

Verb+preposition Colloquialisms (Phrasal Verbs III)

Description: We first looked at these in June 2022. These are widely used – perhaps as many as 80% of verbs used in spoken English are combined with a preposition to obtain a colloquial phrasal verb ... but not in written English!

Level: All

Verbs are often followed by a preposition to give a special meaning.

The special meaning may not be closely related to the original or regular meaning; e.g. “go off”.

- *Go[verb]* = travel from the current place to somewhere else
- *Off [preposition]*= away from something
- Where did Jack *go off* to?

But also:

- The firework will *go off* with a loud BANG!
- The power *went off* during the thunderstorm
- The milk has *gone off*

Some verbal phrases have multiple meanings ... e.g. “Blow up”:

- I had to *blow up* 15 balloons for the party. [*inflate*]
- The terrorist *blew up* the plane. [*bombed*]
- Can you *blow up* this photo into an A3 poster? [*enlarge*]
- The crisis *blew up* over a land dispute. [*developed*]

Here is a list of **verbs** which are paired with several prepositions

- | | | | | |
|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| • Keep | • Run | • Call | • Pay | • Get |
| • Cut | • Go | • Cut | • Pick | • Put |
| • Fall | • Come | • Give | • Pull | • Take |
| • Let | • Break | • Hand | • Stick | • Go |
| • Make | • Leave | • Hang | • Turn | • Hold |

The verbs are paired with **prepositions** that indicate a relative position:

- | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|
| • On | • Out | • Under | • Through | • At | • About |
| • Off | • Up | • Over | • Back | • Away | |
| • In / Into | • Down | • Around | • Forward | • Aside | |

Examples using the verb “keep”

Phrasal Verb	Meaning
Keep at (it)	To continue a difficult activity
Keep away	To avoid getting close
Keep back	To not provide all the information
Keep down	To not vomit food / To stop someone progressing.
Keep from	Not to inform another person
Keep off	To avoid a sensitive topic or activity
Keep on	To continue an activity (often that annoys others) / employment.
Keep to	To maintain a secret / To follow a schedule correctly
Keep up (with)	To remain informed / Not to lose position

Some sample sentences using “keep”

- He didn't enjoy learning his times tables, but he **kept at** it until he could give the correct answers every time.
- If you don't want catch Covid-19 I suggest that you **keep away** from the football match.
- He'll tell you what food to buy, but he'll **keep back** the recipe until the day of the meal.
- She ate so many chips, that she was sick. She couldn't **keep** so much food **down**.
- Even though she had made a lot of progress, the school **kept her down** until she could list the days-of-the-week.
- He'd **kept** his past life a secret **from** her until they returned from honeymoon. Only then did she discover that he already had 3 children!
- I suggest you **keep off** politics with Reggie. She still hasn't accepted the result of the last election.
- We've only enough money to **keep** him **on** for 6 months.
- Even though I gave him a big hug, he **kept on** crying.
- The train **kept to** time until Birmingham
- If you know the answer, **keep** it **to** yourself
- I **keep up** with the Hang Seng index every 12 hours.

Some have a verb and a preposition that can be separated “*separable verbal phrases*”

- They've **kept** the tutor **on** for another year
- They've **kept on** the tutor for another year

But you must separate these phrases if you're using a pronoun for the object of the sentence:

- They've **kept** him **on** for another year

A few phrasal verbs are “*inseparable*” – the verb and the preposition **can't** be separated

- Who **looks after** the baby?
- Who **looks after** her when you're at work?

For example

- Look into [investigate]
- Turn into [transform]
- Come across [encounter]
- Get over [recover]

Often we add a second preposition – usually “from”, “with”, “for” or “to” – after the verbal phrase:

- **Keep away from** Doris – she's dangerous.
- **I'll keep on to** them until they give me an answer.
- **I keep up with** the Hang Seng index every 12 hours.
- He'll have to be **kept down for** another year.