

EXPLAINING PHRASAL VERBS COMPREHENSIVELY AND DYNAMICALLY

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Outline of the workshop:

1. Explaining the basic theory.
2. Explaining particle meanings both literal and abstract
3. Reinforcing Activities
4. Tips and techniques.

We all know the problems students have with phrasal verbs, and the problems that us teachers have too. I believe the only way to deal with this problem is by approaching phrasal verbs comprehensively, trying to show a logic, rather than explaining them randomly, bit by bit, as is often done. Students need a global explanation to support them.

To give a global explanation two concepts need to be explained and fully understood:

- 1) Phrasal Verbs are **combinations of meaning** in which both verb and particle affect the meaning. As a result of this phrasal verbs can be seen not as separate entities that have to be learnt separately one by one but as a system of meanings.
- 2) The importance of the particle meaning needs to be made clear. Students have a clear idea of the basic meaning of many verbs but not of the different meanings of particles. If they become aware of this they can start to see connections between different phrasal verbs with similar or opposed meanings.

1 Explaining the Basic Theory

Obviously the first and the most important step is to explain these two ideas to students. As you know any theory needs to be explained quickly and clearly before the teacher or the students gets lost or bored and gives up deciding it's impossible. What follows is the explanation I usually give students.

How Phrasal Verbs Work

Phrasal verbs are a combination of two parts, verb and particle (a preposition or adverb). Both parts are important to understand the full meaning.

However, it is often the particle which gives the basic meaning and which allows us to see connections with other phrasal verbs. For example:

- He goes **back** home.
- He comes **back** home.
- He gets **back** home.

Back is used in all of these sentences to mean *return*.

If we know back often means return then it is easy to understand the following examples:

- He walks **back** home.
- He runs **back** home.
- He drives **back** home.

And also:

- He **gives** the ball **back**. = He **returns** the ball.
- He **throws** the ball **back**. = He **returns** the ball (throwing it).
- He **kicks** the ball **back**. = He **returns** the ball (kicking it).

These are all literal examples but we can see the same logic in metaphorical uses of **back**:

- He **calls back**.
- The **phones back**.
- They **take** the power **back**.

The same logic applies to other particles and phrasal verbs.

- He walks **in**. = He **enters** (walking).
- He runs **in**. = He **enters** (running).
- He drives **in**. = He **enters** (driving).

Or:

- She asked him **in**. = She asked him to **enter**.
- The burglar broke **in**. = The burglar **entered** (by force).
- He was voted **in**. = He **entered** (into power or government by being voted).

Understanding the meaning of a particle, not only helps us to understand a specific phrasal verb, but also helps us to see connections between different phrasal verbs.

Having explained the theory we can then go on to practising it. It's important to pace this correctly; too fast and students will find it too difficult and get discouraged; too slow and students may have the impression that what is being explained is fairly simple and obvious.

Consequently some of these activities can be done quicker or slower or even omitted, depending on the level. At this point I think it's best to use literal phrasal verbs focus on the theory and to avoid distracting students by more difficult meanings.

Begin with the most simple to understand: **go + particle**. Write up 12 particles on the board

Into, Out of, Up, Down, On, Off, Over, Across, Through, Around, Back, Away

and ask students what is the literal meaning of the particles combined with go, either using synonyms or translation. Explain we can also use come or get with a similar meaning to go + particle.

The next step is to show that we can use other verbs of movement in the same way.

Write up on the board.

Walk, Run, Skateboard, Ski, Fly, Swim, Jump, Climb, Fall, Sail, Cycle, Drive

Then students complete the worksheet on the following pages using the twelve verbs and the twelve particles from the first exercise with go).

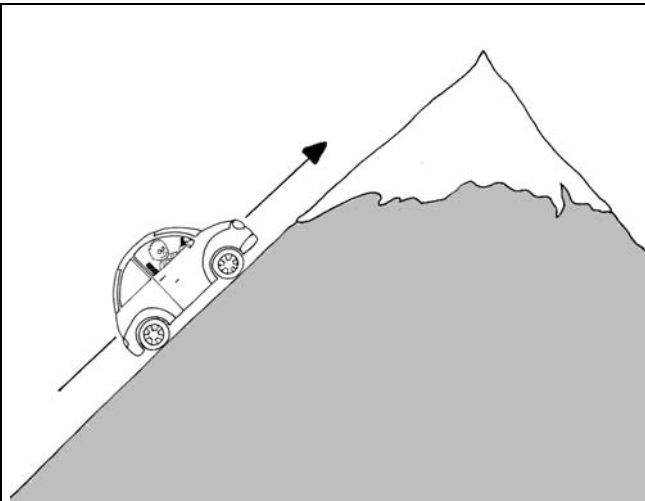
It can be useful to repeat a similar exercise with the same verbs and particles, but with different combinations. This exercise can then be followed by Simon Says or a song like "She'll be coming round the mountains." (for details on how to use these activities see the workshop Physical and Visual Activities for Teaching Phrasal Verbs).

After this, the next step is free practice. I use questionnaires which make students use the target language. The objective of this activity is to make student personalize, to make them think of the real meanings of the phrasal verbs, a stage necessary in any effective language learning but a stage almost always overlooked in the teaching of phrasal verbs. It's possible students won't actually use the phrasal verb in their answer which is fine as long as they are thinking about the meaning.

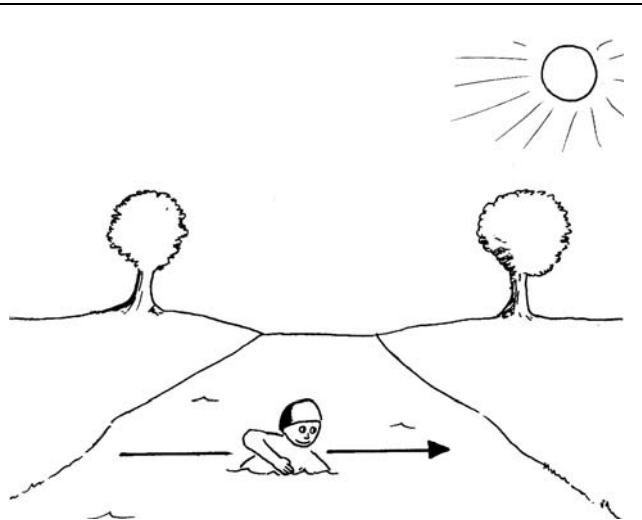
What we've seen so far are combinations with verbs of movement which are usually quite easy for students to grasp. In the next step we use other verbs. Write up these verbs.

Shout, Shine, Push, Help, Carry, Hit, Kick, Throw, Drop, Pull, Hand, Shoot

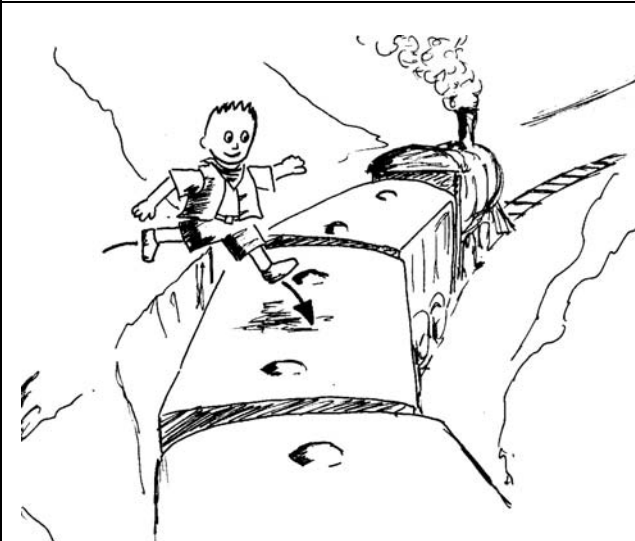
And then the process is of worksheet, physical activity (see Ball Game in the workshop Physical and Visual Activities for Teaching Phrasal Verbs) and questionnaire for oral practice is repeated.



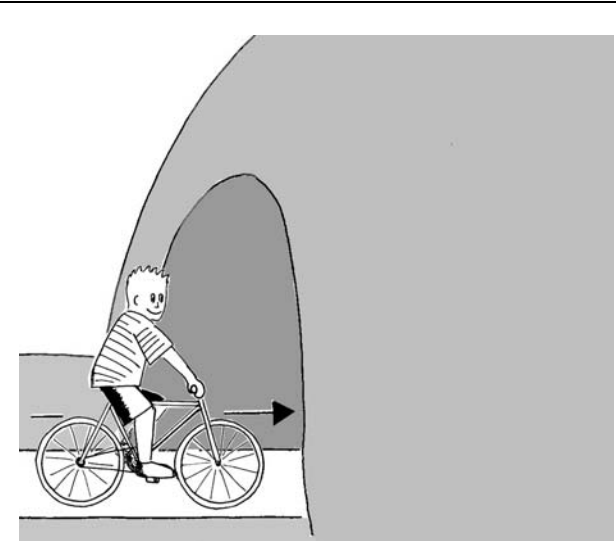
1. Bob _____ the mountain.



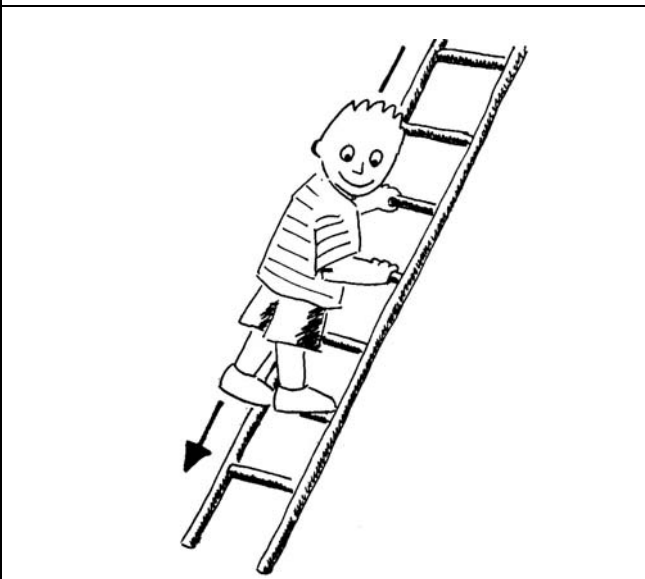
2. Bob _____ the river.



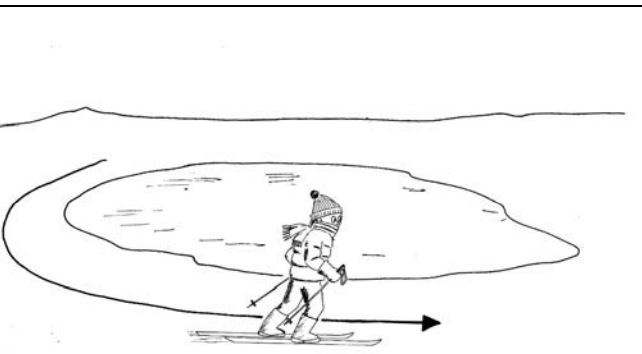
3. Buffalo Bob _____ the train.



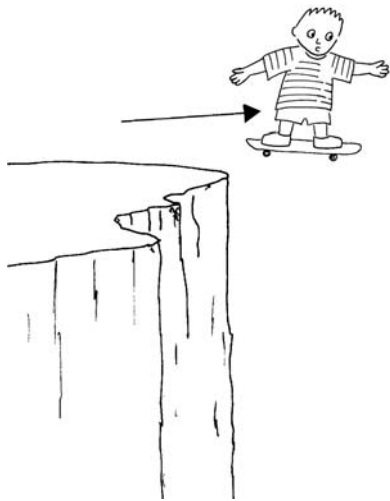
4. Bob _____ the tunnel



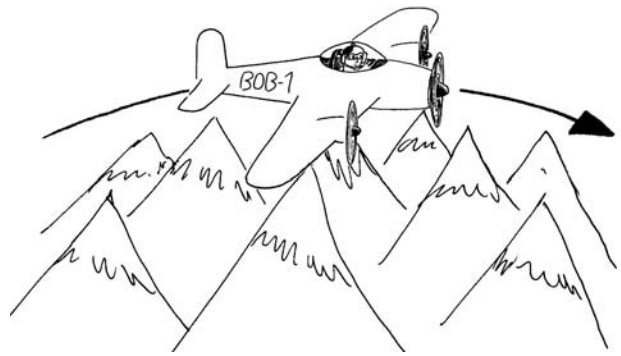
5. Bob _____ the ladder.



6. Bob _____ the lake.



7. Bob _____ the cliff.



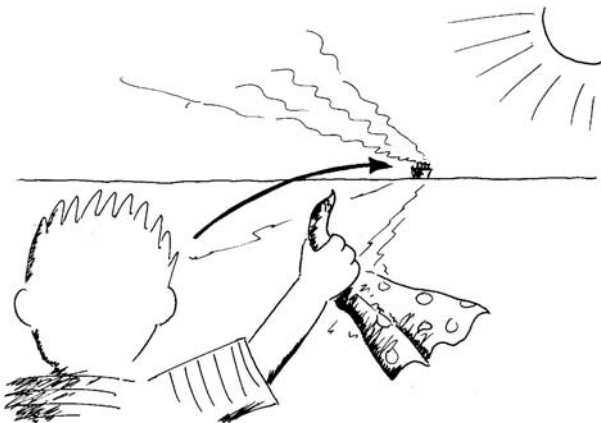
8. Bob _____ the mountains.



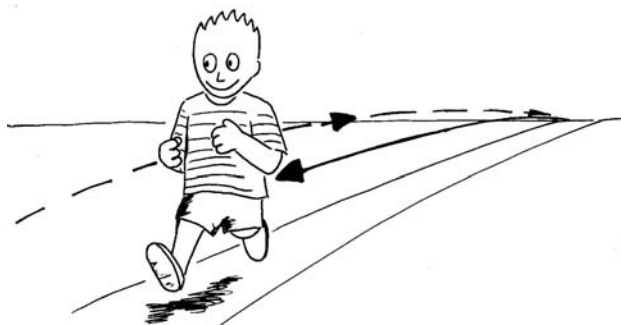
9. The mummy _____ the wall.



10. The tomato _____ the box.



11. The ship _____ ..



12. Bob _____.

**VERB OF MOVEMENT + PARTICLE
CONVERSATION PRACTICE**

Ask and answer these questions with a partner. Try to use the phrasal verb in your answer.

INTO

Do you ever **jump** straight **into** the swimming pool or do you get in slowly?

OUT

Have you ever **fallen out** of bed?

UP

When did you last **climb up** a tree?

DOWN

Have you ever **skied down** a mountain?

ON

When did you last **walk** barefoot **on** the grass?

OFF

Have you ever **fallen off** a bicycle?

OVER

Have you ever **flown over** mountains? What could you see?

ACROSS

When was the last time you **ran across** a busy street?

THROUGH

When did you last **walk through** a wood? Where was it?

AWAY

When did you last **fly away** on holiday?

AROUND

Have you ever **run around** an athletics track?

BACK

How will you **get back** home this evening?

2 Explaining Particle Meanings

The next step is to look at the particle meanings more closely. It's good to do the first session quite soon after the explanation of the basic theory so that students can see this theory applied in a more detailed example while it's still fresh.

At lower levels it's good to separate and focus on literal meanings first, just mentioning the abstract meanings so students are aware of them. At higher levels students will want to move quickly to the more abstract meanings. However, it's necessary to make sure students have the literal meanings clear so they can see connections between literal and abstract meanings.

Here is an example explanation of the literal meanings of ON and OFF. First an overall explanation of the literal meaning is given and then specific meaning groups are explained.

1 TOUCHING – SEPARATE

On means touching to be something and often above it. **Off** means not touching something.

a) Attach – Separate

On explains that we attach one thing to another. The verb tells us how exactly it is attached.

Off explains that we separate one thing from another. The verb tells us how it is attached.

- I **glue** a picture **on**. =I attach a picture (with glue).
- She **sellotapes** it **on**. =She attaches it with (sellotape.)
- He **tears** the poster **off** the wall. = He removes the poster from the wall (by tearing it).

b) Paper / Screen / Tape

We use **on** with paper, screens, TV, computers etc to show the words or text are on the surface of the object. We use **off** to show something is removed.

- The film is **projected on** the screen.
- I've **taped** it **on** video
- I **rub** the writing **off**
- I **wipe** the information **off** the floppy disc

c) Clothes

We also use **on** and **off** with clothes. The most common are **put on** and **take off**. However, if you want to be more specific, you can use many different verbs.

- I **button on** a shirt.= I put on a shirt (and button it)
- I **throw off** my shirt = I take off my shirt (and throw it somewhere)
- I **rip off** my shirt = I take off my shirt (violently).

Again, I usually do **controlled practice** with images and then follow up with an **oral practice questionnaire**. With higher groups you could skip this and move directly to the non-literal meanings, explaining them in a similar way in groups of meaning.

In the case of **on** and **off** these are continuing, leaving and starting or stopping. You can vary the way of presenting the explanation of meanings it by asking students to match pairs of example sentences with meanings.

2 CONTINUE - LEAVE

a) Continue

- He **keeps on** talking. = He continues talking.
- She **walks on**. = She continues walking.
- He **slept on** all morning. = He continued sleeping all morning.

b) Leave

- I'm **off**. = I'm leaving.
- She **walks off**. = She leaves (walking).
- He **rushes off**. = He leaves (in a rush).

3 STARTING – STOPPING

a) Work

- I **go on** at eight. = I start work at eight.
- I **get off** at five. = I finish work at five.
- I'm **off** tomorrow. = I'm not a work tomorrow.

b) Organise – Cancel

- The meeting **is on** for Friday. = The meeting has been organised for Friday.
- The appointment was **put off**. = The appointment was postponed.
- The match has been **called off**. = The match has been cancelled.

c) Start – Stop (machines, effects etc)

- I **turn** the radio **on/off**. = I start/stop the radio working.
- A storm is **coming on** = A storm is starting.
- My hangover is **wearing off**. = My hangover is decreasing.

Again, you can follow this up with a questionnaire but there's a limit to how often we can use questionnaires before they become repetitive and it's necessary to use variations.

Variation 1 Students choose only some of the questions to ask their partner.

Variation 1 Students choose one different question for each of the other students in class.

In both of these variations students will need to read through and think about the meanings of the phrasal verbs in the questions but will feel they have some control over the exercise.

An example of a questionnaire for the abstract meanings of on and off is given below.

**ON – OFF
CONVERSATION PRACTICE**

Ask and answer these questions with a partner. Try to use the phrasal verb in your answer.

2 CONTINUE – LEAVE

a) Continue

- 1 Who **talks on** the longest in your family? Among your friends?
- 2 How long can you **sleep on** for?
- 3 If you saw a robbery would you **walk on**, or would you try to stop the robbery?

b) Leave

- 4 What time do you usually **set off** from home in the mornings?
- 5 When did you last **see** someone **off** from an airport or train or bus station?
- 6 Have you ever **walked off** when someone was speaking to you?

3 STARTING – STOPPING

a) Starting – Stopping

- 7 Apart from the lights, what do you **turn on** first in the morning and what do you **switch off** last at night?
- 8 For you, how long does it take a hangover to **wear off**?
- 9 What **brings on** a headache quickest? (too much work? Children screaming? Techno music?)

b) Work

- 10 What time do you **go on** and **come off** work?
- 11 When **were** you last **off** (on holiday, or sick, or skiving)?
- 12 When were you **taken on** in your present job?

c) Plan / Organise – Postpone / Cancel

- 13 Have you **got** a lot **on** this week?
- 14 Do you **put** things **off** until tomorrow?
- 15 What are good reasons to **call** a wedding **off**?

This is basically the process for explaining particle meanings. It will be necessary to dedicate more time to the first explanation but after this it's probably better to do explanations quickly and to move on to the practice. Students can investigate more outside of class time if they want.

3 Reinforcing Activities

These explanations can be supported by other exercises. Here are some examples.

Text Corrections The John Lennon Story

In this exercise there is a mistake in one part of the phrasal verb combinations (although not in all of the pairs!). Find the mistakes and if you can, try to correct them.

John Lennon was born in 1940. His father 1was often in at sea during the war and eventually his parents 2split up. When his mother started 3living out with her new boyfriend John was 4given off her and then 5thought up by his Aunt Mimi.

At 12 he 6took off the harmonica. At 15 he got his first guitar and at 16 7looked up his first group, The Quarry Men. At one of their first concerts John met Paul McCartney who quickly 8made up. Paul soon 9brought his friend George Harrison out of the group.

In 1958 John was becoming closer to his mother again when sadly she was 10run over in a car accident and killed. John started 11walking out with a girl he met at art school called Cynthia Powell. In 1960 he 12moved off with his friend Stu Sutcliffe who also joined the group, 13coming off with the name of the Beatles. In 1960 they 14set off for Hamburg to play at a nightclub. When they finally 15came up to Liverpool in 1962 they had an audition with George Martin at Parlophone. They 16signed across and recorded their first single, Love Me Do, which became an immediate hit. The rest is history.

HOW DO YOU USUALLY GET OUT OF BED?

Ask and answer these questions with a partner or write down your answers.

1. How do you usually get out of bed during the week?
2. How do you usually get out of bed at the weekend?
3. How do you usually get out of the house?
4. How do you usually get to work or to school?
5. How do you usually get back home?
6. How do you usually sit on the sofa when you get home?
7. How do you usually get into bed?
8. How do you usually go up the stairs?
9. How do you usually get down the stairs?
10. How do you usually get back home on Saturday night?

4 Teaching Tips

Below are some tips to help teaching phrasal verbs which should be taken into account even when they are not the main focus of the lesson.

1 ALWAYS TRY TO SHOW CONNECTIONS.

When phrasal verbs come up in class you it is useful to explain them by comparing or contrasting with other examples to help students see relationships and patterns, and to increase their vocabulary. i.e. If the phrasal verb “**send in**” appears in a text and you are asked to explain it you could

compare it to:

- **write in**
- **phone in**

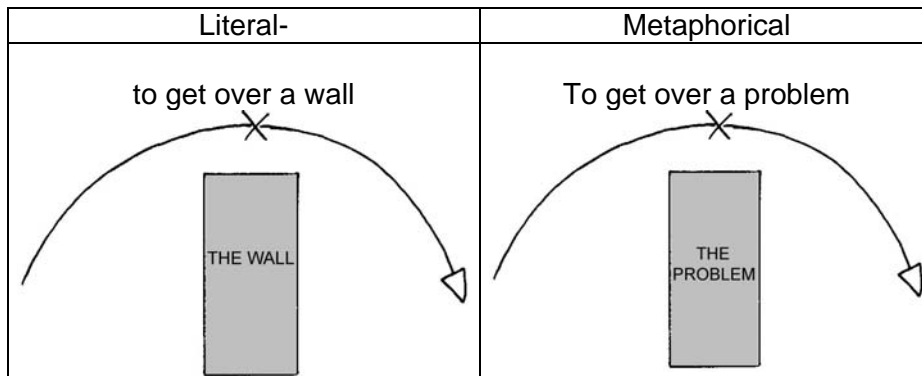
and contrast it with:

- **send out**

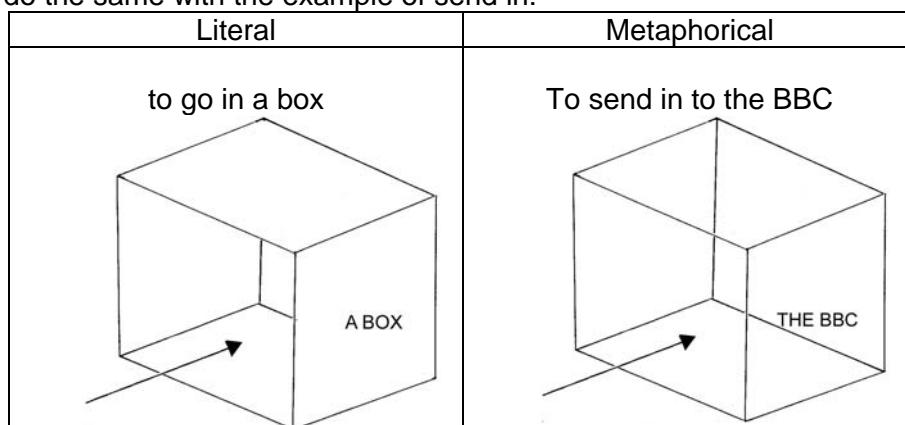
2 SHOW LINKS BETWEEN LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL MEANINGS.

Try to show that many phrasal verbs have literal meanings or are closely linked to the literal meaning, possibly being a metaphorical extension of this literal meaning.

i.e. The common phrasal verb **get over** (a difficulty, an illness) is clearly related to the literal meaning. It is possible to illustrate this relation:



We can do the same with the example of send in:



3 USE CONFUSIONS AND MISTAKES.

Students often confuse the use of different particles (i.e. He sat in/on the car, or he fell over/down). These confusions can be used to explain the differences between particles and by comparing the with other examples (i.e. he lies in/on the bed or he was knocked over/down), they can show how particle meanings are constant.

4 DON'T AVOID USING PHRASAL VERBS.

Even when not specifically teaching phrasal verbs remember to use them in class, even at low levels. Don't shy away from them. For example, don't use "enter" instead of **go in** or "communicate" instead of **get through**. Familiarity with phrasal verbs from the beginning will help students at a later date.