



Handy Phrasal Verbs in the US or UK



1

to fill in vs. to fill out

This is one of the first verb phrases you'll hear if you're applying for visas or jobs. Both verb phrases mean to complete by writing a response, but the prepositions "in" and "out" are different.

In the United Kingdom, you fill in paperwork.

"When you're ready, please fill in the form."

In the United States, you fill out paperwork.

"Please fill out the document so it can be submitted to our department."

You can sometimes use "fill in" in the US, but only in certain cases such as "fill in the blank," or "fill in the bubble" (on a questionnaire). In general, it's best to go with "fill out" for an American audience.

2

to chase up vs. to track down or to scare up

These phrasal verbs both mean to look for something or someone, usually with some extra effort.

In the UK, you could "chase up" an item or a colleague.

"If we want to make biscuits, we should chase up some butter and sugar."

"Could you chase up Jackie for us? She's on duty next."

In the US, you could "track down" an object or a friend.

"Since her birthday is tomorrow, we should track down a cake."

"Let me go track down Jason, I think he knows the answer to that question."

In the US, you can also sometimes scare up something, but this phrasal verb is never used with people and implies that it will take more effort or be less likely to succeed.

"We don't have much in the kitchen, but I can probably scare up something for dinner."

"I took that class last semester, so I could scare up my old textbooks if you'd like them."





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3

to be rained off vs. to be rained out

Spending time outside is great...so long as the sun is shining. These verb phrases are used when an outdoor event is cancelled because of rain. Like the first example, the only difference between them is the prepositions "off" and "out."

In the UK, an event would be "rained off."

"The picnic was rained off, so we'll try to have it next weekend instead."

In the US, an event would be "rained out."

"The concert venue was outdoors, so it got rained out last night."

4

to shoot off vs. to bail out on

We've all been in this situation: you're having fun at a gathering, but your phone suddenly rings and you're rushing to the door to handle something. These phrasal verbs both mean to leave suddenly, at an earlier time than what was planned.

In the UK, you could "shoot off" if an emergency comes up.

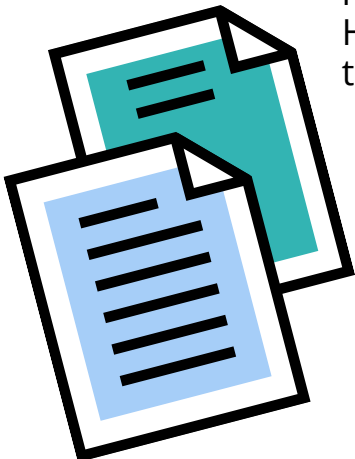
"Sorry I had to shoot off last night. My cat got sick suddenly."

In the US, you could "bail out" (usually shortened to "bail" in conversation) on an uninteresting engagement.

"If you aren't having fun at the party, why don't you just bail and go home?"

"Shoot off" compares the sudden and fast nature of the speaker's departure to something that shoots, like a bullet or rocket.

According to Meriam Webster's dictionary, "bail out" originally referred to when a pilot was ejected from a falling aircraft. Hopefully, you won't be in such a dire situation if you need to use these phrasal verbs, but either way, it will get your point across.





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5

to get on vs. to get along

These phrasal verbs both mean to have a good relationship, or to progress and prosper. For the second meaning, the verb phrase is usually used in combination with an obstacle to overcome, so that someone can “get on/along” even without something or someone. You can add an adjective after these verb phrases to specify if the relationship or progress is good or bad, but with no extra adjective, it’s assumed to be positive.

In the UK, you can “get on” well with a coworker, or “get on” despite a loss.

“I’ve been working with Laura for a week now, and we already get on really well. We have so much in common!”

“I’m going to miss you, but I’ll get on without you.”

In the US, you can “get along” well with an acquaintance, or “get along” without someone you care for.

“I really like my English tutor; we definitely get along.”

“I don’t know how we’ll get along without you here, but we’ll do our best to keep the shop up and running.”

6

to ask ‘round/around (someone) vs. to ask around (about something)

Unlike the previous examples, these phrasal verbs are almost the same but have completely different meanings.

In the UK, asking someone around (usually shortened to ‘round in conversation) means to invite them somewhere.

It’s connected to the idea of asking someone to come around to a place.

“Oh, is Tom available this week? We’d love to ask him ‘round for tea.”

In the US, asking around means inquiring many casual sources about something.

It’s connected to the literal meaning of asking questions to sources that are around the area.

“If the job is available, I can ask around and find some candidates who would apply.”





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For each sentence, select the correct meaning of the phrasal verb and the correct style of English in which it's used.

1. Let's see if we can **track down** a replacement.

- A. To look for, British
- B. To break apart, American
- C. To look for, American
- D. To create a new version, British

2. I hope you are **getting on with** your new classmates.

- A. Have a good relationship, American
- B. Have a bad relationship, British
- C. Like someone, American
- D. Have a good relationship, British

3. He promised he would stay for dinner, but it looks like he **bailed out**.

- A. Leave early or suddenly, American
- B. Go skydiving, British
- C. Quit something, American
- D. Run away, British

4. The family barbecue was **rained off**, so let's have dinner at Grandma's house instead.

- A. Cancelled due to weather issues, American
- B. Cancelled due to rain, British
- C. Cancelled due to a risk of hurricane, American
- D. To be flooded, British

5. If you want to apply for a work visa, you'll have to **fill out** the appropriate paperwork

- A. Cover in pencil, American
- B. Take a test, British
- C. Complete paperwork, American
- D. Sign your name, British

6. If Sheila is free, we could **ask her 'round** for lunch.

- A. Inquire about something, American
- B. Invite over, British
- C. Invite over, American
- D. Order food, British





1. **C**, 2. **D**, 3. **A**, 4. **B**, 5. **C**, 6. **B**

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