

12 Phrasal Verbs with Back

(verb + back)

Phrasal verbs, as you know, are a real tricky business for learners. Although there are some strategies and explanations to understand how they work, it's virtually impossible in many cases to guess their meaning if they are out of context; and it's still tough even when we come across them in a given context.

However, in some rare but fortunate cases, we can easily guess the meaning of the phrasal verb. This is what happens to most **phrasals with *back* (adverb)**, which have the implicit meaning of “returning something/somewhere”.

So in this post I will show you **12 phrasal verbs with back** – as I like to call them – which I think are essential nowadays. So soon you can start using them and recalling their meaning next time you see or hear them. Let's begin!

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1. Give sth. back to s.o. / Give s.o. back something

Don't you just hate it when you lend someone a book and they never return it to you? Well, in this case you could say to this person:

Hey man, could you give me back my book when you finish reading it?

2. Go/Come/Get back somewhere

Imagine you've been to the most amazing place ever: a magnificent beach, a charming historic town or an exceptional ski resort. When you return from your trip, you can tell your friends:

It's been an amazing experience! We need to go back there together.

3. Take sth. back

When you buy something but it turns out that it doesn't fit you or that it's faulty, you can say something like:

Oh heck! Now I need to take it back to the store.

Also, in a more figurative meaning, when we say something hurtful or controversial and regret having said it, we can say:

I'm so sorry, I wish I could take it back.

4. Smile back at s.o.

Remember that time you liked a girl in school and you stared at her and smiled to get her attention? Well, if you were lucky enough, she would smile back at you. Then you would go running to your closest friend and say:

Hey! I think she does like me. She smiled back at me in class!

5. Talk back to s.o.

We've all been teenagers and had some arguments with our parents, haven't we? One of the things teenagers are best at is talking back to their parents, which means "to reply back defiantly and insolently." I can still hear my dad say something like:

Don't you dare talk back to me, young man!

Of course, as any other teenager, I wasn't too good at obeying.

6. Write back to s.o.

Whenever we write an email to a friend, we normally expect a response. In fact, we usually even ask for it like this:

Please, write back ASAP and tell me all about your trip.

7. Get back to s.o.

In a similar way to the previous phrasal verb, this one also refers to providing someone with an answer. For example, imagine that you call a music store to find out if your favourite band's latest album is already in stock. The person who answers the phone may not know for sure, so he or she could say:

I'm not sure, sir. I'll check with the manager and get back to you in a minute.

8. Call s.o. back

So you're talking on your phone while you enter your building. You live in the seventh floor and wisely take the elevator. We all know that phone conversations are prone to break up in elevators. Therefore, before you get in the elevator, you can tell the person on the other end of the line:

Hold on a sec, I'm getting in the lift. I'll call you back in a minute, okay?

9. Put sth. back

Say you're in a bookshop and you grab a couple of books and take them to the counter to pay for them. Suddenly, realise you only have cash to pay for one of them. You decide to lose your turn and go back to where you found the book. If the shop assistant is kind enough, he or she will say:

Oh, don't worry. Leave this one here and I'll put it back for you.

This would mean that the shop assistant is going to return the book to the shelf you found it in.

10. Win s.o. back

This phrasal is quite often used with a very romantic touch. Imagine the good guy in a romcom whose old girlfriend, with whom he's still madly in love, is going to marry the bad guy, whom we all hate from the very beginning of the film. He could say to his ever-understanding friend:

Man, I really need to win her back.

Then he goes and interrupts the wedding in the most inconsiderate but romantic way, and she confesses that she never stopped loving him, or not!

11. Love/like s.o. back

So you like this person who is completely out of your league and you know it. You can tell your friend:

Oh man, she's never gonna love me back, is she?

12. Fight back s.o. or sth.

Remember that person who bullied you in school or high school? Did you ever stand up to him and said “enough is enough”? If you did, you may have ended up having a physical confrontation which you may have had to explain to your parents like this:

I was tired of him bullying me, so I decided it was time to fight back.

This phrasal verb does not necessarily involve physical confrontation, as it can be used in other contexts, like fighting back an unfair political system.

Now that you know how these phrasal verbs work, you can guess the meanings of others like “pay s.o. back”, “hit s.o. back” or “run/walk back somewhere”.

However, take into account that not all phrasal verbs with “back” have a similar meaning. For instance, we have the phrasal verbs “sit back” or “look back”, in which “back” means literally the opposite direction to the one someone is facing.

I hope you found this post useful. If you did, don't forget to share with your friends and family. 😊

I'll see you in the next post. Until then, don't forget to keep smiling!

This post has been written by Luis Porras Wadley. Luis is the creator of KSE Academy, an online academy based in Granada and an official Cambridge Exam Preparation Centre. As an English teacher, Luis has been preparing candidates for over 10 years. He has also published popular exam preparation books like Speaking First, Speaking CAE, Speaking CPE, Use of English C1, Writing C1 o The Ultimate B2 First Writing Guide.