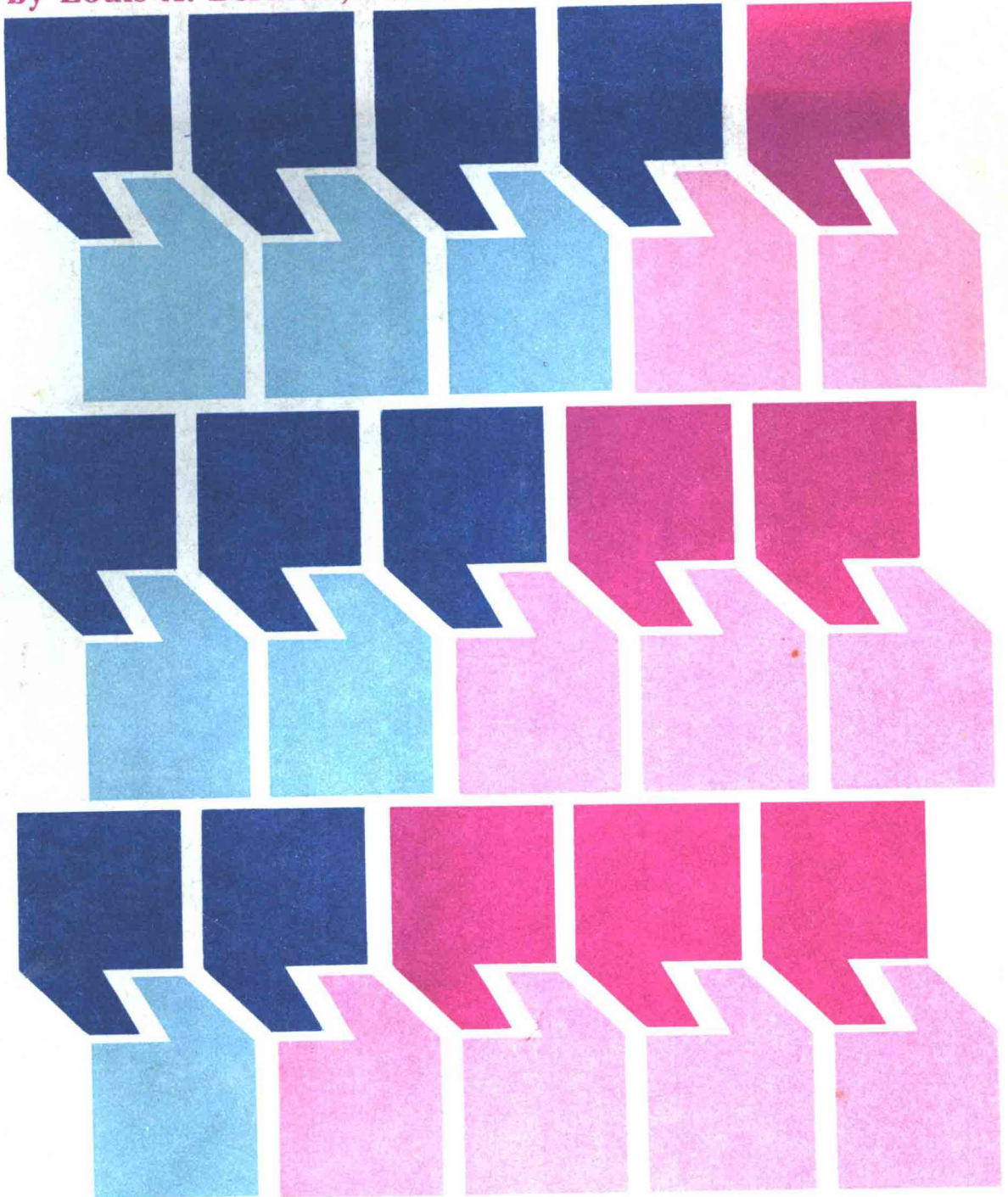


IDIOM WORKBOOK

by Louis A. Berman, Ph.D. and Laurette Kirstein



Verb Phrases by Family • 1335

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by
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and
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edited by
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INSTITUTE OF MODERN LANGUAGES, INC.
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Published by
The Institute of Modern Languages, Inc.
The Language People
2622 Pittman Drive
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 0-88499-530-5

PREFACE

The teaching of English as a second language has devoted most of its attention to helping students learn the basic structures of English. Fundamental sentence patterns, phrase structures, and modification — this is what a student must learn! And, after some time of drills and practice, the student is able to speak and understand a correct English — almost “too correct,” for so much of language teaching emphasizes formal vocabulary and structures.

But what of the advanced student of American English who wants (and needs) to be able to express himself in and to understand a variety of styles of English — including, and especially, colloquial styles appropriate for informal conversation? Such students are usually advised to read widely, to listen to the TV and radio, to mingle with Americans — to immerse themselves in the American culture.

The question posed over the years by foreign-born students to the Student Counseling Service at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle was this: Isn't there a more systematic way to help the advanced student learn conversational, “idiomatic” English? Since the students had already mastered the basics of the language — and, indeed, were successfully established at an American university, we were challenged to offer an advanced-level study program in idiomatic English. This workbook has grown out of a collection of exercises developed for these non-credit study groups at Chicago Circle and tested in the classroom over the years.

A territory so vast and unstructured as idiomatic English can only be conquered step by step. We chose to focus on one type of verb phrase as an important gateway to a mastery of informal English. This type of verb phrase is the *Verb + Particle* that combine to provide a new meaning, for example, *look up*, *break down*, *go about*, *hear of*. If treated at all in texts or dictionaries, such items are typically presented randomly or alphabetically (*turn down*, *turn in*, *turn on*, *turn up*). Our unique strategy is to group verb phrases that have a common *particle*, for example, *buckle down*, *knuckle down*, *pipe down*, *quiet down*, *settle down*. Grouped in this way, many phrases fall into families; they share a related concept, or sense, or “feeling.” Seeing the relatedness of the verb phrases with particles makes the learning experience organized and coherent.

This workbook advocates the common-sense practice (one amply supported by psychological research) of *overlearning*. This refers to the presentation of material that has just been learned in a variety of situations where it is appropriate and applicable. Facts and concepts which are not used after they have been learned are quickly forgotten. New presentations and uses of learned material will not only strengthen the student's control of it, but will also teach new applications. The emergence of this concept in our workbook grows out of the interest of one of the authors, a psychologist, in language learning, concept formation, classroom learning, and study skills — all of which are psychological concerns. Collaboration with an experienced teacher of English as a second language results in an approach to learning which is both psychologically sound and consistent with the principles of ESL teaching.

This book is designed to challenge the advanced learner to bring his ability to express himself in English closer to that of the native speaker.

The workbook is designed to help the student in the following ways:

- to compare, in some detail, differences between formal and informal English;
- to learn through context and by definition the meaning of verb phrases + particle idioms;

- to develop an ability to *use* the verb + particle in an idiomatic fashion;
- to build vocabulary without stressing vocabulary-building, as such;
- to provide a springboard for spontaneous conversation;
- to understand better some aspects of American customs and values.

As such, we hope it will be a means by which the advanced ESL learner can gain control of the rich and multifaceted world of informal English.

INTRODUCTION

Think of two people speaking English. One is not a native speaker, and although he has no trouble expressing his thoughts, his speech is somehow awkward — it is too formal. He sometimes has difficulty understanding informal American English. The other speaker was born and raised in the States, speaking only English. He speaks fluently, of course, and is able to express himself in a style which is idiomatic, colloquial, when this is appropriate. When these two speakers want to say the same thing they might put their thoughts into slightly different words. In the following pairs of statements, which sound like those of a native speaker and which like those of a non-native speaker of English?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. () Guess who I ran into this morning? | () Guess who I encountered this morning! |
| 2. () Is that a true story, or did someone contrive it? | () Is that a true story, or did someone make it up? |
| 3. () Don't look down on him just because he never went to college. | () Don't view him with contempt just because he never went to college. |
| 4. () My daughter will soon be ten years old. | () My daughter is going on ten. |
| 5. () My paper was given an inferior grade because I submitted it late. | () My paper was marked down because I handed it in late. |
| 6. () I'll take back that remark. | () I'll retract that remark. |
| 7. () Discard the broken glass before you cut yourself. | () Throw out the broken glass before you cut yourself. |
| 8. () If you offered me the job, I would accept it immediately. | () If you offered me the job, I would jump at it. |
| 9. () I enjoyed the concert, but I wasn't carried away. | () I enjoyed the concert, but I wasn't entranced by it. |
| 10. () If I mobilize all my effort, I can learn it. | () If I buckle down, I can learn it. |

Notice that the statements by the native speaker are somewhat briefer than those of the non-native speaker. They seem more informal and use simple words and phrases, but express the same ideas as the more formal, complex words and phrases. We will call the kinds of phrases in the informal statements "verb phrases with particles." (For convenience they will also sometimes be referred to simply as verb phrases, though these are not, technically speaking, the only kind of verb phrase.) Verb phrases with particles are an important part of colloquial, idiomatic English. They are especially appropriate for informal conversation.

The Verb Phrase with Particle – What Is It?

One kind of verb phrase is a combination of an action word (verb) and a particle (a word that looks like a preposition)* that expresses a single concept –

for example, *look up*.

Sometimes a preposition is added to the verb and particle –

for example, *look up to*.

Each word in the phrase has a meaning of its own, but in combination the meaning is changed. *LOOK*, according to its primary meaning, is defined as “to make use of the sense of sight, to see.” In the verb phrase with *up* (*look up*) the meaning may be any of the following –

- 1) “raise one’s eyes” (for example, Business is *looking up* these days.)
- 2) “improve, get better” (example, Business is *looking up* these days.)
- 3) “try to find information about” (for example, *Look up* the word in a dictionary.)
- 4) “search for somebody’s house so as to visit him” (for example, *Look me up* the next time you are in town.)

Look up to may mean *admire, regard with respect* (for example, A clergyman must not only know how to perform religious ceremonies, he must be a person everyone can *look up to*.)

What you must be alert for, then, is the special meaning that the verb phrase with particle conveys. Not all dictionaries include this kind of verb phrase, and one which gives them relatively great attention may fail to include the one you are looking up.

Recognition of the verb phrase with particle is essential to an understanding of idiomatic English. Not every verb followed by a word that looks like a preposition is this kind of verb phrase. Remember, the meaning of the verb phrase with particle is likely to be different from the meaning of each of the words used separately. For instance, in “Look at the sunset. Isn’t it pretty?” the words *look at* mean something different from the verb phrase *look at* in “I’ll have to ask an art expert to *look at* (evaluate) this painting, because I want him to establish its value.” Practice recognizing these differences by studying the recognition exercise that follows.

Recognition Exercise

In the pairs of sentences that follow, (a) uses a verb phrase with particle and (b) uses a verb and preposition that looks exactly like the verb phrase in (a), but which conveys a different

*To understand and master the material in this book, it will not be necessary to go into the complexities and variations in the uses of the particle. Students interested in the linguistic aspects of the particle can find a thorough analysis in the:

Cowie, A. P., and R. Mackin. *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English, Vol. 1: Verbs with Prepositions and Particles*. London: Oxford University Press, 1976.

meaning. (Think of these look-alike phrases as analogous to homonyms, look-alike words that have different meanings.)

1. (a) Elections *bring about* a change of government without upheaval or revolution.
(b) When I visit home, I'll have to *bring about* fifteen gifts.
2. (a) Bright as he is, the professor finds it hard to *get* his main idea *across*.
(b) She asked, "What did you *get across* the street?"
3. (a) He got tired of spending his evenings *hanging around* the pool hall.
(b) He notices a string of pearls *hanging around* her neck.
4. (a) We don't know how the rumor started, but it began to *get around*.
(b) Go to the pantry and *get around* six potatoes.
5. (a) At the age of 8 he *took up* the piano.
(b) What was that object he just *took up* the stairs?
6. (a) No matter how discouraging things look, don't *give up*.
(b) Charity is a sacrifice when we *give up* to our capacity.
7. (a) He was *dressed up* for the party.
(b) He wore no shirt, but was *dressed up* to his waist.
8. (a) When he saw that somebody had tampered with his laboratory set-up, he was really *burned up*.
(b) In the laboratory accident, he was *burned up* and down his left arm.
9. (a) Patients who have lain in a coma for months have been know to *come to*.
(b) I hope you will *come to* the hospital to visit me while I am recovering from my operation.
10. (a) He has plenty of good ideas if he would only *stick to* whatever he begins.
(b) He always has trouble making the postage stamp *stick to* the envelope.

Some Verb Phrases with Particles Are Separable

Most verb phrases with particles are separable. Often when a verb is transitive — that is, it takes a direct object — a simple noun, a short noun phrase, or a pronoun functioning as an object can be inserted between the verb and the particle. For example:

Examples: What *brought* it *about*? Nobody is sure what *brought* the crisis *about*.
I know what I want to say, but I'm not sure how to *get* it *across*.
I usually *get* my good ideas *across*.

When the noun phrase is lengthy, the verb is usually not separated from the particle.

Examples: What *brought* it *about*? Nobody is sure what *brought about* the change of plans.

And, when a verb phrase with particle is cast in the passive voice, it cannot be separated.
For example —

The crisis was *brought about* by a change in plans.

Also, if a verb phrase is used as a participle in the passive voice, it cannot be separated.

Examples: Have you *thought it out* carefully?
I assure you it was *thought out* carefully.
Did the boss *turn* your plan *down*?
Yes, it was *turned down*.

A good general rule to follow regarding separability is that a verb phrase is seldom separated if the direct object is a noun phrase, but it is almost always separated when the direct object is a pronoun.

Other Verb Phrases with Particles Are Not Separable

When a verb does not take a direct object (when it is intransitive), it cannot be separated from its particle.

Examples: What has possessed him? What has *come over* him?
(*Not*, What has come him over?)
Does the baby resemble his father or his mother?
Most people say he *takes after* his father.
(*Not*, He takes his father after.)

Here are more verb phrases that take no object:

At the football game a physician was *standing by* in case a player was injured.
The old professor was asked to *step aside* and let a young instructor teach the course.
It was a sad day when Grandfather *passed away*.
Argument failed her, so she *fell back on* pouting and tears.
Yesterday I got a letter from an old friend, and I began to *think back* about good times we had together.
At first the applause was deafening, but it gradually *died down*.

In this workbook, verb phrases with particles which are not separable are indicated by joining the verb and particle with a plus (+) sign, for example, *BRING ABOUT*, *GET+ABOUT*, *GET ACROSS*, *RUN+ACROSS*.

Some Verb Phrases with Particles Form Compound Nouns and Adjectives

The English language has been enriched by verbs and their particles, coming to form compound nouns or adjectives. Sometimes nouns or adjectives are written as one word; sometimes they are hyphenated. Note the following —

1. Driving to school one morning, I almost *ran* a pedestrian *down* and then noticed that he was one of my professors. I said I would be glad to give him a lift to campus if he didn't mind riding in my *run-down* jalopy. While we were riding, he gave me a *run-down* of the entire course.*
2. You *shut off* the gas by turning this *shut-off* valve. As a safety measure, every gas heater must have an automatic *shut-off*.
3. I like to *go out* every Saturday night but I can't spend very much money because, with a limited income, I have to watch my *outgo*.
4. *Blown-up* photographs are interesting to look at because one can see the details more clearly. Furthermore, it's fun to *blow up* photos.
5. I knew that you *thought out* the plan carefully. A well *thought-out* plan always deserves consideration.
6. He watched the plane *take off* and said, "What a smooth *take-off*!"
7. Every year I have my doctor *check up* on my physical condition. After 35, it's a good idea to have an annual *checkup*.
8. That yellowish film was *built up* through dozens of waxings. How do you remove such a *build-up*?
9. If you must go out after dark, travel in company and minimize the risk of a *holdup*. A *hold-up* man is much more likely to accost a lone pedestrian than to take on a group. Nobody wants to be *held up*.

Note that when a verb phrase becomes a compound noun it may or may not be hyphenated! When a verb phrase becomes an adjective, however, it is always hyphenated.

Exercises as Examples of Contemporary Usage

You will learn to recognize a verb phrase and to determine whether it is separable or not by observing the English language in action, that is, by observing *usage*, or *idiomatic usage*. "Correct English" is not dictated by an official book of rules, but by the way English is customarily used by educated people. Books of rules are valid only to the extent that they reflect how educated people actually use English.

The object of the exercises in this workbook is to offer you an in-depth experience in the contemporary American usage of verb phrases. These exercises are *not* for people who are just

*For purpose of demonstration, similar words are used two or three times in this and the following paragraphs, to convey different meanings. Ordinarily, this is *not* good English style! A composition instructor would be more favorably impressed if, for example, this paragraph were written —

Driving to school one morning, I almost ran a pedestrian down before I discovered that he was my professor. I said I would be glad to give him a lift to campus if he didn't mind riding in my old jalopy. While we were riding, he outlined his plans for the entire course.

beginning to learn English. They are for people who have already mastered the basic elements of English as a second language, people who have learned to use and understand formal English and are now ready to master colloquial, idiomatic English. There are many more features of colloquial English than this kind of verb phrase, but an understanding of verb phrases with particles will be very useful in beginning to use idiomatic English.

Verb Phrase Families

List A. A Dictionary Grouping of Verb Phrases

get about	circulate
get across	explain
get around	outwit
get back	recover
get on	succeed
get out	leave
get together	reach an agreement

List B. A Grouping of Verb Phrases by the Theme of Separation

back out	withdraw
drop out	terminate one's membership
get out	leave
give out	become exhausted
leave out	exclude
pass out	lose consciousness
throw out	discard

Both Lists A and B contain verb phrases with particles. Which grouping makes more sense? List A is certainly the more conventional grouping, the kind we have become accustomed to seeing in dictionaries, glossaries, and indexes. Such a grouping is useful for purposes of *reference*. But for purposes of *learning*, it makes more sense to group words by common particle. Why? Because we are much more likely to find similarity of meaning among verb phrases having a common particle than among verb phrases beginning with the same verb. Lists C and D are examples, like B, of families of verb phrases with *out* that share a common theme, or meaning, or sense.

Learning related material is much easier than learning unrelated material. In this workbook we have tried, wherever possible, to facilitate learning by grouping together verb phrases that share a common particle and a similarity of meaning.

List C. A Grouping of Verb Phrases by the Theme of Cognition (perceiving, learning, remembering, thinking)

get out	derive
figure out	understand
make out	interpret
point out	demonstrate
think out	reason

List D. A Grouping of Verb Phrases in which *out* serves as an intensifier (strengthening, sharpening, completing the action)

bawl out	rebuke sharply
empty out	remove all the contents
sell out	sell all of a certain item
tire out	weaken, make very tired
wear out	wear until useless

TO THE TEACHER

This workbook is intended to help the student of English as a Second Language enliven his appreciation of and develop his facility with a significant component of the American idiom, the verb phrase. Therefore, it is important that in initial classes, students become familiar with the basic concepts covered in the Introduction – *verb phrase, particle, preposition, formal and informal language, idiom, and separability*. Students should also be reminded to look in their dictionaries for verb phrase and single word entries which may not be in this book.

We hope that the instructor will use this workbook in an informal and flexible way – not as a basis for rigid drilling, but as a stimulus for thinking and talking about the students' experience with life in the United States and about the richness and subtlety of meanings conveyed by the verb phrase. The book is intended as a tool to help the advanced ESL student understand the verb phrase in context and apply it to similar situations in his everyday experience.

In this workbook, verb phrases with particles are introduced in small groups or families which share a common theme or meaning, or sense. A *Familiarization Exercise* is provided in which all verb phrases are *italicized*. Below the exercise appear the corresponding formal verbs, numbered so that the student can match them with the sentences in that exercise. (Verb phrases covered in that exercise are also listed alphabetically at the bottom of the exercise and can be matched, by number, with the corresponding formal verbs.)

If a verb phrase is followed by more than one parenthesis, the verb phrase corresponds to more than one formal verb. Also, one formal verb may correspond to more than one verb phrase, for example:

<i>COME UP</i> (1)	1. APPEAR
<i>COME UP (TO)</i> (4)	2. ASCEND
<i>DRAW UP</i> (1)	3. HOIST,
<i>GET UP</i> (5)	ELEVATE
<i>GO UP</i> (5) (2)	4. REACH
<i>JACK UP</i> (3)	5. RISE

After each *Familiarization Exercise* is a *Practice Exercise*. These exercises are only suggested and the instructor and students can improvise many other forms of practice.

We hope that this approach to learning idioms will be valuable for your ESL classes and that you will share your results, comments, and questions with us for future editions.

Louis A. Berman
Laurette Kirstein
Chicago Circle

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UNIT 1

VERB PHRASES WITH *ABOUT*

PART A

The question "How do you **go about** learning idiomatic English?" might be rephrased "How do you **get started** . . . ?" In this first group of verb phrases with **about**, the common theme is *getting started*.

1. Familiarization Exercise*

- a. After dinner and a nap, I *set about* studying. ()
- b. How do you *go about* finding a job in this city? ()
- c. I was having trouble with a math course and went to the Dean's office to *see about* the possibility of dropping it. ()
- d. I would like to *think about* your offer before I make a down payment on the house. ()
- e. Too often it *comes about* that one tells a white lie to avoid unpleasantness, only to learn that honesty is the best policy. ()
- f. Until that day, I liked my roommate. Now I can't stand him. Let me tell you what *brought about* my change in attitude. ()
- g. Word has been *getting about* that you've taken another job. Are you really leaving, or is it just a rumor? ()

BRING ABOUT ()
COME + ABOUT ()
GET + ABOUT ()
GO + ABOUT ()
SEE + ABOUT ()
SET + ABOUT ()
THINK + ABOUT ()

1. BEGIN
2. CAUSE
3. CIRCULATE
4. CONSIDER
5. HAPPEN
6. INVESTIGATE
7. PROCEED

2. Practice Exercise

Answer the questions below:

- a. At what time do you usually *set about* getting dinner started?
- b. How would you *go about* buying a new car?
- c. What *brought about* your decision to come to the States?
- d. Did you say you were interested in the job offer just to be polite, or are you *thinking about* it seriously?
- e. Did you plan to share an apartment with an American student, or did it *come about* by accident?

*See TO THE TEACHER for hints on how to use the *Familiarization Exercises*.

PART B

Before they commit a burglary or robbery, criminals often make an exploratory visit to the intended scene of the crime, a process they call “casing the joint.” For good or evil, exercising a skill begins with gathering knowledge. It is an exploratory enterprise – looking in and out, here and there, around and about. The following verb phrases with **about** deal with the theme all around, on *every side*.

3. Familiarization Exercise

- a. A rumor is *going about* that Dean Jones is going to resign. ()
 - b. After finishing high school, some boys like to *knock about* for a year or two. ()
 - c. I wanted to write a poem for her birthday and was *casting about* for an idea. ()
- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| CAST + ABOUT (FOR) () | 1. CIRCULATE |
| GO + ABOUT () | 2. SEARCH ONE'S MIND |
| KNOCK + ABOUT () | 3. WANDER |

4. Practice Exercises

Verb phrases range in tone from literary to slangy. *Cast about* is probably one of the more literary verb phrases in this book. Appropriately, the example given above (c.) concerns writing a poem. Make up a question about each of the tasks in the left column below using one of the phrases listed on the right.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| a. guessing who sent you a comic valentine | 1. <i>casting about</i> |
| b. deciding on the title of an essay | 2. searching my mind |
| c. trying to recall a person's name | 3. racking my brain |

UNIT 2

VERB PHRASES WITH *ACROSS*

Drawn on a map, a bridge spanning a river does indeed form a cross! The purpose of the bridge is to help people (and vehicles) **across** – from here to there, from shore to shore, from one place to another. As a preposition, **across** indicates passing through, or toward the other side. Verb phrases with **across** indicate the transfer of an object or idea from one person to another, or progression from proposal to accomplishment.

5. Familiarization Exercise

- a. He owes me \$5.00 and he still hasn't *come across with it*. Creditors have better memories than debtors. ()
- b. I *came across* my great grandfather's picture as I rummaged through an old trunk in the attic. ()
- c. The bridge was so well guarded that it was impossible to *get across*. ()