
50 PHRASAL VERBS FOR WORK AND BUSINESS

PHRASAL VERBS THAT ARE FREQUENTLY USED IN BUSINESS AND WORK CONTEXTS

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BACK UP

To **back up** something (or **back** something **up**) is to make a copy of information on a computer (for example, files and programmes) so that you do not lose it.

Examples of use:

- a) Remember to **back up** your files.
- b) We lost all our work because we didn't **back it up**.
- c) My computer isn't working. I'm glad I **backed up** all my files.

infinitive	back up
present simple	back up and backs up
-ing form	backing up
past simple	backed up
past participle	backed up

BAIL OUT

1. To **bail out** somebody or something (or **bail** somebody or something **out**) is to help a person or business in difficulty (especially financial difficulties).

Examples of use:

- a) The government used tax payers' money to **bail out** the big banks.
- b) News headline: Charity millions to **bail out** Scottish galleries and museums.
- c) The airline was **bailed out** by its shareholders.

2. To **bail out** of something is to escape from a difficult situation, often leaving other people in a difficult situation by doing so.

Examples of use:

- a) The printing firm have **bailed out** of their contract with us.
- b) Marko said he would help us set up the new business, but he has **bailed out**.

In UK English, bail out is also spelt bale out.

infinitive	bail out
present simple	bail out and bails out
-ing form	bailing out
past simple	bailed out
past participle	bailed out

BOOK UP

When a person, place or event is **booked up** they have no spare time or space.

Always passive.

Examples of use:

- a) The Hilton Hotel is booked up; we'll have to stay somewhere else.
- b) Mrs Ingles is booked up for February, but I can make you an appointment for March.
- c) He is always **booked up** when I try to see him.

BRING FORWARD

To **bring** something **forward** (or **bring forward** something) is to change its date or time so that it happens earlier than planned.

Examples of use:

- a) Next week's training session has been **brought forward** to Friday afternoon.
- b) Can you **bring** the meeting **forward** a week?
- c) They have **brought** my interview **forward** to tomorrow!

infinitive	bring forward
present simple	bring forward and brings forward
-ing form	bringing forward
past simple	brought forward
past participle	brought forward

BRING OFF

To **bring off** something (or **bring** something **off**) is to succeed in achieving something difficult.

Examples of use:

- a) Your new Manager has promised to increase turnover by 40%. Do you really think he can **bring it off**?
- b) They successfully **brought off** their plans to relocate the company to Malaysia.
- c) We need to increase our profits by 20% by April 2012. I'm not sure we can **bring it off**.

infinitive	bring off
present simple	bring off and brings off
-ing form	bringing off
past simple	brought off
past participle	brought off

BURN OUT

To **burn out** is to become extremely tired or ill because of too much work or stress.

Examples of use:

- a) You'll **burn out** if you keep working such long hours without a holiday.
- b) He **burned** himself **out** because he worked too hard.
- c) She had a very stressful job and was **burnt out** within a year.

infinitive	burn out
present simple	burn out and burns out
-ing form	burning out
past simple	burned out or burnt out
past participle	burned out or burnt out

CALL BACK

1. If you **call back** somebody (or **call** somebody **back**) you telephone someone who rang you earlier, or you telephone someone for a second time.

Examples of use:

- a) Mr Evans while you were out: he wants you to **call** him **back**.
- b) He forgot to book a double room, so he had to **call** the hotel **back**.

2. To **call back** is to return to a place to see somebody again.

Examples of use:

- a) I'm sorry, Mrs Bottone is in a meeting. Can you **call back** this afternoon?

infinitive	call back
present simple	call back and calls back
-ing form	calling back
past simple	called back
past participle	called back

CASH IN ON

To **cash in on** something is to benefit or make money from an event or situation, often in an unfair way.

Examples of use:

- a) BBC News headline: [Israelis cash in on Kosher wine trade](#).
- b) Some Londoners **cashed in** on the Royal Wedding by renting out their homes.
- c) Times Online headline: [Investors cash in on BP crisis](#).
- d) Airline companies are **cashing in** on the demand for cheap flights.

infinitive	cash in on
present simple	cash in on and cashes in on
-ing form	cashing in on
past simple	cashed in on
past participle	cashed in on

CASH UP

To **cash up** is to count all the money taken by a shop or business at the end of the working day. UK and Australian English.

Examples of use:

- 1. We haven't had a customer for an hour. Let's **cash up** and go home.
- 2. He trusts her to **cash up** every night.
- 3. When we **cashed up** we realised we'd had our best day ever in the shop!
- 4. I hate **cashing up** before I go home at night. It takes so long!

infinitive	cash up
present simple	cash up and cashes up
-ing form	cashing up
past simple	cashed up
past participle	cashed up

CLOSE DOWN

To **close down** something (or **close** something **down**), e.g. a business or factory, is to close it permanently so that it stops doing business.

Examples of use:

- a) The shop was losing money so we **closed it down**.
- b) The bookshop has **closed down**.
- c) He is unemployed because the factory where he worked has **closed down**.

infinitive	close down
present simple	close down and closes down
-ing form	closing down
past simple	closed down
past participle	closed down

CONTRACT OUT TO

1. To **contract out** something (or **contract** something **out**) is to arrange for another company to do some work instead of your company.

Examples of use:

- a) We are **contracting out** our web design service to a local web designer.
- b) Our government has **contracted out** hospital cleaning services to the private sector.
- c) News headline: Toronto votes to **contract out** garbage pickup.

d) They have voted to **contract** their garbage collection **out** to private companies.

2. To **contract out of** something is to decide not to be included in an official plan or scheme. British English.

Examples of use:

a) I have **contracted out of** the company pension plan.

b) You can **contract out of** the state pension scheme.

infinitive	contract out
present simple	contract out and contracts out
-ing form	contracting out
past simple	contracted out
past participle	contracted out

COPY IN SOMEBODY

To **copy in** somebody (or **copy** somebody **in**), is to send someone a copy of an email you are sending to someone else.

Examples of use:

a) Can you **copy me in** on your staff emails, please?

b) Would you like me to **copy you in** on all my official correspondence?

c) I'll send a copy of the meeting notes to Mr Schweizer, and **copy you in**.

d) Have you been **copied in** on the office memos?

infinitive	copy in
present simple	copy in and copies in
-ing form	copying in
past simple	copied in
past participle	copied in

DRAW UP

To **draw up** something (or draw something up) is to prepare a document or plan.

Examples of use:

- a) I've **drawn up** an employment contract for you to sign.
- b) The architect has **drawn up** plans for our new building.
- c) News headline: Government urged to **draw up** poverty plan.
- d) We must **draw up** a financial plan for the business for 2012.

infinitive	draw up
present simple	draw up and draws up
-ing form	drawing up
past simple	drew up
participle	drawn up

DRUM UP

To **drum up** something is to try and increase interest in something, or support for something.

Examples of use:

- a) Our marketing team is **drumming up** interest in our new product.
- b) He's trying to **drum up** more email subscribers to his new blog.
- c) We **drummed up** lots of new customers with our special offers.
- d) We need to **drum up** some new business or we will go bankrupt.
- e) Can you **drum up** support from the workers for the new working hours?
- f) News headline: [China sends its Tibetan specialist to drum up trade opportunities.](#)

infinitive	drum up
present simple	drum up and drums up
-ing form	drumming up
past simple	drummed up
past participle	drummed up

FALL THROUGH

If a business deal or an arrangement **falls through** it does not happen.

Examples of use:

- a) The sale of the company **fell through**.
- b) Plans to build a new superstore in the town have **fallen through**.
- c) The funding for our new office building has **fallen through**.
- d) I hope the deal doesn't **fall through**.
- e) News headline: BP's oil deal with Rosneft **falls through**.

infinitive	fall through
present simple	fall through and falls through
-ing form	falling through
past simple	fell through
past participle	fallen through

FILL IN FOR SOMEBODY

To **fill in** for somebody is to do their work because they are away.

Examples of use:

- a) Can you **fill in** for me while I'm on holiday?
- b) Go and have your lunch break. I'll **fill in** for you.
- c) Janet is ill. I need someone to **fill in** for her.
- d) Thank you for **filling in** for me and teaching my class.

infinitive	fill in
present simple	fill in and fills in
-ing form	filling in
past simple	filled in
past participle	filled in

GET AHEAD

To **get ahead** is to be successful in your work or your life.

Examples of use:

- a) I want to **get ahead** in my job so I work very long hours.
- b) If you want to **get ahead** in life you must work hard and never give up.
- c) She **got ahead** in her career by going to university and then working abroad for a year.

infinitive	get ahead
present simple	get ahead and gets ahead
-ing form	getting ahead
past simple	got ahead
past participle	got ahead American English is also gotten ahead

HACK INTO

To **hack into** something is to get into someone else's computer system or online account secretly, and often illegally, in order to look at their information or do something illegal.

Examples of use:

- a) Someone tried to **hack into** my father's computer yesterday.
- b) The office computer was **hacked into** and all their files have been deleted.
- c) A person who **hacks into** other people's computers is called a hacker.
- d) News headline: '[Foreign spies](#) **hack into** [Australian PM's computer](#)'.
- e) They **hacked into** the Playstation Network and stole customers' personal data.

infinitive	hack into
present simple	hack into and hacks into
-ing form	hacking into
past simple	hacked into
past participle	hacked into

HIRE OUT

If you **hire out** something (or **hire** something **out**), you allow someone to pay you money so that they can use it for a short time. British and Australian English.

Examples of use:

- a) We **hire out** virtual assistants for small and medium businesses.
- b) They **hire out** gardening machinery on a daily rate.
- c) We're starting a new business **hiring out** limousines for weddings and parties.

d) They wouldn't **hire** the DVD **out** to me because I'm not eighteen.

e) He **hires** himself **out** as a chauffeur.

infinitive	hire out
present simple	hire out and hires out
-ing form	hiring out
past simple	hired out
past participle	hired out

KEY IN

To **key in** something (or **key** something **in**) is to use a keyboard to type information into a computer or into an electronic system.

Example of use

a) Can you **key** this data **in** for me, please?

infinitive	key in
present simple	key in and keys in
-ing form	keying in
past simple	keyed in
past participle	keyed in

KNUCKLE DOWN

To **knuckle down** is to start to work or study very hard.

Examples of use:

- a) I'm not very impressed with your work. **Knuckle down**; or you will have to leave the company.
- b) We all **knuckled down** and finished the work before the deadline.
- c) Our employees should spend less time on Facebook, and **knuckle down** and get on with their work.

infinitive	knuckle down
present simple	knuckle down and knuckles down
-ing form	knuckling down
past simple	knuckled down
past participle	knuckled down

LAY OFF

If a business **lays off** workers (or **lays workers off**) it stops employing them because there is no more work for them to do.

Examples of use:

- a) He was **laid off** six weeks ago.
- b) Many companies **laid off** workers during the recession.
- c) News item: The space shuttle engine manufacturer plans to [lay off 69 workers at Kennedy Space Center in July](#).

infinitive	lay off
present simple	lay off and lays off
-ing form	laying off
past simple	laid off
past participle	laid off

MEASURE UP

To **measure up** is to be good enough; to have the necessary abilities, skills or qualities.

Examples of use:

a) Our office manager has lost her job because her work didn't **measure up**.

b) I'm starting a new job at a law firm today. I hope I **measure up** to their expectations.

infinitive	measure up
present simple	measure up and measures up
-ing form	measuring up
past simple	measured up
past participle	measured up

MEET UP

To **meet up** is to meet someone, or a group of people, in order to do something together.

Examples of use:

a) Can we meet **meet up** for lunch next week to discuss your plans for the business?

b) The accountant and I are **meeting up** at 2pm tomorrow to check the business accounts.

infinitive	meet up
present simple	meet up and meets up
-ing form	meeting up
past simple	met up
past participle	met up

NOTE DOWN

To **note down** something (or **note** something **down**) is to write it somewhere so that you don't forget it.

Examples of use:

a) Thank you for your phone number, I'll **note it down**.

b) **Note down** Mr Barker's address and phone number, please.

infinitive	note down
present simple	note down and notes down
-ing form	noting down
past simple	noted down
past participle	noted down

PENCIL IN

To **pencil in** something or somebody (or **pencil** something or somebody **in**) means to make a provisional appointment for something to happen (for example, a meeting).

Examples of use:

a) I'll **pencil** our meeting **in** for the 4th February at 10am. Let me know if you need to change it.

b) Your meeting with Ms Hu is **pencilled in** for 2.30pm.

c) **Pencil** me **in** for an appointment on Friday morning.

infinitive	pencil in
present simple	pencil in and pencils in
-ing form	UK pencilling in - US penciling in
past simple	UK pencilled in - US penciled in
past participle	UK pencilled in - US penciled in

PHONE UP

To **phone up** somebody (or **phone** somebody **up**) is to telephone them.

Examples of use:

- a) **Phone up** Mr Hargreaves and arrange a meeting, please.
- b) Max is late. Can you **phone** him **up** and ask him where he is?

To **ring up** somebody (or **ring** somebody **up**) means the same as phone up.

infinitive	phone up
present simple	phone up and phones up
-ing form	phoning up
past simple	phoned up
past participle	phoned up

PICK UP

If something **picks up**, it increases or improves after a slow start or a bad period.

Examples of use:

- a) Their new business had a slow start but it **picked up** after a few weeks.
- b) I hope business will **pick up** again soon.
- c) Politicians are confident that economic growth is **picking up**.
- d) Consumer spending is **picking up**.

infinitive	pick up
present simple	pick up and picks up
-ing form	picking up
past simple	picked up
past participle	picked up

Note: this phrasal verb has many [additional meanings](#)

PULL OUT OF SOMETHING

To **pull out of** something means to withdraw from an agreement, or stop taking part in an activity.

Examples of use:

- a) They are threatening to **pull out of** the deal if you don't sign the documents today.
- b) They agreed to buy the business, but **pulled out** at the last minute.
- c) Our investors are **pulling out**.

infinitive	pull out
present simple	pull out and pulls out
-ing	pulling out
past simple	pulled out
past participle	pulled out

REPORT BACK

To **report back** is to tell someone (usually someone in authority) some information that you have discovered, or that they have asked you to find out.

Examples of use:

- a) **Report back** to me when you have finished your research.
- b) Can you attend the meeting and **report back** to me afterwards, please?

infinitive	report back
present simple	report back and reports back
-ing form	reporting back
past simple	reported back
past participle	reported back

RIP OFF

1. To **rip off** somebody (or **rip** somebody **off**) is to make them pay too much money for something.

Informal English.

Examples of use:

- a) The travel company **ripped us off**. The cottage we booked for our holiday was a wreck.
- b) Don't buy a used car from him – he will **rip you off**.
- c) Our elderly neighbour was **ripped off** by a dishonest builder.
- d) News headline: Phone providers 'rip off customers'.

rip-off (noun) something that is overpriced. Informal English.

Examples of use:

- a) Credit card interest charges are a **rip-off**.
- b) This hotel is a **rip-off**.

rip-off (noun) an illegal or poor-quality imitation or copy.

Informal English.

Example of use:

Your jacket is a Ralph Lauren **rip-off**.

infinitive	rip off
present simple	rip off and rips off
-ing form	ripping off
past simple	ripped off
past participle	ripped off

RUN BY / PAST

To **run** something **by** someone is to tell them something so that they can consider it and give their opinion.

This phrasal verb can also be **run** something **past** someone.

Examples of use:

a) Your ideas for the business are very interesting; I'll **run them by** my boss.

b) I would like to **run** these plans **by** our manager.

infinitive	run by / past
present simple	run by / past and runs by / past
-ing form	running by / past
past simple	ran by / past
past participle	run by / past

SELL OFF

To **sell off** a business is to sell all or part of it.

To **sell off** something (or **sell** something **off**) is to sell it at a reduced or low price because you do not want it or because you need the money.

Examples of use:

a) They **sold off** their book store chain.

b) They are **selling off** their stock because the shop is closing next week.

c) The brewery **sold off** 900 pubs.

d) News headline: The Royal Bank of Scotland is to **sell off** its branch in Pakistan.

infinitive	sell off
present simple	sell off and sells off
-ing form	selling off
past simple	sold off
past participle	sold off

SELL OUT

To **sell out** of something is to sell all of it and have no more left for people to buy.

Examples of use:

- a) Can you order more Lady Gaga CDs before we **sell out**?
- b) The new iPhones are **selling out** everywhere.
- c) We have **sold out** of tickets for tonight's show.
- d) He **sells out** of his homemade cakes every day.

When all the items for sale in a shop have been sold they are **sold-out**.

infinitive	sell out
present simple	sell out and sells out
-ing form	selling out
past simple	sold out
past participle	sold out

SELL UP

To **sell up** (or **sell** something **up**) is to sell a business completely and move onto something else or somewhere else. Mainly British English.

Examples of use:

- a) The restaurant hasn't made much money for the past two years so we're **selling up** and opening a book shop.
- b) News headline: [Pierre Cardin ready to sell up at 88](#).
- c) We **sold up** the company and retired to Spain.

infinitive	sell up
present simple	sell up and sells up
-ing form	selling up
past simple	sold up
past participle	sold up

SHOP AROUND

When people **shop around**, they compare the prices and quality of an item so that they can choose the best one to buy.

Examples of use:

- a) I'm going to **shop around** for the best price before I buy a new phone.
- b) Consumers should **shop around** before choosing expensive items like computers.
- c) Everyone is **shopping around** for the best deals.

infinitive	shop around
present simple	shop around and shops around
-ing form	shopping around
past simple	shopped around
past participle	shopped around

SIGN UP

1. To **sign up** is to agree to do something, or to take part in something, by signing one's name.

Examples of use:

- a) I've **signed up** for an English language course.
- b) He needs a new job so he has **signed up** with an employment agency.
- c) We **signed up** to take part in the company's team-building events

2. To **sign up** somebody (or **sign** somebody **up**) is to hire them to work for you, or to put their name on a list to receive a service from you or to become a member of something.

Examples of use:

- a) We have **signed up** 100 teachers **up** for our new online teaching project .
- b) We are thinking about **signing up** a new office manager.
- c) The mobile phone company are **signing up** thousands of new customers.

infinitive	sign up
present simple	sign up and signs up
-ing form	signing up
past simple	signed up
past participle	signed up

SMARTEN UP

1. If you **smarten up** somebody or something (or **smarten** somebody or something **up**) you make them / it look tidier, or more attractive, or cleaner.

Mainly UK English

Examples of use:

- a) You must **smarten up** for your job interview.
- b) They've **smartened up** our local restaurant with new tables and chairs, and new carpets.
- c) Our office needs **smartening up** – it hasn't been decorated for over four years.
- d) Your shop looks dull and boring; you must **smarten it up** if you want more customers.

2. To **smarten up** is to improve the way you do things, or to improve your attitude or behaviour.

Mainly American English.

Informal.

Example of use:

He was late for work every day for two weeks. His boss told him to **smarten up** or leave the company.

infinitive	smarten up
present simple	smarten up and smartens up
-ing form	smartening up
past simple	smartened up
past participle	smartened up

BE SNOWED UNDER

To **be snowed under** is to be overwhelmed: to have too much work to do.

Informal English.

Examples of use:

- a) She is totally **snowed under** at work.
- b) We're **snowed under** at work because two members of staff are on holiday.
- c) John started his new business last month and he is **snowed under** with orders already.
- d) I had a week off work last week, and I've been **snowed under** ever since.

STAY BEHIND

To **stay behind** is to remain in a place when other people leave it

Examples of use:

a) When the conference had finished, we **stayed behind** to discuss the new project.

b) Question: Are you going home now?

Answer: No, I'm **staying behind** to finish this work.

infinitive	stay behind
present simple	stay behind and stays behind
-ing form	staying behind
past simple	stayed behind
past participle	stayed behind

STEP DOWN

To **step down** is to leave your job (usually an important job or position), especially so that someone else can do it.

Often + **from** or **as**

Examples of use:

a) Mrs Green is **stepping down** as chairperson in May.

b) He is under pressure to **step down** from his role as company CEO.

c) Mr Bean **stepped down** as the head of department in January.

STEP UP

To **step up** something (or **step** something **up**) is to do more of an activity, work harder at it, or increase the level or strength of something in order to improve a situation.

Examples of use:

- a) We're going to sell out of Christmas puddings long before Christmas if we don't **step up** production.
- b) The deadline for the project is next week; we need to **step up** the pressure on the staff to work harder.
- c) News headline: German businesses to **step up** hiring and investment.

infinitive	step up
present simple	step up and steps up
-ing form	stepping up
past simple	stepped up
past participle	stepped up

STOCK UP

To **stock up** is to buy a lot of something.

Examples of use:

- a) The weather forecasters are predicting a long hot summer so we have **stocked up** on suncream.
- b) News headline: [Cubans stock up as prices of hygiene products jump](#).

infinitive	stock up
present simple	stock up and stocks up
-ing form	stocking up
past simple	stocked up
past participle	stocked up

TAKE OVER (1)

To **take over** something (or **take** something **over**) is to get control of a company.

Examples of use:

- a) The bookshop was making big losses when we **took it over**.
- b) Microsoft announced it is **taking over** Skype.
- c) The British chocolate company has been **taken over** by an American company.

infinitive	take over
present simple	take over and takes over
-ing form	taking over
past simple	took over
past participle	taken over

TAKE OVER (2)

To **take over** something (or **take** something **over**) is to start doing something that someone else was responsible for before you.

Examples of use:

- a) Isaac is **taking over** the business from his father.
- b) My daughter is going to **take over** the accounts.
- c) She **took over** as manager when Mr Hunt retired.

infinitive	take over
present simple	take over and takes over
-ing form	taking over
past simple	took over
past participle	taken over

TALK OVER

To **talk over** something (or **talk something over**), is to discuss a problem or situation with someone.

Examples of use:

a) I have been offered a job in Japan. I need to **talk it over** with my husband and children.

b) We're having a meeting to **talk over** the poor sales figures.

c) We have **talked over** your future with the company, and decided to offer you a permanent contract.

infinitive	talk over
present simple	talk over and talks over
-ing form	talking over
past simple	talked over
past participle	talked over

TEAM UP

To **team up** is to join another person, or group, in order to do something together.

Examples of use:

a) News headline: Banks **team up** for online payment system.

b) The businesses **teamed up** to provide day care for their workers' children.

c) We **teamed up** for the new project.

infinitive	team up
present simple	team up and teams up
-ing form	teaming up
past simple	teamed up
past participle	teamed up

WIND UP

1. To **wind up** something (or **wind** something **up**) is to bring it to a conclusion – to finish it, or prepare to finish it.

Examples of use:

- a) It's nearly six o'clock so we'll **wind** the meeting **up** now.
- b) I'd like to **wind up** this morning's presentation by reminding you that there is a free buffet lunch in Room 201.

2. If a business is **wound up** it is closed.

Examples of use:

- a) The business had massive debts and was officially **wound up** last month.
- b) They voted to **wind** the company **up**.
- c) The recession has hit us hard and we have to **wind up** the business.

infinitive	wind up
present simple	wind up and winds up
-ing form	winding up
past simple	wound up
past participle	wound up

WRITE OFF

If you **write off** a sum of money you accept that you have lost it, or that it will not be repaid.

Examples of use:

- a) We have **written off** the printing company's debt.
- b) Why don't you speak to your bank manager and ask if he will **write off** your business overdraft?

infinitive	write off
present simple	write off and writes off
-ing form	writing off
past simple	wrote off
past participle	written off

WRITE UP

When you **write up** something (or **write** something **up**) you write it on paper or type it into a computer, in its finished form – usually from your notes or a rough draft.

Examples of use:

- a) Don't forget to send me your report when you've **written** it **up**.
- b) Have you **written up** the notes from today's meeting?

infinitive	write up
present simple	write up and writes up
-ing form	writing up
past simple	wrote up
past participle	written up

Coming soon....

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