

## Two- and three-word verbs: word order

A

The meaning of some verbs commonly used with a particular *preposition* or *adverb* (or *particle*) is often different from the meaning of their separate parts. We can call these *two-word verbs*:

- I'll quickly **go over** the main points of the report again. (= summarise)
- She had to **let her dress out** because she'd put on weight. (= make it larger)

Other *three-word verbs* are commonly used with an *adverb* + *preposition*.

- Do you think he's really likely to **go through with** his threat? (= do it)
- The team has failed to **live up to** earlier expectations. (= achieve what was expected)

These two- and three-word verbs are sometimes also called *phrasal verbs*.

B

Many two-word verbs are usually *intransitive*:

- He **grew up** on a farm.
- When she **came to** she found herself in hospital.

**Also: crop up, fall through, get up, move off, shop around, splash out**

However, some two-word verbs can be used transitively or intransitively with the same meaning:

- I'll **call back** later.
- I'll **call you back** when I get home.

**Also: answer back, clear away, cover up, help out, take over, tidy up, wash up**

and other two-word verbs can be used transitively or intransitively with a different meaning:

- The engine **cut out** and the car came to a stop.
- I **cut the picture out** and kept it.

**Also: break in, hold out, look out, look up, pick up, split up, turn in, wind up**

C

With many *transitive* two-word verbs, the object can come before or after the adverb:

- I want to **try out** the local food. *or*
- I want to **try** the local food **out**.

**Also: bring about, clean up, count out, drink up, gather up, get down, leave out, make up, mess up, shoot down, sort out, throw away, use up**

However, if the object is a pronoun it must come between the verb and the adverb:

- I won't be able to go to the party. You'll have to **count me out**. (*not ... count out me.*)

and we prefer to put the object after the adverb when the object is long. Compare:

- She had to **clean the kitchen up**. (*or ... clean up the kitchen.*) *and*
- She had to **clean up the mess in the kitchen**. (*rather than ... clean the mess in the kitchen up.*)

D

With some transitive two-word verbs, the object comes between the verb and the adverb:

- I just couldn't **tell the twins apart**. (*not ... tell apart the twins*)

**Also: catch out, hear out, order about, pull to, push to, shut up (= to silence), stand up**

E

With some transitive two-word verbs, the object follows the preposition:

- She **takes after** her mother.
- I **flicked through** a magazine while I was waiting.

**Also: account for, act on, approve of, call on, check into, look after, provide for, result from, run into, take against**

F

With most three-word verbs, the object goes after the preposition:

- He really **looks up to** his older brother.

However, a few three-word verbs usually have the object immediately after the verb. A second noun or noun phrase goes after the preposition:

- She tried to **talk me out of** the plan.

**Also: come in for, come up against, cut back on, look down on, put up with**

**Also: do out of, help on with, let in on, put down as, put up to, take up on**



## Exercises

94.1 If possible or necessary, add an appropriate noun or pronoun in the space. **B**

- The same problem kept cropping ..... up, even though I thought I'd fixed it.
- I'm not sure how you spell it. I'll look ..... up in the dictionary.
- I'm busy at the moment, but I can help ..... out this evening.
- If you tidy ..... up, I'll do the cleaning.
- The deal fell ..... through because we couldn't agree a price.

94.2 Show where the word or phrase in brackets should go in each sentence with a  $\wedge$ . If it is possible to put it in more than one place, mark these two possibilities. **C**

- The house is untidy, but I haven't got time to sort  $\wedge$  out now. (*it*)
- We've introduced a training scheme to bring about. (*some improvement*)
- The strike by airline pilots messed up. (*the holiday I'd spent months planning*)
- I decided to try out for a couple of months. (*the diet*)
- I used up to buy the car. (*all my savings*)
- A: I must get my shoes repaired again.  
B: But they're so old – why don't you just throw away? (*them*)

94.3 Complete each sentence using a two-word verb from (i) and a noun phrase from (ii). If two word orders are possible, give both. **C & D**

(i)

get down    leave out    make up  
~~push to~~    hear out    shut up

(ii)

the general ideas    me    my mind  
her name    the thing    ~~the window~~

- It's freezing in here. Can you push the window to?
- When she filled the form in she ....., so they sent it back to her.
- The alarm started when I opened the car door, and now I can't .....
- There were so many desserts on the menu, I couldn't .....
- I ....., but the lecturer spoke so quickly I couldn't follow the details.
- I know you suspect me of cheating, but you've got to give me a chance to explain myself. At least ..... before making up your mind.

94.4 If necessary, correct the word order or give a more likely word order in these sentences. If they are already correct, write  $\checkmark$ . **D, E & F**

- He was always ordering about everyone, getting them to do his work for him.
- It is assumed that parents will provide their children for until they are 18.
- She wouldn't let in me on the secret, however hard I tried to persuade her.
- The snow was so heavy that the police called motorists on to avoid unnecessary journeys.
- I checked into the hotel at about four.
- I took up Emre on his offer and stayed in his flat while I was in Ankara.
- The government has come in for a lot of criticism over its decision to increase spending on defence.
- My parents didn't approve of our engagement.
- I had always looked Mr Gao up to, so I was shocked to discover what he had done.