

Phrasal Verbs and Formal Writing

When you are using a language, it is important to understand if a word is **formal** or **informal**, so that you can use it in an appropriate way. In an exam, you must show that you have developed a keen awareness of register and you will lose marks for using words that are too formal and vice versa.

Widespread popular wisdom about phrasal verbs among learners and teachers is that they are colloquial, casual **and** informal. Although there is some basis for this belief, the reality is more complicated:

1. Some phrasal verbs are markedly informal, for example:

bum around, piss off, chill out, goof around

2. But some phrasal verbs, conversely, are decidedly formal and/or literary, for example:

ascribe to, cast down, consign to, impinge on, renege on

3. The majority of phrasal verbs are neutral, with no particular stylistic marking. "What time shall we **set off**?" is neutral in conversation, while "What time shall we **depart**?" is unusually formal.

4. Phrasal verbs are common in many types of writing – though not all – as well as in speech.

Match the following phrasal verbs with their more formal single-word verbs:

back out

back off

back up

check out

come across

deal with

fill in

kick in

leave out

pay off

put up with

throw away

prove profitable	activate	omit	support	consult	address
withdraw	discard	tolerate	retreat	inform	encounter

