

## Lesson 4.8 – Prepositions or Particles? Learning about Phrasal Verbs

Particles look just like prepositions, but over time they have shifted to become a part of the verb. The bolded phrases are all verbs that contain particles.

Don't **run down** the batteries.

We looked up the answers.

**Turn on** the light, please.

Don't forget to **turn in** your homework.

I'm excited to **pick out** a present for my friend.

We know that these are particles instead of prepositions because of their meaning. The verb plus particle has a meaning that is distinct from the sum of the meanings of the parts. And also they have a neat trick, called Particle Shift; they can move from their position right next to the verb to a position following the noun phrase complement.

Don't run the batteries down.

We looked the answers **up**.

Turn the light **on**, please.

Don't forget to turn your homework **in**.

I'm excited to pick a present **out** for my friend.

Cool, huh? Prepositions can't do that.

We ran down the street. ACK! We ran the street down.

We looked up the street toward the park. ACK! We looked the street up toward the park.

We turned onto the freeway. ACK! We turned the freeway onto.

**Activity.** Have your students figure out if the bolded words are prepositions or are part of the verb (particles). Have them describe how they know.

They climbed **up** the fence.

He shot **off** his toy rocket.

Bert looked **for** a banana.

The rabbit hopped **through** the grass.

Please turn up the radio.

They brought **up** the issue several times.

You should think **through** the problem carefully.

I already handed **in** my paper.

So what's kind of weird and kind of cool about particles is that they are really part of the verb, so you'd expect them to fuse to the verb, but instead they can move away from it. This is a remnant of English's Germanic roots; German (and Old English) have these "separable verbs," as they're called, too.

There are certain particles that seem to have a distinct meaning from the meanings of the

parts, like the ones above, but that cannot undergo Particle Shift. Sometimes these are called “prepositional phrasal verbs” to distinguish them from phrasal verbs. Distinguishing the two types of phrasal verbs from each other is not important unless you are using the movement diagnostic to distinguish phrasal verb particles from prepositions. You may encounter some that really seem to make meaning in conjunction with the verb, but are unable to undergo Particle Shift, like the following.

She can pass for an American.

The smallest puppy often gets picked on.

I ran into a good friend at the café.

The grandparents are looking after the kids.

You should stand by your principles.

Also, there are multi-word phrasal verbs with more than one particle. For these too, the meaning suggests that the particles have glommed on to the verb. (There's one - *glom on!*)

You shouldn't put up with that noise.

I am really looking forward to the party.

We loaded up on junk food for the game.

They have been sitting in for me while I've been sick.

So when discussing either verbs or prepositions, it's important to know about these particles.

Also, English Language Learners (ELLs) often learn long lists of these phrasal verbs since they are quite common in speech, more so in American English than British English, apparently, and are a marker, therefore, of real fluency. There are a gazillion books and websites like this one to help ESL students with phrasal verbs. It's important to note that phrasal verbs often have more formal synonyms – *put off* vs. *postpone*, *get together* vs. *assemble* – so are used somewhat less in the written language.

I'll leave you with one of my favorite strings of prepositions (and other stuff? Are there any particles here?). I grew up in Appalachia, and this was a phrase my third grade teacher, Genave Montgomery, had recalled hearing someone say. It's great.

I walked out up over in back of yonder.

Ponder on that.

