**Multi-Word Verbs**

These are used frequently by native English speakers, and can cause problems for students as they seem to defy any logical analysis and both the meaning and grammatical usage have to be learnt by rote.

Their usage however helps the fluidity of expression and it is worth the effort to try to master some.

A multi-word verb is a combination of a verb plus an adverb or preposition  which creates a meaning different from the original verb, as opposed to a free combination of the words.

Example:  
I ran into my teacher at the movies last night. ***run + into = meet***  
He ran away when he was 15. ***run + away = leave home***

Counter-example (free combinations):

He ran out of the house. ***The*** ***verb and adverb retain their original meaning.***

**Phrasal verbs**

A phrasal verb is a verb and a spatial adverb

2. Some phrasal verbs are intransitive. An intransitive verb cannot be followed by an object.

Example:  
He suddenly showed up. ***"show up" cannot take an object***

These are usually used in informal speech. The prepositions or adverbs act as place adjuncts and cannot be separated from the verb (“He *showed* suddenly *up”* is wrong) nor is inversion (“He up showed”). Note that in free combinations this is allowed (“He ran straight out of the house” or “Out of the house he ran”).

3. Some phrasal verbs are transitive. A transitive verb can be followed by an object.

Example:  
I made up the story. ***"story" is the object of "make up"***

There are some transitive phrasal verbs that appear to also be intransitive (“The bomb *blew up*” ***exploded*** and “the bomb *blew up* the whole city” ***destroyed***), but the meaning of the phrasal verb changes, even if there is a semantic similarity in the two different roles of bomb, as an Agent in the first and Affected (cause-effect) in the second.

4. In theory transitive **phrasal verbs are separable**. The object can also be placed between the verb and the preposition. There are a few verbs that do not allow this however.

Example:  
I looked the number up in the phone book.  
I looked up the number in the phone book.

5. WARNING! Although many phrasal verbs can take an object in both places, you must put the object between the verb and the preposition if the object is a pronoun.

Example:  
I looked the number up in the phone book.  
I looked up the number in the phone book.  
I looked it up in the phone book. ***correct***  
I looked up ~~it~~in the phone book. ***incorrect***

Also, for clarity, if the object is long it should be placed at the end.

Example:

They should put off until the next meeting the decision of buying a new printer for the office.

They should put the decision of buying a new printer for the office off until the next meeting ***incorrect***

**Prepositional verbs**

A prepositional verb is a verb and a preposition. The verb has a literal use but has a fixed association with the preposition. **The preposition always precedes the complement**, unless stranded as in a question. (Stranding – Whom did you give it to? – No stranding - To whom did you give it?)

Example:

He broke with his girlfriend

Which girl did he break with?

I have lost touch with most of my school friends.

Example:  
I ran into an old friend yesterday.  
They are looking into the problem.

**The differences between phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs**

A phrasal verb can be separated.

**Phrasal verb**

He broke up the party.

He broke the party up.

He broke it up.

**Prepositional verbs**

He broke with his girlfriend.

He broke his girlfriend with. ***incorrect***

He broke with her.

In a phrasal verb the particle cannot precede a relative pronoun or an interrogative word at the beginning of a clause, or a wh- question.

**Phrasal verb**

Examples:

Up what did he break? ***incorrect***

The party up which he broke. ***incorrect***

He broke completely up the party. ***incorrect***

**Prepositional verbs**

Example:

With whom did he break?

The girl with whom he broke up.

He broke completely with his girlfriend.

Interestingly, sometimes a combination of verb plus particle can be either a prepositional or a phrasal verb, and in these cases, one of the most trustworthy criteria is reducing the noun phrases to pronouns so their collocation determines the category of the verb.

**Phrasal verb**

He turned on his supporters. (‘he excited them’)

He turned them on.

**Prepositional verbs**

He turned on his supporters. (‘he attacked them’)

He turned on them.

**Phrasal-prepositional verbs**

This type of verbs consists of a lexical verb followed by two particles, the first adverbial and the second prepositional. As happens with intransitive phrasal verbs, these combinations are largely restricted to informal English and as occurs with other multi-word verbs, it is possible to paraphrase their meaning in one word (1), although this criterion to distinguish them is not always reliable (2).

Example

(1) I can’t put up with liars. (‘tolerate’)

(2) They look down on their neighbours. (‘regard with a feeling of superiority’)

Some phrasal-prepositional verbs require a direct object as a complement, and in this case, it is placed before the two particles (3). If a sentence with a verb of this type only has a prepositional object, the irregular passive (the prepositional object becomes subject) is possible (5), and the regular passive occurs only when both prepositional and direct objects are appear in the sentence (4).

Example

(3) Some people put success down to sheer luck.

(4) Success is put down to sheer luck.

(5) The death penalty has been recently done away with.