

49. FOCUS ON: combinations of *get*, *right*, *back*, and *to*

The focus of this section is an expanded definition of the two-word phrasal verb **get to** and the three-word phrasal verb **get back to**. The purpose is to try to make some sense out of a seemingly limitless number of idiomatic combinations of *get*, *to*, and various particles and adverbs, in particular *right* and *back*, and to demonstrate that many phrasal verbs comprised of *get* and a particle are actually variations of **get to** that can be modified with *right* and/or *back*.

Remember that *back* is sometimes part of a phrasal verb and sometimes an adverb used to modify a phrasal verb (review Section 26), although we will see that there is often no difference in meaning between the phrasal verb **get back** (to), discussed in Section 42, and the phrasal verb **get to** modified by back (**get back to**).

The numbers in the chart correspond with the meanings in the definitions.

get to

1. Although the phrasal verb **get to** is defined here as meaning arrive, it can be understood as the basis for some of the phrasal verbs that were discussed in Section 42:

*Bill **got to** Peoria.* (Bill arrived in Peoria.)

Bill got back to Peoria. (Bill returned to Peoria.)

*Bill **got up** to Peoria.* (Bill arrived in Peoria from the south.)

Bill got down to Peoria. (Bill arrived in Peoria from the north.)

two-word phrasal verb <i>get to</i>			
arrive at a location, reach a level	start	be permitted or allowed to do something	bother, annoy
<p>1</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) to _____ (<i>back</i>) a place</p> <p>basis for:</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>back</i> to</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>up</i> (to)</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>down</i> (to)</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>over</i> (to)</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>out</i> (to)</p>	<p>3</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>to</i> _____ (<i>back</i>) something you want or need to do</p>	<p>5</p> <p><i>get to</i> _____ do something</p>	<p>6</p> <p>_____ <i>get to</i> _____ something someone</p>
<p>2</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>to</i> _____ (<i>back</i>) a level, amount, number</p> <p>basis for:</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>back</i> (to)</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>up</i> (to)</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>down</i> (to)</p>	<p>4</p> <p><i>get to</i> _____ doing something gradually</p>	<p>three-word phrasal verb <i>get back to</i></p> <p>contact some again</p> <p>1</p> <p><i>get</i> (<i>right</i>) <i>back to</i> _____</p>	

*Bill **got over** to Peoria.* (Bill arrived in Peoria from the east or west.)

*Bill **got out** to Peoria.* (Bill arrived in Peoria from the east or from a larger city.)

We see that **get back** (to), **get up** (to), **get down** (to), **get over** (to), and **get out** (to) are variations of **get to** but with additional information. These verbs can be modified with *right*, meaning *immediately*, *quickly*, or *directly* (see Section 10):

*Bill **got right back** to Peoria.* (Bill returned to Peoria quickly.)

Get to work has two meanings, similar but not the same. **Get to work** can refer to *an arrival at a place where someone works*:

*Ann **got to** work.* (Ann arrived at the place where she works.)

But **get to work** (see meaning 3) can also mean *start working*, without any reference to a change of location:

*Joe **got to** work.* (Joe started working.)

*Joe **got back to** work.* (Joe started working again.)

*Joe **got right to** work.* (Joe started working immediately.)

*Joe **got right back to** work.* (Joe started working again immediately.)

The difference in these two meanings is illustrated by the following sentence:

*I **got to** work at 9:00, but I didn't **get to** work until 10:00, which can paraphrased as I arrived at my office at 9:00, but I didn't start working until 10:00.*

2. Although the phrasal verb **get to** is defined here as meaning *reach a certain level, number, or amount*, it can be understood as the basis for some of the phrasal verbs discussed in Section 42:

*Jane **got to** 120 pounds.*

*Jane **got back to** 120 pounds.* (Jane weighs 120 pounds again.)

*Jane **got up to** 120 pounds.* (Jane used to weigh less than 120 pounds.)

*Jane **got down to** 120 pounds.* (Jane used to weigh more than 120 pounds.)

We see that **get back** (to), **get up** (to), and **get down** (to) are variations of **get to** but with additional information.

Get up (to) and **get down** (to) can be modified by *back*:

*Jane **got back up to** 120 pounds.* (Jane used to weigh 120 pounds, lost weight, and then gained it back.)

*Jane **got back down to** 120 pounds.* (Jane used to weigh 120 pounds, gained weight, and then lost it.)

3. If you start to do something, you **get to** it:

*I'll try to **get to** my homework after dinner.*

If you start to do something, stop doing it, and then later start to do it again, you **get back to** it:

*I'll try to **get back to** my homework after dinner.*

If you start to do something, stop doing it, and then later quickly start to do it again, you **get right back to** it:

*I'll try to **get right back to** my homework after dinner.*

Remember that when both *right* and *back* are used, *right* always comes first:

*~~I'll try to **get back right to** my homework after dinner.~~*

get back to

1. **Get back to** is a three-word verb meaning *talk to someone again later*. **Get back to** does not vary in form — neither *back* nor *to* is optional.

Infinitive				
	present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
dog up	clog up & clogs up	dogging up	clogged up	clogged up

1. **clog... up** *p.v.* When people or things **clog up** a drain or something else that liquids must flow through, they put something in it that prevents water or other liquids from going through it or that prevents it from working properly.

*Don't pour that bacon grease in the sink — you'll **clog** the drain **up**.*

*Dr. Smith said my arteries were so **clogged up** by plaque deposits that it was a miracle I was still alive.*

clogged up *part.adj.* When a drain or something else that liquids must flow through is **clogged up**, something is in it that prevents water or other liquids from going through it or that prevents it from working properly.

*The mechanic told me that the engine valves in my car were **clogged up**.*

get ahead

get ahead & gets ahead	getting ahead	got ahead	gotten/got ahead
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1. **get ahead** *p.v.* When you **get ahead**, you become more successful and make progress in your job or your life.

*With your pessimistic attitude, you'll never **get ahead**.*

***Getting ahead** is pretty easy when your father owns the company.*

get back to

get back to & gets back to	getting back to	got back to	gotten/got back to
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1. **get back to** *p.v.* When you **get back to** people, you talk to them later, usually because you do not have time to talk to them at the time or because you will have information for them later that you do not have now.

*I don't have time to talk now; I'm really busy. Can I **get back to** you ?*

*That real estate agent still hasn't **gotten back to** me to let me know if our offer was accepted.*

Infinitive				
	present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
get on	get on & gets on	getting on	got on	gotten/got on

1. **get on** *p.v.* When you move your body toward something and stand, sit, or lie on it, you **get on** it.

*The nurse asked me to take off my shirt and **get on** the examination table.*

*If you **get on** that chair you can reach the top shelf.*

2. **get on** p.v. When you mount an animal, bicycle, motorcycle, and so on, you **get on** it.

***Getting on** a camel isn't as easy as **getting on** a horse.*

*The children **got back on** their bikes and went home.*

3. **get on** p.v. When you enter a bus, train, airplane, ship, and so on, you **get on** it.

*The bus stopped so that I could **get on**.*

*Only people who are going on the cruise can **get on** the ship.*

4. **get... on** p.v. When you **get** an item of clothing **on**, you put it on your body.

Get your coat on. It's cold outside.

*These gloves are too small. I can't **get** them **on**.*

5. **get on** (with) p.v. When you continue doing something, you **get on**, **get on** with what you were doing, or **get on** with it.

*It's getting late. If we're going to finish this work today we'd better **get on** with it.*

*I didn't say you could stop! **Get on** with your work.*

get to

get to & gets to

getting to

got to

gotten/got to

1. **get... to** p.v. When you **get to** a place, you arrive there. When you **get** people to a place, you help them to go there or take them there. When you **get to** work, you arrive at the place where you work.

*Sarah left her house at 8:30 and **got to** the beach at 9:15.*

*When I **get to** Tokyo, I'll call to let you know I arrived safely.*

*Frank got fired because he kept **getting to** work late.*

*I went to the restaurant across the street for lunch, and I didn't **get back to** work until 2:30.*

2. **get to** p.v. When things or people **get to** a certain level, number, or amount, they reach it.

*It sure was hot yesterday. It must have **gotten to** 100 degrees.*

*When I run, I always try to **get to** five miles before I quit.*

3. **get to** p.v. When you **get to** something that you want or need to do, you find the time to do it. When you **get to** work, you start working.

*I didn't have time to do the ironing last night. I'll try to **get to** it tonight.*

*Karen finally **got back to** her school project yesterday. She hadn't worked on it for weeks.*

*You've wasted the entire morning. When are you going to **get to** work?*

*My boss told me to get off the phone and **get back to** work.*

4. **get to** p.v. [informal] When you **get to** doing something, you begin to do it gradually.

*Dad **got to** thinking that maybe we ought to move to Los Angeles and try to find work there.*

After seeing all those strange lights in the sky, I **got to** wondering if maybe UFOs really exist after all.

5. get to p.v. When you **get to** do something, you are allowed to do it or are able to do it.

Timmy was excited because he **got to** ride a pony.

I hope I **get to** shake the President's hand after his speech.

6. get to p.v. When something **gets to** you, it bothers or annoys you, either psychologically or physically.

Jim's constant complaining is really starting to **get to** his wife.

Let's sit down and rest — this heat is **getting to** me.

Infinitive

	present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
hang on	hang on & hangs on	hanging on	hung on	hung on

1. hang on (to) p.v. When you **hang on** or **hang on** to something, you hold it tightly so that you will not fall or be hurt. **Hold on** is similar to **hang on**.

I fell off the horse because I wasn't **hanging on** tightly enough.

If she'd **hung on** to my hand, she wouldn't have fallen off the cliff.

2. hang on p.v. [informal] When you **hang on**, you wait for a short time. **Hold on** is the same as **hang on**.

Hang on for a minute — I'll be right back.

Judy's coming to the phone now — can you **hang on**?

start off

start off & starts off off	starting off	started off	started
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1. start off (with/by) p.v. When an activity or event **starts off**, it begins. When you **start** an activity or event **off** with something, you begin with it. When you **start** an activity or event **off** by doing something, you begin by doing it.

The singer **started** the concert **off** with a song from her latest CD.

Many speakers like to **start off a** speech by telling a joke.

2. start off p.v. When people or things **start off** a certain way, they are this way at the beginning of a process that changes them. **Start out** is similar to **start off**.

The day **started** off nice, but it got cold and cloudy.

I thought the movie was good, but it **started** off kind of boring.

Infinitive

	present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
throw away	throw away & throws	throwing away	threw away	thrown away

1. throw... away p.v. When you **throw** something **away**, you dispose of it by

putting it in the wastebasket, trash, and so on. **Throw out** is the same as **throw away**.
*If you're finished with these papers, **throw them away**.*

*Nancy's outside looking in the trash for her wedding ring; it was accidentally **thrown away**.*

2. throw... away p.v. When you **throw away** something important or valuable, you foolishly do something that causes you to lose it.

*This is your last chance to save your marriage, so don't **throw it away**.*

*When I got mad and quit my job, I **threw away** a chance to become vice-president of the company.*

EXERCISE 49a — Complete the sentences with phrasal verbs from this section. Be sure the phrasal verbs are in the correct tense.

1. We were lucky that the floodwater didn't _____ the second floor.
2. These steps have ice on them, so _____ to my arm.
3. I usually _____ work at 8:40.
4. It's important to _____ your day _____ with a good breakfast.
5. I never used to care about Maria's bad attitude, but now it's starting to _____ me.
6. I'm a little busy now. Give me your phone number, and I'll _____ right _____ you.
7. Go _____ your shoes _____ — we're leaving in a minute.
8. Ann cut her hair in the bathroom, and she _____ the sink _____ with hair.
9. Don't let the baby _____ the table — he might fall off.
10. If you hadn't _____ the theater late, you wouldn't have missed the beginning of the movie.
11. _____ all that junk in the garage made a lot more room.
12. As Jerry was _____ the train, he realized that he had forgotten his ticket.
13. Whenever I _____ feeling depressed, I call my mother.
14. If you want to _____ in this world, you need a good education.
15. The trail to the top of the mountain _____ level, but then it gets steeper and steeper.
16. Maybe you should _____ with your work and stop wasting time.
17. _____ for a couple of minutes — I'm almost ready.
18. This is a great opportunity. Don't be stupid and _____ it _____.
19. I know you're busy, but when do you think you might have time to _____ back _____ fixing that leak in the roof?
20. I waited outside Mr. Baker's office for two hours, but I never _____ talk to him.
21. Madeleine fell off her bike, but she _____ right back _____ again.
22. _____ work! This has to be finished in three hours, and you haven't even started.

EXERCISE 49b — Write answers to the questions using phrasal verbs and participle adjectives from this section. Be sure the phrasal verbs are in the correct tense.

1. Linda's three-year-old daughter can't put her shoes on. What can't Linda's three-year-old daughter do?
2. Luis started to feel a little depressed. What did Luis do?
3. Marvin had a nice family and a good job, but he lost them because of drugs. What did Marvin do to his family and job?

4. After I take a break, I'm going to continue working immediately. What am I going to do?
5. Betty doesn't have the information I want, so she's going to call me when she does. What is Betty going to do?
6. The sewer drain became blocked by dead leaves. What happened to the sewer drain?
7. In Question 6, how would you describe the sewer drain after it became blocked?
8. Ned has never arrived at his office after 9:30. What has Ned never done?
9. You continued with your work. What did you do?
10. When the temperature inside the turkey reaches 190 degrees, take it out of the oven.
When should the turkey be taken out of the oven?
11. Bill said that he couldn't wait any longer. What did Bill say?
12. My taxes are due in three days, so I've got to do them tonight. What have I got to do?
13. Sam's birth certificate must have been accidentally put in the trash. What must have happened to Sam's birth certificate?
14. Dan showed me how to mount a horse. What did Dan show me?
15. Their marriage began well, but things got worse. What did their marriage do?
16. My brother told me that I shouldn't let it bother me. What did my brother tell me?
17. Alex was allowed to pet a baby tiger at the zoo. What happened to Alex?
18. The mountain climber held the rope tightly. What did the mountain climber do?
19. Mike went to the diving board and stood on it. What did Mike do?
20. The bus driver stepped out of the bus to check the tires, and then he entered the bus again immediately. What did the bus driver do after he checked the tires?
21. It's been only fifteen minutes since Heather left. She could not have arrived at the airport already.
What couldn't Heather have done already?
22. The salesperson always begins his presentation by introducing himself. What does the salesperson always do?
23. Having an MBA should help you to progress in your career. What should an MBA do?

EXERCISE 49c — Write five original sentences using *get to* and *get back to*. Try to use *right* and *back* in some of the sentences.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

EXERCISE 49d, Review — Complete the sentences with these phrasal verbs from previous sections. Be sure the phrasal verbs are in the correct tense. To check their meanings, review the section number given after each one.

close down, 48	get over, 42	look down on, 48	switch on, 48
come in/into, 47	knock out, 48	look up to, 48	throw out, 48
cut back, 47	know about, 33	put back, 48	trick into, 35
get off on, 40	let in/into, 41	switch off, 48	turn down, 45

1. The company has decided to save money by _____ on advertising.
2. Look at the arrival monitor to see if his plane has _____ yet.
3. That sneaky car salesperson _____ me _____ paying for a lot of options I didn't want.
4. Those shoes are so ugly. Why don't you just _____ them _____?
5. Anyone who has done as much good for other people as he has deserves to be _____.
6. Charles used to _____ me because he went to college and I didn't.
7. What do you _____ changing the meeting from Tuesday to Wednesday? No one has said anything to me about it.
8. The opening of the new factory had to be _____ because some equipment hadn't been delivered.
9. Janice loves to cook, and she especially _____ baking fancy pastries.
10. The antigovernment newspaper was _____ by the dictator.
11. Rio de Janeiro is so beautiful. It _____ me _____ when I saw it.
12. Jim asked Lydia to marry him, but she _____ him _____.
13. That chimney is _____ a lot of cold air _____.
14. Most people _____ a cold in four or five days.
15. If it gets too cold in here, _____ the air conditioner.
16. Could you _____ the lights _____ please, it's getting dark.