

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**DICTIONARY**  
*of*  
**PHRASAL**  
**VERBS**

CAMBRIDGE



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# **Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs**

## **Academic Consultant**

Professor Michael McCarthy

## **Commissioning Editor**

Elizabeth Walter

## **Project Manager**

Glennis Pye

## **Lexicographers**

Stephen Curtis

Ann Kennedy

Kerry Maxwell

Clea McEnery

Elaine McGregor

Susannah Wintersgill

Kate Woodford

## **American English Consultant**

Carol-June Cassidy

## **Australian English Consultant**

Barbara Gassmann

## **Design and Production**

Barney Haward

Andrew Robinson

## **Software Development**

Robert Fleischman

## **Editorial contributions have been made by**

Annetta Butterworth

Dominic Gurney

Lucy Hollingworth

Geraldine Mark

Jane Reeves

# Introduction

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Phrasal verbs are an important feature of the English language. Their importance lies in the fact that they form such a key part of everyday English. Not only are they used in spoken and informal English, but they are also a common aspect of written and even formal English. Understanding and learning to use phrasal verbs, however, is often problematic and there are many reasons for this. The meaning of a phrasal verb, for example, often bears no relation to the meaning of either the verb or the particle which is used with it. This means that phrasal verbs can be difficult both to understand and to remember. Neither does it help that many phrasal verbs have several different meanings, nor that their syntactic behaviour is often unpredictable.

The **Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs** addresses all the problems associated with this rich and complex area of the English language and presents information in a way which is clear and helpful. Full coverage is given of British, American and Australian English, making this a truly international dictionary. Information on the grammatical structure of each phrasal verb is presented in an explicit fashion which does not require the user to decipher complex codes. Clear and precise definitions have been written using a carefully controlled defining vocabulary of under 2000 words. Every phrasal verb is illustrated with examples based on sentences from the Cambridge International Corpus, ensuring that they reflect natural written and spoken English.

In addition, this dictionary contains supplementary material in the form of theme panels (phrasal verbs shown in groups according to their meaning) and photocopiable exercises. This makes it a unique resource which can be used not only for reference purposes but also as a valuable classroom or self-study learning aid.



# How to use this dictionary

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## Inflections

Inflections are shown for each phrasal verb.

**chuck in** chucks, chucking, chucked

Inflections which are different in American or Australian English are also shown.

**get off** gets, getting, got (American pp also gotten)

## Syntax

Syntax here refers to the grammatical arrangement of phrasal verbs. In this dictionary, syntax is shown clearly without the use of complicated grammar codes. This part of an entry indicates whether a phrasal verb is transitive or intransitive and where the object of a transitive phrasal verb can be placed. Some phrasal verbs can only ever be used in restricted grammatical forms or restricted tenses and these are also shown.

This phrasal verb is intransitive. It does not take an object.

**drift off** drifts, drifting, drifted

**drift off**

to gradually start to sleep • *As Tim started telling her about his holiday for the third time, she closed her eyes and drifted off.*

This phrasal verb is transitive. The object can be placed after the phrasal verb or between the two parts of the phrasal verb. 'sth' (something) is used to show that the object is non-human.

**flag down** flags, flagging, flagged

**flag down sth or flag sth down**

to make a vehicle stop by waving at the driver • *A police officer flagged the car down.* • *We tried to flag down a taxi but they were all full.*

'sb' (someone) is used to show that the object of this phrasal verb is human.

**gun down** guns, gunning, gunned

**gun down sb or gun sb down**

to shoot someone and kill or seriously injure them, often when they cannot defend themselves • *He was gunned down in front of his wife and child by two masked assassins.*

This phrasal verb is transitive. The object can only be placed after the phrasal verb. 'sth/sb' is used to show that the object can be human or non-human.

**see to** sees, seeing, saw, seen

**see to sth/sb**

to deal with something that needs doing or to help someone who needs your help • *The cats need feeding twice a day, but Paula's seeing to that.* • *Would you like any help or are you being seen to?*

Brackets show that this phrasal verb can be transitive or intransitive.

**build up** builds, building, built

**build up** (sth) or **build** (sth) **up**

to increase in amount, size, or strength, or to make something increase in amount, size, or strength • *There were big delays as traffic built up on the roads into the city.*

'swh' (somewhere) is used to show that the object of this phrasal verb is a place.

**come from** comes, coming, came, come

**come from** swh

1 if someone comes from a particular place, they were born there and lived there when they were a child • *'Where do you come from?'* • *Manuela comes from Bologna.*

This phrasal verb is always followed by an object or by the -ing form of another verb.

**see about** sees, seeing, saw, seen

**see about** sth/doing sth

to deal with something, or to arrange for something to be done • *It's getting late – I'd better see about dinner.* • *You should see about getting your hair cut.*

This phrasal verb is always followed by the infinitive form of another verb.

**bend over backwards** bends, bending, bent

**bend over backwards** to do sth

to try extremely hard to do something to help or please someone • *She would always bend over backwards to help anyone in trouble.*

This phrasal verb is always used in the passive form.

**sandwich between**

**be sandwiched between** sb/sth (always passive) *informal*

to be in a small space in the middle of two people or things • *Kim was sandwiched between her brothers in the back of the car.*

This phrasal verb is always used in the reflexive form.

**fend for** fends, fending, fended

**fend for** yourself (always reflexive)

to take care of yourself without needing help from other people • *She's 83 years old and still fends for herself.*



This phrasal verb is always used in continuous tenses.

Many phrasal verbs have several different meanings and several different syntactic patterns. In this dictionary, the different meanings are shown in groups of the same syntactic pattern.

Differences between British, American and Australian usage are also clearly shown.

## Cross-references

A cross-reference like this is used to show the position of a phrasal verb in the dictionary, so that it can be found easily.

## die for

**be dying for** sth (always in continuous tenses) *informal*

to want something very much, especially food or drink • *Put the kettle on – I'm dying for a cup of coffee.* • *I'm dying for a cigarette.*

## fill in fills, filling, filled

**fill in** sth or **fill** sth **in**

1 to write the necessary information on an official document [e.g. form, questionnaire] • *Please fill in the application form and send it back by November 2nd.*

2 to cover a hole in the surface of something and make it smooth by putting a substance in it • *Before painting, fill in all the cracks in the plaster.*

**fill in** sb or **fill** sb **in** *slightly informal*

to tell someone about the things that have happened while they have not been there, or to give someone the information they need in order to do something • (often + **on**) *Let's go for a coffee and you can fill me in on what happened at the meeting.*

**fill in**

to do someone else's work for them because they cannot or will not do it themselves • (usually + **for**) *Can you fill in for me for a couple of hours while I'm at the dentist's?* • *Janet filled in while her boss was away on holiday.*

## rain off/out

**be rained off** (always passive) *British & Australian*

**be rained out** (always passive) *American*

if a sport or other outside activity is rained off, it cannot start or continue because it is raining • *Most of the day's matches at Wimbledon were rained off.* • *Last night's baseball game was rained out.*

## hand round

see **hand around/round**



## Definitions

These explain the meanings of the phrasal verbs. They are written using words from a list of less than 2000 common words, making them easy to understand. They also contain information about typical subjects and objects.

Definitions show the most typical subjects and objects of phrasal verbs like this,

**drag on** drags, dragging, dragged

**drag on**

if an unpleasant or difficult situation or process drags on, it continues for too long  
 • (often + **for**) *The war has already dragged on for six years and could drag on for a further six.*  
 • *The talks might drag on for weeks before any concrete result is announced.*

or like this.

**file away** files, filing, filed

**file away** sth or **file** sth **away**

to put something that is written [e.g. document, letter] in a particular place so that you can find it easily  
 • *He always files everything away very carefully, so the report shouldn't be hard to find.*

## Example sentences

Example sentences are given for each meaning of a phrasal verb. Based on sentences taken from the Cambridge International Corpus, they show how phrasal verbs are used in natural written and spoken English.

Examples also provide essential information about collocation and grammar.

**keep on at** keeps, kept

**keep on at** sb (never in continuous tenses)

to talk to someone about something many times, usually because you want to complain about something they have done or not done  
 • *I wish she wouldn't keep on at me, it's not my fault.*  
 • (often + **about**) *He keeps on at me about the kind of clothes I wear.*  
 • (sometimes + to do sth) *The boss keeps on at me to sort out the filing system.*

Some phrasal verbs are also used as part of a fixed expression. These are shown in bold in the example sentences and are explained in brackets after the example.

**get along** gets, getting, got (*American pp* also **gotten**)

**get along**

1 if two or more people get along, they like each other and are friendly to each other  
 • *Vicky and Ellen seem to be getting along much better these days.*  
 • (often + **with**) *I really don't get along with my sister's husband.*  
 • *We've been **getting along like a house on fire**.* (= very well)



## Nouns and adjectives

A number of nouns and adjectives are derived from phrasal verbs. These are shown after the phrasal verb they are derived from.

**send up** sends, sending, sent

**send up** sb/sth or **send** sb/sth **up** *informal*  
to make someone or something seem stupid by copying them in a funny way • *He loves sending up some of the more serious teachers.*  
• *The book sends up the British obsession with class.*

**send-up** *n* [C] *informal* • *The programme is a hilarious send-up of the James Bond films.*

**grow up** grows, growing, grew, grown

**grow up**

**1** to gradually change from being a child to being an adult • *She grew up in New Zealand.*  
• *What do you want to be when you grow up?*  
• *Learning to take disappointments is all part of growing up.*

**grown-up** *n* [C] a child's word for an adult  
• *Daddy, why are all the grown-ups laughing?*

**grown-up** *adj* fully developed as an adult, or behaving or appearing like an adult • *The couple, married for 32 years, had four grown-up children.* • *I hadn't seen her for three years and she suddenly looked so grown-up.*

Phrasal verbs which are highlighted are very common and useful for learners of English to learn.

**look up** looks, looking, looked

**look up** sth or **look** sth **up**

to look at a book or computer in order to find a piece of information • *Can you look up the French word for 'marrow'?* • *I'm not sure what his number is. You'll have to look it up in the telephone directory.*



Abbreviations

<i>adj</i>	adjective	<i>pt</i>	past tense
<i>n</i>	noun	<i>pp</i>	past participle
<i>adv</i>	adverb	esp.	especially
<i>prep</i>	preposition	e.g.	for example
[C]	a noun that can be used in the plural	sth	something
[U]	a noun that does not have a plural form and cannot be used with <i>a</i> or <i>one</i>	sb	someone
[singular]	a noun that does not have a plural form and can be used with <i>a</i> or <i>the</i>	swh	somewhere
[plural]	a noun that can only be used in the plural form		

Regional labels

<i>British</i>	this phrasal verb is only used in British English	<i>mainly British</i>	this phrasal verb is mainly used in British English
<i>American</i>	this phrasal verb is only used in American English	<i>mainly American</i>	this phrasal verb is mainly used in American English
<i>Australian</i>	this phrasal verb is only used in Australian English		

Register labels

<i>informal</i>	phrasal verbs which are used with friends or family or people you know in relaxed situations	<i>taboo</i>	phrasal verbs which are likely to offend people and are not used in formal situations
<i>formal</i>	phrasal verbs which are used in a serious or polite way, for example in business documents, serious newspapers and books, lectures, news broadcasts etc	<i>humorous</i>	phrasal verbs which are intended to make people laugh
<i>slang</i>	phrasal verbs which are used in an informal or not very polite way, often between members of a particular social group	<i>literary</i>	phrasal verbs which are mainly used in literature
<i>old-fashioned</i>	phrasal verbs which are still used but sound old-fashioned	<i>old-use</i>	phrasal verbs which were use before the 20th century but are now rare



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# A

**abide by** abides, abiding, abided

**abide by** sth

to accept or obey an agreement, rule, or decision • *Staff who refused to abide by the new rules were fired.* • *We are quite willing to abide by their decision, whatever it may be.*

**abound in/with** abounds, abounding, abounded

**abound in/with** sth formal

to contain a lot of something • *Its forest and plains abound with deer and elk.* • *His later novels abound in plots and schemes.*

**accede to** accedes, acceding, acceded

**accede to** sth formal

- 1 to agree to something that someone has asked for [e.g. request, demand], often after disagreeing with it • *The government finally acceded to the nationalists' demand for independence.*
- 2 if someone accedes to the throne or to power, they become king or queen, or they take a position of power • *The diaries were written in 1837 when Queen Victoria acceded to the throne. (= became queen)* • *Traidenis acceded to power in 1270 and ruled Lithuania for twelve years.*

**accord with** accords, according, accorded

**accord with** sth formal

to be the same as something, or to agree with something • *His version of events does not accord with the witness's statements.*

**account for** accounts, accounting, accounted

**account for** sth

- 1 to explain the reason for something or the cause of something • *Can you account for your absence last Friday?* • *She was unable to account for over \$5000. (= she could not explain where the money was)* • *'Have you seen that awful dress she's wearing?' 'Yes, I*

*know, there's no accounting for taste, is there?!'* (= you cannot explain why some people like the things that you do not like)

- 2 to form a particular amount of something
  - *Students account for about 50% of our customers.*

**account for** sb

to explain where someone is, especially someone who is lost • *The army made no attempt to account for the missing men.*

**ace out** aces, aching, aced

**ace out** sb or **ace sb out** American, informal to defeat someone • *We were aced out by a rival agency.*

**ache for** aches, aching, ached

**ache for** sb/sth

to want someone or something very much • *He lay awake, his whole body aching for sleep.* • *After only two weeks apart she was aching for him.*

**act out** acts, acting, acted

**act out** sth or **act sth out**

- 1 to perform the actions and speech of a situation or story • *The children were told to act out a verse of their favourite poem.*
- 2 to express your thoughts or emotions by using words or actions to represent them • *In therapy sessions children are encouraged to act out their aggressions and talk about their fears.* • *Playing another character allows you to act out your repressed desires.*

**act up** acts, acting, acted

**act up**

- 1 slightly informal if part of your body or a machine acts up, it stops working properly • *If my knee starts acting up, I might have to give tomorrow's walk a miss.* • *My car has been acting up again – I must get someone to have a look at it.*
- 2 if someone, especially a child, acts up, they behave badly • *As soon as one of the kids starts acting up, the others follow.*
- 3 British to do a more important job than you usually do for a limited period • *Junior staff are frequently required to act up but they don't get paid extra.*

**add up** adds, adding, added

**add up** (sth) or **add** (sth) up

to calculate the total of two or more numbers • *If you add those four figures up, it comes to*



over £500. • Kids who only ever use calculators to do sums quickly forget how to add up in their heads.

**add up** (never in continuous tenses) *slightly informal*

- 1 to increase and become a large number or amount • *If you put a few pounds away each week, it's surprising how quickly it adds up.* • *You may only be eating a hundred calories here and a hundred calories there, but it all adds up.*
- 2 to be a reasonable or likely explanation for something • (often negative) *So why would she accept a job offering less money and fewer prospects; it just doesn't add up.*

**add up to** adds, adding, added

**add up to** sth

- 1 to become a particular amount • *The various building programmes add up to several thousand new homes.*
- 2 to have a particular result or effect • *Trains are frequently cancelled and always late, all of which adds up to a lot of frustration for the passenger.* • *Whether such proposals add up to any real help for the poor remains to be seen.*

**adhere to** adheres, adhering, adhered

**adhere to** sth *formal*

to obey a rule or principle • *Companies failing to adhere strictly to safety guidelines are penalised.*

**agree with** agrees, agreeing, agreed

**agree with** sb *slightly old-fashioned*

if new situations or conditions agree with you, they are right for you and make you feel happy • *The sea air seemed to agree with him – he looked fitter than he had in a long time.* • *It's good to see you looking so well – motherhood obviously agrees with you.*

**not agree with** sb (always negative; never in continuous tenses)

if a type of food or drink does not agree with you, it makes you feel slightly ill • *I tend to avoid onions – they don't agree with me.*

**aim at** aims, aiming, aimed

**aim at** sth/doing sth

to intend to achieve something, or to be intended to achieve something • *We're aiming at a 50% increase in production.* • *This is the latest in a series of talks aimed at settling the conflict.*

**aim sth at** sb

to intend something to influence someone, or to be noticed or bought by someone • (usually passive) *Roughly half of the magazines bought in Britain are aimed exclusively at women.* • *I don't think his remarks were aimed at anyone in particular.*

**allow for** allows, allowing, allowed

**allow for** sth

to consider or include something when you are making plans or judging a situation • *The whole journey should take just over five hours – that's allowing for delays.* • *Even allowing for exaggeration, these reports of human suffering are an appalling tale.*

**allow of** allows, allowing, allowed

**allow of** sth *formal*

to accept that something is possible or correct • *The old woman was too full of energy to allow of their walking slowly on her account.*

**allude to** alludes, alluding, alluded

**allude to** sth/sb *slightly formal*

to mention something or someone in an indirect way • *She mentioned some trouble that she'd had at home and I guessed she was alluding to her son.* • *So what is the dark secret alluded to in the title of Wellbrock's latest novel?*

**amount to** amounts, amounted

**amount to** sth (never in continuous tenses)

- 1 to become a particular amount • *The cost of treating heart disease and cancer amounts to 100 billion dollars a year.*
- 2 to be the same as something, or to have the same effect as something • *He gave what amounted to an apology on behalf of his company.* • *It remains to be seen whether his threats amount to anything more than tough talk.*
- 3 to be or become very good or important • (usually negative) *The changes in the department did not amount to much.* • *If you don't work hard in school, you'll never amount to anything.*

**angle for** angles, angling, angled

**angle for** sth

to try to get something without asking for it in a direct way • *I suspect she's angling for*



*promotion. • He's been angling for an invitation all week.*

**announce against** announces, announcing, announced

**announce against** sb/sth *American*

to say publicly that you do not support a particular politician or political party  
• *Many show business people have announced against the Republican candidate.*

**announce for** announces, announcing, announced

**announce for** sth *American*

to say publicly that you are going to try to be elected for a particular political position • *He surprised the whole nation by announcing for the Presidency.*

**announce for** sb/sth *American*

to say publicly that you support a particular politician or political party • *The union announced for the Democratic candidate.*

**answer back** answers, answering, answered

**answer** (sb) **back**

if someone, especially a child, answers back, or answers someone back, they reply rudely to someone they should be polite to • *Don't you dare answer me back, young lady!* • *What shocks me about Terry's kids is the way they answer back.*

**answer for** answers, answering, answered

**answer for** sth

to be responsible for something bad, or to be punished for something bad • *If the government decides to send all these men off to war, they will have a lot of deaths to answer for.* • *Do you think parents should have to answer for their children's behaviour?* • *This was a perfectly happy office till Phil took over – he's got a lot to answer for.* (= everything is his fault)

**answer for** sb/sth

if you say that you can answer for someone or for a quality that they have, you mean that you know from experience that they can be trusted, or that they have that quality • *I can answer for Tanya because I used to work with her but I've no idea what the other candidates are like.* • *Just from those three months of working together I can answer for her professionalism.*

**answer to** answers, answering, answered

**answer to** sb *slightly formal*

if you answer to someone in a higher position, they are the person you have to explain your actions or decisions to • *We were living in a police state, where the police answered to no one.*

**ante up** antes, anteing, anted

**ante up** (sth) *American*

to pay an amount of money • *Each person is being asked to ante up \$12 to cover expenses.*

**arrive at** arrives, arriving, arrived

**arrive at** sth

to achieve an agreement or decision, especially after thinking about it or discussing it for a long time • *We discussed the matter at length but failed to arrive at a decision.* • *It is hoped that after this round of talks they will be able to arrive at an agreement.*

**arse about/around** arses, arsing, arsed

**arse about/around** *British & Australian, slang*

to waste time doing silly or unimportant things • *I wish he'd stop arsing around and help me clear up this mess.*

**ascribe to** ascribes, ascribing, ascribed

**ascribe** sth **to** sth *formal*

to believe or say that something is caused by something else • *If this had been the first time such a disaster had occurred, it could have been ascribed to misfortune.* • *He ascribes his phenomenal success to being in the right place at the right time.*

**ascribe** sth **to** sb/sth *formal*

to believe that someone or something has a particular quality • *It seems strange that she can ascribe such callousness to her own son.* • *People often ascribe different values to the same word.*

**ascribe** sth **to** sb *formal*

to believe that something was said, written, or created by a particular person • *Most experts have ascribed the drawing to Michelangelo.*

**ask after** asks, asking, asked

**ask after** sb/sth

to ask for information about someone, especially about their health • *Graham's been*



**ask around**

*asking after you again. • Julia asked after your health.*

**ask around** asks, asking, asked**ask around**

to ask several people in order to try to get information or help • *I'll ask around at work and see if anyone can babysit.*

**ask for** asks, asking, asked**couldn't ask for** sb/sth (always negative)

if you say that you couldn't ask for someone or something better, you mean that that person or thing is the best of their kind • *She's great to work for – I really couldn't ask for a better boss.*

**ask for** sb

to say that you would like to speak to someone or see someone • *A young man was here earlier, asking for Rebecca.*

**be asking for** sth (always in continuous tenses) *informal*

to behave stupidly in a way that is likely to cause problems for you • *Drinking and driving is just asking for trouble. • Coming into work late almost every morning – he was really asking for it!*

**ask in** asks, asking, asked**ask in** sb or **ask sb in**

to invite someone to come into a building or room, especially your home • *I didn't want to leave him on the doorstep so I asked him in. • (often + for) I'd ask you in for a coffee but I have to be up early in the morning.*

**ask out** asks, asking, asked**ask out** sb or **ask sb out**

to invite someone to come with you to a place such as the cinema or a restaurant, especially as a way of starting a romantic relationship • *There's some girl in the office he fancies but he's too scared to ask her out. • (sometimes + for) She phoned him to ask him out for a drink.*

**ask over/round** asks, asking, asked**ask sb over/round**

to invite someone to come to your house • *I've asked Adrian and David over to dinner next Saturday. • (often + for) I thought we might ask Nicky and Steve round for drinks one night.*

**aspire to** aspires, aspiring, aspired**aspire to** sth

to have a strong desire to achieve or possess something • *Unlike so many men, he has never aspired to a position of power.*

**associate with** associates, associating, associated**associate** sb/sth **with** sb/sth

to connect someone or something in your mind with someone or something else • *Patience isn't a virtue I normally associate with Clare. • Why do men always associate enjoying themselves with drinking loads of beer? • It's interesting how different styles of dress can be associated with different types of music.*

**be associated with** sth (always passive)

if problems or dangers are associated with a particular thing or action, they are caused by it • *The cancer risks associated with smoking are well publicized. • Tackling the problems associated with inflation is not going to be an easy task.*

**associate with** sb

to spend time with a group of people, especially people who are disapproved of • *Tim's mother has always disapproved of the sort of people that he associates with.*

**atone for** atones, atoning, atoned**atone for** sth *formal*

to do something in order to show that you are sorry for doing something bad and that you want to improve the situation • *Why should the new generation feel they have to atone for the country's past?*

**attend to** attends, attending, attended**attend to** sb/sth

- formal* to deal with a situation or problem • *I've got to go into the office. I have one or two matters to attend to.*
- to help or care for someone or something • *The doctors tried to attend to those with the worst injuries first. • As a child you always assume that your parents are there to attend to your needs.*

**attest to** attests, attesting, attested**attest to** sth *formal*

to prove that something is true • *A national poll conducted last week attests to her popularity.*



**attribute to** attributes, attributing, attributed

**attribute sth to** sth *slightly formal*  
to believe or say that something is the result of something else • *He attributes his lack of self-confidence to a troubled childhood.* • *She attributes her success to having a good team of people working for her.*

**attribute sth to** sb/sth *slightly formal*  
to believe that someone or something has a particular quality • *I would never attribute such a lack of judgement to you.*

**attribute sth to** sb *slightly formal*  
to say that something was said, written, or created by a particular person • (usually passive) *The poem was originally attributed to a little-known Welsh author.* • *Both statements were attributed to the minister in the press.*

**auction off** auctions, auctioning, auctioned

**auction off** sth or **auction sth off**  
to sell something, especially buildings or furniture, at an auction (= a public sale where things are sold to the person who offers the most money) • *Conally's house and*

*belongings were auctioned off to repay his business debts.*

**avail of** avails, availing, availed

**avail yourself of** sth (always reflexive) *formal*  
to take the opportunity to use something, often in order to improve your situation • *As an employee I thought I might avail myself of the opportunity to buy cheap shares in the company.*

**average out** averages, averaging, averaged

**average out** sth or **average sth out**  
to calculate the average of a set of numbers • *When I average out what I spend on clothes it comes to about £150 a month.*

**average out**  
to be equal in amount or number • *In the end the highs and lows of life tend to average out.*

**average out at** averages, averaging, averaged

**average out at** sth  
to have as the average number • *My time off work this year averages out at two days a week.*