

English Grammar: Unnecessary Phrasal Verbs?

We often use a verb with a preposition to enhance or alter the meaning of the verb (phrasal verbs). However, sometimes these prepositions are not necessary, but they add a little 'color' to the language! Here are some examples:

to be stressed <i>out</i>	to be stressed to the limit <i>John seems really stressed out this week.</i>
to check <i>over</i>	to check thoroughly <i>I want you to check over this contract.</i>
to clean <i>out</i>	to clean, organize and remove trash <i>We need to clean out the garage this weekend.</i>
to clean <i>up</i>	to remove a mess <i>The kids have finished eating. Let me clean up.</i>
to cut <i>up</i>	to cut into pieces <i>I need to cut up the potatoes to make chips.</i>
to dry <i>out</i>	to dry completely <i>The tent should dry out before we pack.</i>
to fall <i>down/over</i>	to fall (<i>person, accidentally</i>) <i>He fell down while running to the bank.</i>
to fill <i>up</i>	to fill to the maximum <i>At the gas station: "Fill it up, please".</i>
to hand <i>over</i>	to give something to somebody under obligation <i>The police officer demanded that he hand over his license.</i>
to meet <i>up</i>	to meet (<i>informal situation</i>) <i>Let's meet up at the mall tomorrow.</i>
to note <i>down</i>	to note on paper <i>Teacher: "I want you to note down everything I say."</i>
to print <i>out</i>	to print on paper using a printer <i>I need to print out my report before 11am.</i>
to sit <i>down</i>	to sit <i>I need to sit down, I'm very tired.</i>
to sit <i>up</i>	to sit correctly <i>Teacher: "Everybody – sit up! The headmaster is coming."</i>
to try <i>out</i>	to try or experiment a new place or process <i>I really want to try out that new restaurant on 5th Avenue.</i>

Other examples

to build <i>up</i>	to increase
to calm <i>down</i>	to become calm
to charge <i>up</i>	to charge
to close <i>down</i>	to close permanently
to cool <i>down</i>	to become calm
to empty <i>out</i>	to empty completely
to flatten <i>out</i>	to flatten completely
to flip <i>over</i>	to turn 180 degrees
to shout <i>out</i>	to shout specific words
to tidy <i>up</i>	to tidy completely
to climb <i>up</i>	to climb
to pack <i>up</i>	to pack everything
to spell <i>out</i>	to spell slowly and clearly
to stand <i>up</i>	to stand (<i>get up from a chair</i>)
to start <i>off</i>	to start (<i>a long event</i>)
to start <i>out</i>	to start (<i>a long journey</i>)
to send out	to send a document (<i>to many people</i>)
to turn <i>around</i>	to turn 180 degrees
to write <i>down</i>	to write on paper
to write <i>up</i>	to write an academic paper or a report
to open <i>up</i>	to open completely
to open <i>out</i>	to open and lay flat
to contract <i>out</i>	to contract
to subcontract <i>out</i>	to subcontract
to test <i>out</i>	to test a new process or procedure