

## PHRASAL VERB STORIES

Students' nightmare and teachers' delight – phrasal verbs. We tell students that they're so important to learn because they're used so much in everyday English. If students don't use them they'll sound stiff, formal and unnatural, and if they don't understand them they'll find themselves in difficulty when people use them all the time. So we rub our hands with glee and send our students off to study and memorise them and then they do some frustrating exercise which they get half wrong – and therefore we tell them to go back to studying them.

OK, perhaps it doesn't always go quite like that. However, phrasal verbs ARE notoriously difficult for students to learn, especially if they're the ones where the component parts taken in isolation throw little if any light on the meaning of the multi-word verb e.g. *make up* (after a quarrel), *take up* (a sport, hobby etc.). One way I've tried to help students tackle this area is by finding a picture story (you'll find at least one in every coursebook, and comics, magazines, newspaper cartoon strips etc are a fruitful source) and then writing a simple story which narrates the main events in the picture sequence. The trick is then to insert *as naturally as possible* a limited number of phrasal verbs which, you hope, students will learn as part of having to engage with the story in a variety of ways.

The classroom procedure is as follows – to demonstrate the procedure I'm using a picture sequence from Teaching Tenses by Rosemary Aitken ( ). This particular lesson has two versions, one for Pre-Intermediate and one with Intermediate and upwards. However, the techniques can be used for any level – just change the verbs.

Some of this procedure draws on the ideas I wrote about in my 'Lions' Den' contribution to the last issue of the MATEFL newsletter.

### **STAGE 1: ENGAGING THE STUDENTS' INTEREST**

- 1 Tell students they're going to be 'doing' a story about .... (a disastrous day)
- 2 Cut up the pictures, mount each one on card (and laminate for long-lasting use, if you can).
- 3 Enlarge two of the pictures – A4 size if you can. It's best if the two pictures are as unrelated as possible. Ask the class what they think might have happened in the story. Accept all possibilities, and don't say whether they're right or wrong.

### **STAGE 1 b OPTIONAL (this can be left out if you don't feel it's right for you or your class) SPEAKING - 'PICTURE ARTIST' INFORMATION GAP**

- 4 Divide the class into Team A and Team B. Ask each team to select an artist (they don't need to draw very well – stick figures will do.). Draw a line down the middle of the board. Each team's artist will draw on a different half of the board. So now the two teams sit as far away as possible from the board, at different sides of the classroom, whilst their artists stand at the board.

- 5 Give each team one of the two enlarged pictures, which they **must not show** to their Team Artist. Simultaneously, the two teams ‘dictate’ their picture to their Team Artist, who has to draw the picture as accurately as possible on the appropriate half of the board. Lots of ‘learning noise’ will be happening – all part of the fun. Set a (flexible) time limit for this. When they’ve finished, the two artists can look at the enlarged pictures, and each team looks at the other team’s enlarged picture. Congratulate the teams and the artists.

### **STAGE 2: SPEAKING – DESCRIBING PICTURES AND NARRATING A STORY (INFORMATION GAP)**

- 6 Tell the class that the two pictures form part of a sequence of pictures in a story. You are going to hand out the other pictures in the story. Students **must not show** their picture to anyone else.
- 7 Give each student one picture. Share if you have more than six students. If you have fewer than six, take a picture yourself and/or give some stronger students two or more pictures.
- 8 Tell the students that in a moment they’re going to describe their picture to the other students. The other students can ask questions for clarification. The idea is to guess the possible sequence of the pictures. Students mentally prepare, look up necessary vocabulary in their dictionaries, call you over for help in their preparation, etc. Students now proceed to describe their pictures. You might want to ask them to sit in the order their pictures come in the story.
- 9 When students think they have a logical sequence, put all the students’ pictures on the board or face upwards on the table so that everyone can see them. Ask if they want to change anything. The teacher now reads out the story (see the accompanying text) and students decide if their order was correct.

### **STAGE 3: LANGUAGE STUDY AND PRACTICE: VOCABULARY – PHRASAL VERBS**

- 10 Hand out the gapped text describing what happened that accompanies this article. Ask students to silently read through it and imagine the concepts/meanings/words that are missing.
- 11 Ask the students to put down their pens and to listen to the story again as you dictate it at a speed which is only slightly slower than natural speed. They *cannot write while you read*. As soon as you finish, they can write down any words they remember. Repeat this step two or three times (more than three will probably become frustrating). The important thing is that students can only write once you have finished reading.
- 12 Get students to help each other and then elicit/provide the answers.
- 13 Ask students to look at the pictures, cover the text, and mentally rehearse the story using as many of the phrasal verbs as possible.
- 14 In pairs, students re-tell the story to each other using the new phrasal verbs.

## VARIATION

1 You can leave out stages 1-8 and simply ask students to look at the picture sequence in the right order (see the accompanying pictures). Ask students to narrate the stories to themselves in their own mind.

2 Ask students to listen and look at the picture sequence while you read out your prepared text.

3 Continue with stages 10- 14 above.

Have fun!

*Alan Marsh*

PS. Yes, the purists will have noted that not all the verbs are strictly phrasal verbs. Some are prepositional verbs and others are verb + adjective collocations. That's why I prefer using the term **multi-word verbs**, which seems a useful umbrella term for these different grammatical categorisations.

## A Multi-Word Verb Story (Pictures from Teaching Tenses: R. Aitken )

### Intermediate and Upwards Version

#### Teacher's Text

Yesterday everything **went wrong** for Bill. He **woke up** late and **got dressed** quickly. He **knocked** the lamp **over** and had to **sweep up** the pieces. As he **rushed out of** the house his wallet **fell out** of his briefcase. He **ran for** the bus, but missed it. So he **jumped into** a taxi. Of course, he didn't have any money, the taxi driver **got angry**, and a fight **broke out**. Bill accidentally hit a policeman and **ended up** in jail.

#### Gapped Text

Yesterday everything 1) \_\_\_\_\_ for Bill. He 2) \_\_\_\_\_ late and 3) \_\_\_\_\_ quickly. He 4) \_\_\_\_\_ the lamp \_\_\_\_\_ and had to 5) \_\_\_\_\_ the pieces. As he 6) \_\_\_\_\_ the house his wallet 7) \_\_\_\_\_ of his briefcase. He 8) \_\_\_\_\_ the bus, but missed it. So he 9) \_\_\_\_\_ a taxi. Of course, he didn't have any money, the taxi driver 10) \_\_\_\_\_, and a fight 11) \_\_\_\_\_. Bill accidentally hit a policeman and 12) \_\_\_\_\_ in jail.

### Pre-Intermediate Version

#### Teacher's Text

Yesterday was a terrible day for Bill. He **woke up** late and **got dressed** quickly. He accidentally broke the lamp. As he **hurried out of** the house, his wallet **fell out** of his briefcase. He **ran for** the bus, but missed it. So he **got into** a taxi. Of course, he didn't have any money, the taxi driver **got angry**, and started a fight. Bill accidentally hit a policeman and **ended up** in jail.

#### Gapped Text

Yesterday Bill 1) \_\_\_\_\_ late and 2) \_\_\_\_\_ quickly. He accidentally broke the lamp. As he 3) \_\_\_\_\_ the house, his wallet 4) \_\_\_\_\_ of his briefcase. He 5) \_\_\_\_\_ the bus, but missed it. So he 6) \_\_\_\_\_ a taxi. Of course, he didn't have any money, the taxi driver 7) \_\_\_\_\_, and started a fight. Bill accidentally hit a policeman and 8) \_\_\_\_\_ in jail.