University Centre
Abdelhafid Boussouf
E-learning Centre

English – Level 2

Lesson 09
Phrasal verbs and
Modal verbs

Pedagogical Staff

Name	Grade	Institute	E-mail Address
Djalal Mansour	MCB	Letters and Languages	Djalal.mansour@centre-univ-mila.dz
Assia Azzioui		Letters and Languages	a.azzioui@gmail.com
Wiam Zemieche		Letters and Languages	wiamemma99@gmail.com

Students Concerned- Semester 06 -

Institute	Department	Year	Specialty
Letters and Languages	-Foreign Languages	Licentiate 02	French
Economic Sciences	-Economic Science -Commercial Science -Management Science	Licentiate 02	All specialties

Objectives of the Lesson

This lesson has been designed to make students use phrasal and modal verbs correctly, and they will be able to produce sentences.They allow students to build complex sentences that can convey interesting and compelling messages.
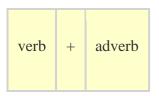
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1. Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb like *pick up*, *turn on* or *get on with*. These verbs consists of a **basic verb** + **another word or words**. The two or three words that make up a phrasal verb form a short "phrase" - which is why we call them "phrasal verbs". But a phrasal verb is still a verb. *Look* is a verb. *Look up* is also a verb - a **different** verb. They do not have the same meaning, and they behave differently grammatically. You should treat each phrasal verb as a separate verb, and learn it like any other verb. Look at these examples. You can see that there are three types of phrasal verb formed from a single-word verb:

		verb	definition	example
single-word verb		**look**	direct your eyes in a certain direction	You must **look** before you leap.
phrasal verb	verb + adverb	**look up**	search for and find information in a reference book	You can **look up** the word in a dictionary.
	verb + preposition	**look after**	take care of	Who is **looking after** the baby?
	verb + adverb + preposition	**look forward to**	anticipate with pleasure	I **look forward to** meeting you.

Phrasal Verb: VERB + ADVERB

The structure of this type of phrasal verb is:

verb	+	adverb

These phrasal verbs can be:

- **transitive** (direct object)

- **intransitive** (no direct object)

Look at these examples of transitive and intransitive::

		meaning	example sentence	
				direct object
transitive	**put off**	postpone	We will have to **put off**	the meeting.
	turn down	refuse	They **turned down**	my offer.
intransitive	**get up**	rise from bed	I don't like to **get up**.	
	break down	stop working	He was late because his car **broke down**.	

Separable

When this type of phrasal verb has a direct object, we can usually separate the two parts. For example, "turn down" is **separable**. We can say: "**turn down** my offer" or "**turn** my offer **down**". Look at these example sentences:

✔ They **turned down** my offer.

✔ They **turned** my offer **down**.

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However, if the direct object is a **pronoun**, we have no choice. We **must** separate the two parts of the verb and insert the pronoun. Look at these examples with the verb "switch on". Note that the last one is impossible:

✔ John **switched on** the radio.

✔ John **switched** the radio **on**.

✔ John **switched** it **on**.

✖ ~~John **switched on** it.~~

Separable or inseparable?

Many dictionaries tell you when a phrasal verb is separable. If a dictionary writes "look (something) up", you know that the phrasal verb "look up" is separable, and you can say "look something up" and "look up something". It's a good idea to write "sthg/sby" as appropriate in your vocabulary book when you learn a new phrasal verb, like this:
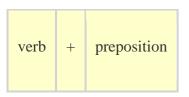
- **get up**

- **break down**

- **break** sthg **off**

- **turn** sthg/sby **down**

This tells you if the verb needs a direct object (and where to place it).

[Phrasal Verbs reference](): hundreds of phrasal verbs with definitions, example sentences, quizzes and answers

Phrasal Verb: VERB + PREPOSITION

This type of phrasal verb is also called a "**prepositional verb**". The structure of a prepositional verb is:

verb	+	preposition

Because a preposition always has an object, all prepositional verbs have direct objects (i.e. they are transitive).

Look at these examples of prepositional verbs:

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prepositional verb	meaning	example sentence	
			direct object
believe in	have faith in the existence of	I **believe in**	God.
look after	take care of	He is **looking after**	the dog.
talk about	discuss	Did you **talk about**	me?
wait for	await	John is **waiting for**	Mary.

Prepositional verbs **cannot be separated**. That means that we cannot put the direct object between the two parts. For example, we must say "look after the baby". We cannot say "look the baby after":

✔️ Who is **looking after** the baby?

❌ ~~Who is **looking** the baby **after**?~~

It is a good idea to write "something/somebody" in your vocabulary book when you learn a new prepositional verb, like this:

- **believe in** something/somebody

- **look after** sthg/sby

This reminds you that the verb needs a direct object (and where to place it).

Phrasal Verb: VERB + ADVERB + PREPOSITION

This type of phrasal verb is also called a "**phrasal-prepositional verb**". The structure of a phrasal-prepositional verb is:

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| verb | + | adverb | + | preposition |

Look at these examples of phrasal-prepositional verbs:

phrasal-prepositional verb	meaning	example sentence	direct object
get on with	have a friendly relationship with	He doesn't **get on with**	his wife.
put up with	tolerate	I won't **put up with**	your attitude.
look forward to	anticipate with pleasure	I **look forward to**	seeing you.
run out of	use up, exhaust	We have **run out of**	eggs.

Because phrasal-prepositional verbs end with a preposition, **there is always a direct object**. And, like prepositional verbs, phrasal-prepositional verbs **cannot be separated**. Look at these examples:

✔ We **ran out of** gas.

✔ We **ran out of** it.

✘ We ~~**ran** gas **out of**~~.

✘ We ~~**ran out** gas **of**~~.

It is a good idea to write "something/somebody" in your vocabulary book when you learn a new phrasal-prepositional verb, like this:

- **get on with** somebody

- **put up with** sthg/sby

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- **run out of** something

This reminds you that the verb needs a direct object (and where to place it).

2. Modal Verbs

Modal verbs show possibility, intent, ability, or necessity. Because they're a type of auxiliary verb (helper verb), they're used alongside the infinitive form of the main verb of a sentence. Common examples of modal verbs include *can*, *should*, and *must*.

Modal verbs can be tricky, but the good news is that they're simple once you learn how they work. Below, we explain everything you need to know to use modal verbs with ease.

Modal verbs are quite common in English; you've seen them in action hundreds of times even if you didn't know what they were called. The most frequently used ones are:

can

may

might

could

should

would

will

must

There are other, less common modal verbs. Some—like *shall* and *ought*—are rarely used any longer. There are also verbs that can function either as main verbs or as modal auxiliaries depending on the context; *got*, *need*, and *have* all behave like modal verbs in the common colloquial expressions *got to*, *need to*, and *have to*. Some modal verbs express very specific conditions that don't come up often, like *dare* in its modal form in "Dare I ask?" The word *used* in the idiomatic phrase *used to*, as in "I used to be an English student too," behaves like a modal verb with only a past tense form.

When are modal verbs used?

What special conditions do modal verbs indicate? Here's a list, along with examples:

Likelihood

Some things seem likely to be true but can't be stated as definite facts. In these cases, you can use the modal verbs *should* and *must* to show probability without certainty.

*Her parents **must be** so proud.*
*My baby brother **should be** asleep by now.*

Possibility

In a situation when something is possible but not certain, use the modal verb *could*, *may*, or *might*.

*Judging by the clouds, it **might rain** today.*
*She **may become** the youngest pro soccer player ever.*

Ability

The modal verb *can* expresses whether the subject of a sentence is able to do something. Likewise, the negative form, *cannot* or *can't*, shows that the subject is unable to do something.

*She **can speak** three languages but none of them well.*
*You **can lead** a horse to water, but you **can't make** it drink.*

Permission

If you want to ask permission to do something, start your question with *can*, *may*, or *could*. Traditionally, *may* is considered more formal and polite usage for permission; if you ask "Can I go to the bathroom?" it could be misinterpreted as "Do I have the ability to go to the bathroom?" However, in modern informal usage, *may* and *can* are both perfectly acceptable options for describing possibility or permission.

*Students, you **may leave** early today.*
***Could I play** too?*

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Request

Similarly, if you want to ask someone else to do something, start your question with ***will***, ***would***, ***can***, or ***could***.

Would *you **get** that box off the top shelf?*
Will *you **turn** that music down?*

Suggestion/advice

What if you want to recommend a course of action but not command it? If you're giving suggestions or advice without ordering someone around, you can use the modal verb ***should***.

*You **should try** the lasagna.*
*That guy **should wear** less cologne.*

Command

On the other hand, if you want to command someone, use the modal verbs ***must***, ***have***, or ***need***. With the latter two, the main verb does not drop the word *to* from its infinitive form.

*You **must wash** your hands before cooking.*
*You **need to be** here before 8:00.*

Obligation or necessity

Modal verbs can express a necessary action, such as an obligation, duty, or requirement. Likewise, the negative forms express that an action is *not* necessary. Use the same modal verbs as with commands: ***must***, ***have***, and ***need***.

*We **have to wait** for our boss to arrive before we open.*
*You **don't need to come** if you don't want to.*

Habit

To show an ongoing or habitual action—something the subject does regularly—you can use the modal verb ***would*** for the past tense and ***will*** for the present and future. The phrase ***used to*** is also acceptable when you're talking about a habit in the past.

*When I lived alone, **I would fall** asleep with music.*

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*I **will arrive** early to every meeting and **leave** late.*

How to use modal verbs (with examples)

Luckily, using modal verbs in a sentence is pretty simple. For basic sentences—in the simple present tense—just remember these rules:

Modal verbs come directly before the main verb except for in questions.

With modal verbs, use the infinitive form of the main verb. With most but not all modal verbs, *to* is dropped from the infinitive.

So if you want to brag about your ability to eat an entire pizza, you use the modal verb **can** before the infinitive form of *eat* without *to*—which is simply *eat*. The rest of the sentence continues as normal.

*I **can eat** an entire pizza.*

If you want to communicate that circumstances are requiring you to eat an entire pizza, you might use the modal verb **have** before the infinitive form of *eat*, retaining *to*:

*I **have to eat** an entire pizza.*

For yes/no questions, you still use the infinitive form of the main verb, but the order is a little different: **[modal verb] + [subject] + [main verb infinitive]**.

***Can** you **eat** an entire pizza?*

***Do** you **have to eat** an entire pizza?*

Note that in the second example above, because *have* is a verb that only sometimes functions as an auxiliary verb and at other times functions as a main verb, the question is formed with the auxiliary verb *do* at the beginning.

Because modal verbs deal largely with general situations or hypotheticals that haven't actually happened, all of the core ones can refer to present and future time but only some of them can refer to past time, and most of the time they do not change form to make different tenses. However, all of them can be used with different conjugations of a sentence's main verb to refer to present or future time in different ways, so let's talk a little about verb tenses and modal verbs.

Present tenses

We already covered the simple present above, but you can also use modal verbs in the present continuous and present perfect continuous tenses.

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Present continuous

After the modal verb, use the word *be* followed by the *–ing* form of the main verb: **[modal verb]** + *be* + **[verb in -ing form].**

*I **should be going**.*

Present perfect continuous

You can add a modal verb before a main verb in the present perfect continuous tense without changing much. However, note that the main verb always forms the present perfect continuous using *have been*, when appearing with a modal verb, never *had been*, even if the subject is third-person. The formula is **[modal verb]** + *have been* + **[main verb in -ing form].**

*She **must have been sleeping**.*

Simple past and present perfect tenses

Using a modal verb in the simple past or the present perfect (which indicates an action that happened in the past but is directly related to the present) is a little trickier.

Only a few of the core modal verbs have the ability to refer to past time: *could*, *might*, *should*, and *would*. They do this by functioning at times as the past tense forms of their fellow modal verbs *can*, *may*, *shall*, and *will*. But keep in mind that, as we saw above, *could*, *might*, *should*, and *would* also have different senses in which they refer to the present and the future, indicating possibility, permission, request, habit, or other conditions. None of the modal verbs can be used in the past perfect, the past continuous, or the past perfect continuous tense.

Simple past

Of the main modal verbs listed at the top, only *can* and *will* can be used in the simple past. The expressions *have to* and *need to* can also be used in the simple past, when conjugated as *had to* and *needed to*. Other modal verbs use the present perfect to discuss events in the past.

Can and *will* use their past tense form plus the infinitive form of the main verb without *to*, just like in the present: *could/would* + **[main verb infinitive].**

*I **could do** a handstand when I was a kid.*
*During exam season in college, I **would not sleep** much.*

Present perfect

To form the present perfect using the modal verb could, might, should, or would, use the present perfect form of the main verb, which is *have* plus the past participle. As with the present perfect continuous, you always use have, even if the subject is third-person: ***could/might/should/would + have +* [main verb past participle].**

*I **might have gone** to the party, but I forgot.*

Future tenses

Because the [simple future](), [future continuous](), [future perfect](), and [future perfect continuous]() tenses of main verbs are all already formed with the modal verb ***will***, when you want to indicate likelihood, permission, or any of the other conditions discussed above in the future, it often makes sense to do it in some other way than by adding a modal verb.

*They **will be more likely to come** over tomorrow if you give them plenty of warning.*
However, there are also situations in which a modal verb other than ***will*** can be used to talk about something in the future. In these cases, the new modal verb just replaces *will* in the sentence, and the main verb takes the same form it would with *will*..

*I **can hang out** tomorrow.*
***Could I be majoring** in law next year?*
*They **should have left** by the time we get there.*
*By twenty years from now, **I may have traveled** to more conferences than I care to recall.*