

Teaching a thematic “set” of phrasal verbs

Another way of teaching phrasal verbs is by teaching a thematic “set” of phrasal verbs. All the phrasal verbs are linked together by a common thread. Some examples of thematic sets would include relationships (ask out, break up, settle down, get along...), travel (go away, set off, take off, touch down...) or work (clock in, slack off, take on, wind up).

The following lesson is for intermediate students and is on the theme of “secrecy” and “holding and giving information”. It includes a speaking activity for students to personalise the newly learnt phrasal verbs. Click here to download it and let your students in on the secrets of phrasal verbs!

Teaching a “set” of phrasal verbs and personalising new phrasal verbs

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Lesson Aim: To present a set of 9 phrasal verbs. The phrasal verbs are all connected to the theme of giving and obtaining information. There is a recognition-based activity, followed by a speaking activity to incorporate the phrasal verbs into use.

Level: Intermediate

Teaching Approach: In this lesson, the phrasal verbs are all linked thematically. This helps provide a context from which their meaning can be more easily deduced. But it is not enough to just **present** a set of new phrasal verbs, even if they are more neatly organised into a category. As with other new items of vocabulary, learners should get a chance to **use** them. The reformulation of the original questionnaire and the optional follow up provide two good ways of putting the new words to use: getting the students to **personalise** them.

Stage One

Think of something interesting about yourself that you could share with your class. Ask them to come in closer and tell them that you are going to let them in on a little secret. Act conspiratorial. Pause. Then tell them the information (for example: *I know it was a very bad thing to do, but I once stole a chocolate bar from a shop*). If it is suitable, encourage them to ask you more questions. (*When? When I was eight years old. Did you get caught? No, but my parents found out from my friend etc.*) Ask your students if any of them have a little bit of interesting information they would like to share. Don't let this go on too long, but respond to one or two students if they want to share something with the class.

Stage Two

Explain that in today's class that they are going to learn some different ways to talk about giving, keeping and holding information. Put the students into pairs and distribute the questionnaire. Emphasize that the students are not required to share any secrets with each other if they don't want to! Circulate while students do the questionnaire, but don't interrupt them.

Stage Three

Draw students attention to number 3 on the worksheet and explain that these are what some English speakers said in answer to the questionnaire. First ask them to match the sentences to the questions. When they are finished, ask them to speculate what the words in bold mean. They can do this in pairs. Then ask them to match them to their definitions on the second page of the handout. Check the answers. Answers: g / a / h / c, f / e / d / d / b

Stage Four

Students can now try to rewrite the questionnaire using the phrasal verbs they have just learnt. A sample answer is below. When they have finished, get them to switch partners and interview their new partner with the rewritten questions. Ask them to incorporate the new language they have learned in their answers as well.

1. Are you a secretive person? Do you **keep a lot of secrets to yourself**?
2. If you had a secret, which of the following people would you **confide in**? Imagine that the secret was not directly connected to them.

3. Now imagine that the secret involved WAS connected to them. Who would you **let in on** the secret?
4. Do people **confide in you**?
5. Are you someone people trust with their secrets?
6. Have you ever **let out** a secret?
7. Think of the place where you study or work. Do secrets **get around**?

Stage Five (optional)

Draw students' attention to the tips for learning and understanding phrasal verbs in the yellow box. If your students have access to the internet, they can also do the online exercise using these phrasal verbs.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret...

An intermediate phrasal verb lesson

1. Do this questionnaire with a partner. You don't have to tell anything that is secret!

THE SECRECY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you a secretive person? Do you keep a lot of secrets?
 2. If you had a secret, which of the following people would you tell it to? Imagine that the secret was not directly connected to them.
 - a. A parent
 - b. A brother or sister
 - c. Your partner (husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend)
 - d. A colleague at work
 - e. A classmate
 3. Now imagine that the secret involved WAS connected to them. Who would you tell?
 4. Do people tell you their secrets?
 5. Are you someone people trust with their secrets?
 6. Have you ever told a secret by accident?
 7. Think of the place where you study or work. Do people often know each other's secrets?
 8. Is there someone at your work or school who knows, or wants to know, secrets about everybody?
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2. Now look at what some other English speakers said about these questions. What questions were they answering?

- a. My mum, definitely. I can't **keep** anything **from** her.
- b. Oh yes. Things **get around** all the time at the office.
- c. Yes, I would say so. People **confide in** me a lot. I don't know why.
- d. That would be Jason. He **picks up** things all the time and **fills us in** on the gossip.
- e. Well, there was one time when I **let it out** that my friend was pregnant. She was very angry with me!
- f. I'll **let you in on** a secret: I tell everybody my secrets.
- g. No, I can't **keep things to myself**!
- h. My husband and I share everything. We don't **hold** anything **back**.

3. Look back at the phrasal verbs in **bold**. Match them to their definitions.

- To keep something secret and not tell anyone else about it.
- To not tell someone something.
- To decide not to say something.
- To tell someone secrets.
- To say something that was supposed to be a secret.
- To learn some interesting or useful information.
- To give someone details about something.
- If this happens with some news, it means that lots of people hear it.

4. Look at the questionnaire. What questions can you rewrite using the phrasal verbs you have just learnt. When you have finished, work with a new partner. Ask your questions.

TIPS FOR UNDERSTANDING PHRASAL VERBS OUT

Sometimes you can understand the phrasal verb by looking at the **particle** (the second word). The particle **out** can sometimes mean *removed*. The phrasal verb **let out** has this meaning when referring to a secret. The secret is removed from hiding. Look at these other examples where OUT means *removed*:

Removed from being unknown

I didn't mean to say that. It just **slipped out**!

All the information about the war is **coming out** now.

When she **found out** the truth, she was very sad.

Removed from a place (a more literal interpretation of OUT)

If you start a fight in the bar, you will be **thrown out**.

It took a long time to **get out** of building.

Every night I **take out** the garbage.

TIP FOR USING PHRASAL VERBS GRAMMAR of PHRASAL VERBS

Some phrasal verbs must always be separated. That is, the object must come between the verb and the particle. In this lesson, *fill in*, *keep to yourself* and *keep from* are examples of this kind of phrasal verb.

He filled me in on the details. NOT He filled in me on the secrets.

Don't keep the information to yourself. NOT Don't keep to yourself the information.

We never keep secrets from each other. NOT We never keep from secrets from each other.