

18. FOCUS ON: phrasal verbs and **can, could, will, and would**

Can, could, will, and would are *modal auxiliary verbs*, often called *modals*. Modals are very important in English, but they can be confusing because they are used to say many different things. Here is a basic review of **can, could, will, and would** and their most common uses.

Could is used as the past tense of **can**:

I can't **come over** tonight.

I couldn't **come over** last night.

Would is used as the past tense of **will** (the future use of **will** has already been discussed in Section 15) to talk about something that was future in the past:

I didn't buy that nice coat for my son because I knew he would quickly **grow out of it**.

Would is used in place of **will** when repeating someone else's words:

She said she would **get** next Friday off.

Would is used as the past tense of **will** to talk about a repeated past action:

When I worked as a bank guard, I would **stand around** all day doing nothing.

Normally, **can, could, will, and would** have different uses, and it is important to use the correct one; however, in one special case — making requests — they can be used with very little difference in meaning:

Can you **get off** the couch?

Could you **get off** the couch?

Will you **get off** the couch?

Would you **get off** the couch?

Can and **could** are used, with little difference in meaning, to ask for permission:

Can I **think about** it before I make a decision?

Could I **think about** it before I make a decision?

Can, could, will, and would are used in **conditional** sentences. Conditional means that a condition, usually stated in an **if clause**, must be satisfied for the **main clause** to be true.

When the condition is something that is actually possible, the verb in the **if clause** is normally in the present tense. If the condition in the **if clause** is something that could not actually be true, the past tense form of the verb is used.

When the condition in the **if clause** is something that is actually possible, **can** is used in the main clause to discuss a real ability:

If I have a car, I can **come over**.

When the condition in the **if clause** is something that is actually possible, **will** is used in the main clause to discuss a real willingness or intention:

If I have a car, I will **come over**.

When the condition in the **if clause** is not something that is actually possible, **could** is used in the main clause to discuss an unreal or imaginary ability:

If I had a car, I could **come over**.

When the condition in the **if clause** is not something that is actually possible, **would** is used in the main clause to discuss an unreal or imaginary willingness or intention:

If I had a car, I would **come over**.

Either the **if** clause or main clause can occur first in a sentence, with a slight change in punctuation:

If I had a car, I would **come over**. I
would **come over** if I had a car.

Infinitive

present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
breakthrough			
breakthrough & breaks through	breaking through	broke through	broken

1. **breakthrough** p.v. When you use force to go through a wall or other barrier, you **break through** it.

The thieves **broke through** the wall of the jewelry store.

The attackers couldn't **break through** the thick walls of the fort.

2. **breakthrough** p.v. When you cannot do something because of a problem and you find a way to solve or eliminate the problem, you **breakthrough**.

After the problem of tissue rejection is **broken through**, organ transplants will become more common.

It took three days of negotiation, but we finally **broke through** the deadlock.

breakthrough n. An important discovery or development that solves or eliminates a problem that is preventing you from doing something is a **breakthrough**.

Dr. Wood announced an important **breakthrough** in the search for a cure for AIDS.

figure on

figure on & figures on on	figuring on	figured on	figured
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1. **figure on** p.v. When you **figure on** something, you expect it or plan for it.

/ didn't **figure on** such cold weather. I wish I'd brought a coat.

You can **figure on** spending a least hundred bucks if you're going to that restaurant.

Infinitive

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

1. **get off** p.v. When you **get off** a bus, airplane, or train, you leave it.

The bus stopped and I **got off**.

You can't **get off** the train while it's moving.

2. **get off** p.v. When you are standing, lying, or sitting on something, such as a horse, bicycle, motorcycle, stage, platform, or piece of furniture, and you step down from it onto the ground, you **get off** it.

You're so lazy. Why don't you **get off** the couch and help me? **Get off** your bicycle and come inside.

3. **get off** p.v. When you are standing within an area of ground, or on something that covers an area of ground, and you move to the side of it and step off of it, you **get off** it.

The referee told the player to **get off** the field. You're standing on our beach blanket — **get off** it!

4. **get... off** p.v. When you **get** something **off**, you remove it even though it may be difficult.

I can't **get** this paint **off** my hands. The top of this bottle is on so tight I cannot **get it off**.

5. **get... off** p.v. When you **get** a certain period of time **off**, you are allowed by your employer to miss work during this period.

Pregnant women usually **get** three months **off** with pay. Could I **get** tomorrow morning **off** to go to the doctor?

6. **get off** p.v. When you **get off**, or **get off** work, you finish that day's work and leave your place of employment.

Sally said she wouldn't **get off** work until 6:00. I haven't **gotten** off early all week.

7. **get... off** p.v. When you do something wrong but are not punished, or you are punished only lightly for it, you **get off**. Someone who helps you to avoid punishment **gets** you **off**.

He killed four people, but he **got off** with only three years in jail. If his lawyer hadn't been so incompetent, he would have **gotten** him off with a lighter sentence.

8. **get off** p.v. When you stop talking on the telephone, you **get off** the telephone.

Get off the phone — I need to use it! It's late, we'd better **get off** the phone.

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Infinitive

	present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
go	go beyond & goes beyond	going beyond	went beyond	gone beyond

1. **go beyond** p.v. When people or things are better or worse, or do something in a better or worse way than is normal or expected, they **go beyond** what is normal or expected.

Did you say Jackson's new book is good? I think it **goes beyond** good — it's fantastic! Sam's wife discovered that he wasn't just friends with his secretary; their relationship **went** way **beyond** friendship.

lift upon

lift up & lifts up	lifting up	lifted up	lifted up
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1. **lift... up** p.v. When you **lift up** something, you use your hands to raise it above the surface that it was on.

That rock is too heavy — I can't **lift it up**. **Lift up** the cover and look in the box.

line up

line up & lines up	lining up	lined up	lined up
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1. **line... up** p.v. When people or things form a row, they **line up**. When you arrange people or things so that they form a row, you **line** them **up**.

People **lined up** to buy Superbowl tickets. Timmy is **lining** his toy cars **up**.

lined up part.adj. People or things that form a row are **lined up**.

People have been **lined up** outside the box office for three days. The children are **lined up** for attendance.

2. **line... up** p.v. When something **lines up** with something else, or when you **line up** something with something else, it is positioned correctly in relation to something else.

If this bolt doesn't **line up** with that hole, the lock won't work. The holes in part A have to **line up** with the holes in part B before you screw them together.

3. **line... up** p.v. When you arrange for someone or something to be available at a future activity or event, you **line** that thing or person **up**.

/ couldn't **line** a clown **up** for Susie's birthday party.

Who have they **lined up** for the show?

lined up part.adj. Someone or something that you have arranged to be available for a future activity or event is **lined up**.

Don't worry about the show; everything is **lined**

up.

The singer is **lined up**, but the band isn't.

lineup n. The people or things planned for an event are the **lineup**.

The network has planned quite a **lineup** of entertainers for the half-time special.

There's always a trapeze act in the circus **lineup**.

Infinitive

	present tense	-ing form	past tense	past participle
stand				
stand around & stands around	standing around	stood around	stood around	

1. **stand around** p.v. When you **stand around**, you stand in a place wasting time and not doing anything useful.

/ have all this work to do, and you guys just **stand around** watching me. The manager told them to stop **standing around** and get to work.

tell apart

tell apart & tells apart	telling apart	told apart	told apart
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1. **tell... apart** p.v. When it is possible to see how two similar things are different, you can **tell** them **apart**.

The twins are identical; no one can **tell** them **apart**. All the puppies look the same, and I have a hard time **telling** them **apart**.

EXERCISE 18a — Complete the sentences with phrasal verbs from this section. Be sure the phrasal verbs are in the correct tense.

- Could you _____ the phone? I want to make an important call.
- Neither side would give an inch. There was no way to _____ the stalemate.
- If you put this fake Rolex watch next to a real one, you can _____ them _____ easily.
- Jim wanted to go to a movie tonight, but I told him I wouldn't _____ work until late.
- If the holes don't _____, the screws won't go in.
- There weren't any chairs at the party, so we just _____ talking.
- I told Frank that his drinking problem isn't just hurting him; it _____ that — it's hurting his family, too.
- The lawyer was sure he could _____ him _____ with only two years in prison.
- When I took this job after I finished high school, I never _____ spending thirty-five years here.

10. Mother was the last one to _____ the airplane.
11. Bob _____ everything in his cabinet so that it's easy to find what he's looking for.
12. Lydia told me she would try to _____ three weeks _____ so we can go on vacation.
13. There were police barricades around the palace, but some of the protesters _____.
14. Children, stop jumping on the bed with your dirty shoes. _____ right now!
15. Can you _____ the TV while I put the VCR under it?
16. Some CDs come wrapped in plastic that's almost impossible to _____.
17. I couldn't _____ a magician for the birthday party.
18. _____ the carpet. I just shampooed it.

EXERCISE 18b — 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. Paul said he would remove his cat from the table. What did Paul say?
2. I can't see any difference between the original and the copy. What can't I do?
3. Erik can't raise the box of books because it's too heavy. What can't Erik do?
4. Bill said he hadn't expected snow in May. What did Bill say?
5. Nancy arranged for a great band to play at the prom next week. What did Nancy do?
6. In Question 5, how would you describe the band?
7. Jerry thought the problem with his car is that it needs a tune-up, but the mechanic said it's worse than that. What did the mechanic say?
8. The soldiers smashed a hole in the wall and entered the city. What did the soldiers do to the wall?
9. Carlos stops working at 5:00 everyday. What does Carlos do at 5:00 everyday?
10. You were arrested for drunken driving, but the judge gave you only a warning. What did you do?
11. The teacher moved all the desks in his classroom so that they were in straight rows. What did the teacher do?
12. In Question 11, how would you describe the desks?
13. She asked me if I would stop talking on the telephone. What did she say?

14. I stood at the bus stop for an hour waiting for the bus. What did I do for an hour?
15. The personnel manager at my new job said I wouldn't have to work on Sundays. What did the personnel manager say?
16. When you put a doorknob on a door, the two sides have to be directly across from each other. How do the two sides have to be?
17. Sam stepped from the train. What did Sam do?
18. Mark's father told him to move from the grass to the sidewalk. What did Mark's father tell Mark?

EXERCISE 18c — Complete these sentences, using your own words, with phrasal verbs from this section or previous sections.

1. Last week, he couldn't _____.
2. When I was younger, I could _____.
3. He'll _____.
4. When I _____, I would _____.
5. Could you _____?
6. Would you _____?
7. Can I _____?
8. Could I _____?

EXERCISE 18d, 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.

believe in, 16	go along with, 3	hold off, 16
carry on, 16	go for, 16	put past, 16
come over, 17	go with, 15	tell on, 15
come through, 15	grow out of, 17	think about, 16
count on, 16	head back, 15	
get through, 16	head for, 15	

1. I suggested that we go to Paris, and she really _____ the idea.
2. After I _____ it, I decided not to take the job.
3. I _____ buying a new computer because I thought they would be on sale in January.
4. Do you think this yellow tie _____ this blue shirt?
5. Her uncle promised to pay for her wedding, and he _____.
6. It's very important that you do this work correctly. I'm _____ you.
7. Timmy broke a window, and his sister _____ him.
8. The detective asked me if Jake had robbed the liquor store, and I said I didn't know but that I wouldn't _____ it _____ him.

9. Todd said he would _____ to my house after dinner and help me with my homework.
10. The reason Charles is vice-president of the company is that he _____ the boss on every decision.
11. Tomorrow I'm going to leave Winnipeg and _____ Toronto.
12. I probably won't _____ to Winnipeg for a month or more.
13. I didn't get Sally what she wanted for her birthday, and she _____ about it all day.
14. You have so much work to do. When do you think you'll _____?
15. I bought these pants for my son a month ago, and he's _____ them already.
16. Ned didn't _____ UFOs until he saw one.