERB V P prep/adv V pron-refl P prep/adv V n P prep/adv
 5 If you **set up** home or **set up** shop, you buy a house or business of your own and start living or working there. □ *They married, and set up home in Ramsgate. ...20 businessmen hoping to set up shop in Japan.* PHRASAL VERB V P n
 6 If something **sets up** something such as a process, it creates it or causes it to begin. □ *The secondary current sets up a magnetic field inside the tube... This can help you satisfy the craving without setting up problems later on.* PHRASAL VERB V P n (not pron) Also V n P
 7 If something **sets you up** for something, it puts you in a good condition or position to deal with it, for example by making you feel healthy and energetic. □ *I have my cornflakes and smell the fresh air and the grass and it sets me up for the day... The win sets us up perfectly for the match in Belgium.* PHRASAL VERB V n P
 8 If you **are set up** by someone, they make it seem that you have done something wrong when you have not. [INFORMAL] □ *He claimed yesterday that he had been set up after drugs were discovered at his home... Maybe Angelo tried to set us up.* PHRASAL VERB = frame be V-ed P V n P Also V P n (not pron)
 □ → See also set-up

In sense #1, we see "V P n (not pronoun)" in the margin, and below that is "V n P." It's easy to guess that "V" means verb. If you invest some time in studying how to use your dictionary (by referring to the introduction when you can't figure out the dictionary's abbreviations and symbols), you will see (as in the clippings from the introduction, on the next page) that "**P**: stands for **particle**," and "**n (not pronoun)**: stands for a **noun group** of some kind, but **not a personal pronoun**." The margin note also shows the order of *set up*'s elements: it is verb first, particle second, and then non-personal pronoun. Carefully study the dictionary's sample ("*The two sides...*").

Also in sense #1, in the margin, we see "V n P." If we look up "n" in the dictionary's introduction, we see that "**n**: stands for **noun** or **noun group**...including a pronoun." That tells us that it's possible to separate this phrasal with a pronoun: verb, then pronoun, then particle. The sample shows us "*setting it up*."

n: stands for **noun** or **noun group**. If the **n** element occurs in a pattern with something that is part of a noun group, such as an adjective or another noun, it represents a noun. If the **n** element occurs in a pattern with something that is not part of a noun group, such as a verb or preposition, it represents a noun group. The noun group can be of any kind, including a pronoun.

e.g. **n N:** collector 2 ... *He earned his living as a tax collector.*

V for n: advertise 2 ... *We advertised for staff in a local newspaper.*

n (not pron): stands for a **noun group** of some kind, but **not a personal pronoun**. It is used in phrasal verb patterns where the particle is an adverb.

e.g. **V P n (not pron):** burn down ... *Anarchists burnt down a restaurant.*

P: stands for **particle**. It is used in phrasal verb patterns to represent the particle. Particles may be either adverbs or prepositions.

e.g. **V P n:** look after 1 ... *I love looking after the children.*

LONGMAN

This dictionary handles phrasals in a different way. Look at the arrow in sense #1; it points both ways. We can easily imagine that this sense of *set up* is separable, so a pronoun can come before or after the particle:

to start doing something eagerly and with determination: *If we all set to, we'll finish the job in half an hour.*

set up *phr v*

1 COMPANY/ORGANIZATION ETC to start a company, organization, committee etc; **establish:** **set sth** ⇔ **up** *They want to set up their own import-export business. | new regulations for setting up political parties | set (yourself) up (as sth) (=start your own business) John decided to set up as a graphic designer. | set up shop/set up in business (=begin operating a business) Now Betterware plans to set up shop elsewhere in Europe.*

2 ARRANGE/ORGANIZE **set sth** ⇔ **up** to make the arrangements that are necessary for something to happen: *I'll set up an appointment for you. | There was*

Let's see how *Longman* shows that a phrasal *cannot* be separated:

case might go against him. | The vote went against the government.

go ahead *phr v*

1 to start to do something, especially after planning it or asking permission to do it: [+with] *They've decided to go ahead with plans to build 50 new houses on the site. | go ahead and do sth I went ahead and arranged the trip anyway.*

2 if an event or process goes ahead, it happens: *A judge has ruled that the music festival can go ahead.*

3 spoken used to give someone permission to do something, or let them speak before you: *'Do you mind if I open the window?' 'No, go ahead.'* | *If you want to leave, go right ahead.*

4 also **go on ahead** to go somewhere before the other people in your group: *You go ahead and we'll catch you up later. | [+of] He stood back to let Sue go ahead of him.*

5 to start to be winning a game or competition: *Dulwich went ahead after 22 minutes. → GO-AHEAD¹*

go along *phr v*

1 if you do something as you go along, you do it

To the right of **go ahead** we see "*phr v.*" In sense 1, unlike in the entry for *set up*, we don't see any arrows at all. We can guess what *Longman* is telling us by omitting the arrow: There is only one way that we can use this phrasal verb, so we can't put a noun before the particle. We couldn't say, for example, "Go plans ahead with." (Also note that we use *with* when we have an object.)

OTHER DICTIONARIES

Every learner's dictionary has its own way of presenting grammar. When you begin using a dictionary invest time in learning that dictionary's peculiar methods. That investment will pay off big in the long run!

A USEFUL TIP

If you're writing something and you want to use a certain phrasal verb but don't know its grammar, and if you can't find it in the dictionary — put the object after the particle, and don't replace the object with a pronoun. Why? The main difference among different kinds of phrasal verbs is whether or not the object — or its pronoun — can be placed in between the verb and the particle.