

ADVANCED ENGLISH

C1-C2 Phrasal Verbs, Idioms & Register

Multiword verbs, idiomatic frames, metaphor, diplomacy, and audience-aware reformulation

C1

Flexible, precise, well-structured language for demanding social, academic, and professional situations.

C2

Fine-grained control of nuance, register, implication, style, and reformulation with very little strain.

Your target

Understand dense idiomatic English and use selected multiword expressions naturally - while knowing when plain language is the better advanced choice.

Inside this guide

15 units covering phrasal-verb grammar, particle logic, idiomatic stance, professional multiword verbs, cultural opacity, a 30-day plan, and a personal expression bank.

Important accuracy note

CEFR levels describe communicative ability. They do not publish one mandatory list of punctuation rules, vocabulary items, grammar points, or idioms for C1 and C2. This guide is a practical, CEFR-aligned progression designed for advanced learners.

American English conventions are used as the default. Recognized international and British variants are noted where they materially affect meaning or style.

How to Use This Guide

Advanced progress is less about collecting more rules and more about making better choices under pressure. Work actively: notice the option, explain the effect, produce your own version, then revise it.

Step	What to do
1. Meaning	Identify literal, aspectual, or idiomatic meaning.
2. Grammar	Learn separability and complement pattern.
3. Register	Decide where the expression fits.
4. Paraphrase	State the same meaning in transparent language.
5. Use	Produce it selectively in authentic context.

C1 evidence

You can choose an effective form for a demanding task, sustain control across a longer response, and repair awkward wording without losing the thread.

C2 evidence

You can deliberately manipulate nuance, rhythm, register, emphasis, and implication, and can reformulate almost immediately when the first wording is not exact.

Recommended rhythm

- Study one unit every two days.
- Day A: notice, analyze, and imitate.
- Day B: retrieve, produce, and edit without looking.
- Recycle older units after 3, 7, and 14 days.

The advanced learner's trap

Knowing that an expression is grammatically possible is not enough. At C1-C2, the questions become: Is it natural here? Is it the right register? Does it imply what I intend? Is there a more precise or more economical way to say it?

C1-C2 Phrasal Verbs, Idioms & Register - Skill Map

The sequence moves from reliable advanced control to deliberate stylistic control. A learner may meet any feature earlier; the distinction here is the depth, flexibility, and consistency of use.

#	Unit	C1 focus	C2 extension
1	Phrasal verbs vs. single-word verbs by register	Choose common phrasal verbs naturally in conversation and neutral prose.	Shift between phrasal and Latinate alternatives without changing tone unintentionally.
2	Particle meaning and metaphor	Use spatial particle meanings to infer unfamiliar phrasal verbs.	Recognize metaphorical extensions such as completion, emergence, reduction, and continuation.
3	Separable phrasal verbs and information structure	Place pronouns and noun objects accurately with separable verbs.	Use object placement to manage weight and rhythm with longer noun phrases.
4	Three-word verbs	Use high-value verb + particle + preposition combinations accurately.	Control register and complement patterns in abstract contexts.
5	Phrasal-prepositional verbs for problems and solutions	Use natural combinations for investigation, response, and recovery.	Select multiword verbs that encode process stages precisely.
6	Idioms of uncertainty and knowledge	Understand common idioms used to express incomplete knowledge.	Use idiomatic uncertainty without becoming vague or evasive.
7	Idioms for cause and consequence	Recognize figurative expressions about triggers, momentum, and downstream effects.	Choose idioms whose imagery matches the situation and register.
8	Idioms for difficulty, progress, and limits	Use common idioms around obstacles and progress appropriately.	Control tone from conversational to professional and recognize clichéd overuse.
9	Idiomatic stance and diplomacy	Use multiword phrases to disagree, qualify, and redirect politely.	Manage face and interpersonal nuance without hiding the substantive point.
10	Idioms and cultural opacity	Recognize when an idiom may confuse an international audience.	Choose culturally portable language when clarity matters more than local color.
11	Multiword verbs in academic and professional English	Use neutral and formal multiword verbs that occur in serious writing.	Avoid the false rule that phrasal verbs are unsuitable in formal prose.
12	Phrasal verb polysemy	Distinguish multiple senses of high-frequency phrasal verbs.	Infer sense from syntax, object type, and discourse context.
13	Verb-noun idiomatic frames	Use semi-fixed expressions such as take into account and bear in mind.	Manipulate internal grammar while preserving the idiomatic frame.
14	Idiomatic compression and reformulation	Understand compact idiomatic phrases in fast speech and dense writing.	Reformulate them instantly into transparent language for a different audience.
15	Personal idiom and phrasal-verb bank	Prioritize multiword expressions you encounter repeatedly.	Track register, separability, object patterns, and common collocates for durable control.

Phrasal verbs vs. single-word verbs by register

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C1 TARGET

Choose common phrasal verbs naturally in conversation and neutral prose.

C2 EXTENSION

Shift between phrasal and Latinate alternatives without changing tone unintentionally.

Core idea

Many phrasal verbs are neutral, not automatically informal. Register depends on the individual expression.

Notice the effect

carry out / conduct

put off / postpone

look into / investigate

Practice

1. Classify each pair by register and nuance.
2. Rewrite a formal paragraph more conversationally.
3. Rewrite a spoken explanation more formally.

Production challenge

Explain one process twice: once conversationally and once in formal professional English.

Watch for this

Do not replace every phrasal verb with a single-word verb in formal writing; some phrasal verbs are standard and precise.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Particle meaning and metaphor

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C1 TARGET

Use spatial particle meanings to infer unfamiliar phrasal verbs.

C2 EXTENSION

Recognize metaphorical extensions such as completion, emergence, reduction, and continuation.

Core idea

Particles often contribute recurring meanings: out can suggest completion or emergence; up can suggest completion or increase.

Notice the effect

work out

phase out

build up

carry on

Practice

1. Group ten phrasal verbs by particle meaning.
2. Predict a possible meaning before checking a dictionary.
3. Create a visual metaphor for one particle family.

Production challenge

Teach one particle family aloud using five examples and contrasts.

Watch for this

Particle logic helps prediction but does not guarantee meaning; always verify unfamiliar expressions.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Separable phrasal verbs and information structure

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C1 TARGET

Place pronouns and noun objects accurately with separable verbs.

C2 EXTENSION

Use object placement to manage weight and rhythm with longer noun phrases.

Core idea

Pronouns normally go between verb and particle in separable phrasal verbs: turn it down, not turn down it.

Notice the effect

turn the offer down / turn down the offer

turn it down

write the detailed proposal up

Practice

1. Repair pronoun-placement errors.
2. Compare end-weight with short vs. long noun objects.
3. Build five separable pairs with pronouns.

Production challenge

Give instructions containing six separable phrasal verbs and clear pronoun placement.

Watch for this

Separability is lexical. Learn it with the phrasal verb instead of guessing.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Three-word verbs

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C1 TARGET

Use high-value verb + particle + preposition combinations accurately.

C2 EXTENSION

Control register and complement patterns in abstract contexts.

Core idea

Three-word verbs behave as units and normally keep their particles together.

Notice the effect

come up with

put up with

get away with

follow up on

Practice

1. Match each verb to a context.
2. Create a sentence with a noun complement and one with a pronoun where possible.
3. Paraphrase each using non-phrasal language.

Production challenge

Tell a workplace or study story using at least five three-word verbs.

Watch for this

Do not separate fixed three-word combinations arbitrarily.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Phrasal-prepositional verbs for problems and solutions

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C1 TARGET

Use natural combinations for investigation, response, and recovery.

C2 EXTENSION

Select multiword verbs that encode process stages precisely.

Core idea

Problem-solving English relies on chunks such as narrow down, rule out, work around, and follow through on.

Notice the effect

narrow down the cause

rule out an option

work around a limitation

follow through on a plan

Practice

1. Arrange the phrases into a problem-solving sequence.
2. Give a plain-English definition of each.
3. Use them in a realistic troubleshooting example.

Production challenge

Explain how you solved a difficult problem using six target multiword verbs.

Watch for this

Do not confuse rule out with rule against, or follow up with follow through.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Idioms of uncertainty and knowledge

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C1 TARGET

Understand common idioms used to express incomplete knowledge.

C2 EXTENSION

Use idiomatic uncertainty without becoming vague or evasive.

Core idea

Idioms can soften or frame knowledge claims: as far as I know, by all accounts, the jury is still out.

Notice the effect

as far as I know

by all accounts

the jury is still out

take something at face value

Practice

1. Paraphrase each idiom literally.
2. Rank them by formality and certainty.
3. Use one in a cautious response.

Production challenge

Discuss an unresolved issue using no more than three uncertainty idioms and clear factual language around them.

Watch for this

Idioms should not replace evidence. They frame uncertainty; they do not resolve it.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Idioms for cause and consequence

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C1 TARGET

Recognize figurative expressions about triggers, momentum, and downstream effects.

C2 EXTENSION

Choose idioms whose imagery matches the situation and register.

Core idea

Expressions such as set the stage for, open the door to, and have a knock-on effect are common in advanced discourse.

Notice the effect

set the stage for

open the door to

a knock-on effect

tip the balance

Practice

1. Explain the metaphor in each phrase.
2. Use each in a neutral professional sentence.
3. Create a non-idiomatic paraphrase.

Production challenge

Explain a chain of consequences using four figurative expressions without mixing incompatible metaphors.

Watch for this

Mixed metaphors can distract: do not 'open the door' and then 'tip the iceberg' in the same idea.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Idioms for difficulty, progress, and limits

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C1 TARGET

Use common idioms around obstacles and progress appropriately.

C2 EXTENSION

Control tone from conversational to professional and recognize clichéd overuse.

Core idea

Many idioms are vivid but familiar; the skill is knowing when they add value.

Notice the effect

hit a roadblock

make headway

reach a bottleneck

push the limits

Practice

1. Sort by formal-neutral-conversational.
2. Use one idiom in speech and paraphrase it for a formal report.
3. Identify one overused cliché and replace it.

Production challenge

Give a project update using three idioms, then produce a report version with literal equivalents.

Watch for this

A cliché can still be useful, but too many make writing sound generic.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Idiomatic stance and diplomacy

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C1 TARGET

Use multiword phrases to disagree, qualify, and redirect politely.

C2 EXTENSION

Manage face and interpersonal nuance without hiding the substantive point.

Core idea

Advanced spoken English often uses formulaic softeners and framing phrases.

Notice the effect

I take your point, but...

I wouldn't go so far as to say...

That said,...

be that as it may

Practice

1. Rank phrases by formality.
2. Complete each with a clear disagreement.
3. Rewrite one blunt response using a diplomatic frame.

Production challenge

Role-play a disagreement in which you acknowledge, qualify, and then state your position clearly.

Watch for this

Softening should not make your actual position impossible to identify.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Idioms and cultural opacity

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C1 TARGET

Recognize when an idiom may confuse an international audience.

C2 EXTENSION

Choose culturally portable language when clarity matters more than local color.

Core idea

C2 control includes knowing when not to use an idiom.

Notice the effect

move the goalposts

inside baseball

a ballpark figure

throw someone under the bus

Practice

1. Explain which metaphors rely on cultural knowledge.
2. Replace each with globally clear language.
3. Decide which might be acceptable in your own audience.

Production challenge

Rewrite a jargon-heavy internal message for an international team.

Watch for this

Idiomatic fluency is not the same as inclusiveness or clarity.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Multiword verbs in academic and professional English

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C1 TARGET

Use neutral and formal multiword verbs that occur in serious writing.

C2 EXTENSION

Avoid the false rule that phrasal verbs are unsuitable in formal prose.

Core idea

Expressions such as build on, stem from, account for, and point to are standard in academic and professional English.

Notice the effect

build on previous work

stem from a limitation

account for the difference

point to a broader issue

Practice

1. Use each in an analytical sentence.
2. Find single-word alternatives and compare nuance.
3. Create a short paragraph where multiword verbs sound more natural than the alternatives.

Production challenge

Summarize an argument using eight neutral/formal multiword verbs.

Watch for this

Do not force a rare single-word synonym when the multiword verb is the conventional choice.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Phrasal verb polysemy

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C1 TARGET

Distinguish multiple senses of high-frequency phrasal verbs.

C2 EXTENSION

Infer sense from syntax, object type, and discourse context.

Core idea

A phrasal verb may have literal, aspectual, and idiomatic senses.

Notice the effect

take off: remove / leave the ground / become successful

break down: stop functioning / analyze / lose emotional control

Practice

1. Create three contexts for one polysemous phrasal verb.
2. Identify clues that reveal the intended sense.
3. Paraphrase each sense with a different verb.

Production challenge

Tell a short story using three senses of one phrasal verb without creating confusion.

Watch for this

Learning only one translation per phrasal verb leaves major gaps in comprehension.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Verb-noun idiomatic frames

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C1 TARGET

Use semi-fixed expressions such as take into account and bear in mind.

C2 EXTENSION

Manipulate internal grammar while preserving the idiomatic frame.

Core idea

Many advanced idioms are not colorful metaphors; they are semi-fixed professional frames.

Notice the effect

take into account

bear in mind

call into question

bring to light

Practice

1. Identify which parts can change and which are fixed.
2. Use each phrase with a realistic object.
3. Paraphrase each in plain language.

Production challenge

Give a 2-minute analytical response using six semi-fixed frames naturally.

Watch for this

Do not modify fixed internal words casually unless corpus evidence supports the variation.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Idiomatic compression and reformulation

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C1 TARGET

Understand compact idiomatic phrases in fast speech and dense writing.

C2 EXTENSION

Reformulate them instantly into transparent language for a different audience.

Core idea

A hallmark of very advanced control is the ability to move between idiomatic and explicit wording.

Notice the effect

in the long run

for the time being

at short notice

in hindsight

Practice

1. Paraphrase each without an idiom.
2. Use each in a sentence with clear time reference.
3. Translate an idiomatic paragraph into plain English.

Production challenge

Explain the same situation in idiomatic conversational English and then in plain international English.

Watch for this

If the audience may not share the idiom, reformulation is a strength, not a loss of sophistication.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

Personal idiom and phrasal-verb bank

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C1 TARGET

Prioritize multiword expressions you encounter repeatedly.

C2 EXTENSION

Track register, separability, object patterns, and common collocates for durable control.

Core idea

A useful entry contains more than a definition: phrase, meaning, grammar, register, example, contrast, retrieval cue.

Notice the effect

look into | investigate | neutral | inseparable | look into the issue

turn down | reject/reduce | neutral | separable | turn it down

Practice

1. Build ten full entries from your recent reading or listening.
2. Mark which are active vs. recognition-only.
3. Create spaced retrieval questions.

Production challenge

Give a 3-minute response using ten expressions from your personal bank without looking.

Watch for this

Do not force newly learned idioms into every conversation. First stabilize comprehension, then selective production.

Self-check: Can I explain why my final version is better, not merely say that it sounds better?

30-Day Practice Plan - Days 1-15

Each unit receives two days: first for controlled noticing, then for independent production. Keep a correction log; advanced progress comes from repeated repair of your own recurring patterns.

Day	Focus	Mode	Output
1	Phrasal verbs vs. single-word verbs by register	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
2	Phrasal verbs vs. single-word verbs by register	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
3	Particle meaning and metaphor	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
4	Particle meaning and metaphor	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
5	Separable phrasal verbs and information structure	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
6	Separable phrasal verbs and information structure	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
7	Three-word verbs	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
8	Three-word verbs	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
9	Phrasal-prepositional verbs for problems and solutions	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
10	Phrasal-prepositional verbs for problems and solutions	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
11	Idioms of uncertainty and knowledge	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
12	Idioms of uncertainty and knowledge	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
13	Idioms for cause and consequence	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
14	Idioms for cause and consequence	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
15	Idioms for difficulty, progress, and limits	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.

Retrieval rule

Before opening the guide, write or say what you remember from the previous unit. Retrieval before review is a stronger test than rereading.

30-Day Practice Plan - Days 16-30

Each unit receives two days: first for controlled noticing, then for independent production. Keep a correction log; advanced progress comes from repeated repair of your own recurring patterns.

Day	Focus	Mode	Output
16	Idioms for difficulty, progress, and limits	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
17	Idiomatic stance and diplomacy	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
18	Idiomatic stance and diplomacy	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
19	Idioms and cultural opacity	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
20	Idioms and cultural opacity	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
21	Multiword verbs in academic and professional English	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
22	Multiword verbs in academic and professional English	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
23	Phrasal verb polysemy	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
24	Phrasal verb polysemy	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
25	Verb-noun idiomatic frames	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
26	Verb-noun idiomatic frames	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
27	Idiomatic compression and reformulation	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
28	Idiomatic compression and reformulation	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.
29	Personal idiom and phrasal-verb bank	Notice + imitate	Analyze 3 examples and create 2 controlled imitations.
30	Personal idiom and phrasal-verb bank	Retrieve + produce	Produce a 60-90 sec response or 150-word text; revise once.

Retrieval rule

Before opening the guide, write or say what you remember from the previous unit. Retrieval before review is a stronger test than rereading.

Advanced Quick Reference

Use this page as a fast review before writing, speaking, or editing.

Feature	Advanced question to ask
Meaning	Is the sense literal, aspectual, metaphorical, or idiomatic?
Grammar	Is the verb separable? What complement follows?
Register	Would it fit casual speech, neutral prose, or formal analysis?
Transparency	Will an international audience understand it easily?
Alternative	Can I paraphrase it precisely without the idiom?
Polysemy	Does this expression have other common meanings?
Metaphor	Does the imagery fit the rest of the sentence?
Use	Is this expression helping clarity or merely displaying vocabulary?

Advanced English is not maximum complexity. It is maximum control.

Final Performance Assessment

This is a learning check, not an official CEFR certification. Use it to identify where your advanced control is stable and where you still depend on conscious effort.

Task A - Prepared

Create a 3-minute spoken response or 300-word text using at least five features from this guide. Revise once.

Task B - Unprepared

Answer a new prompt for 2 minutes or write 180 words in 12 minutes. Then identify three choices you would improve.

Mastery checklist

- I can distinguish separable, inseparable, and three-word verb patterns.
- I understand common particle meanings but verify unfamiliar expressions.
- I can shift between phrasal and single-word alternatives by register.
- I can paraphrase idioms for an international or formal audience.
- I use idioms selectively rather than forcing them.
- I track grammar, register, meaning, and polysemy in my personal expression bank.

Dimension	1 - Developing	2 - Reliable C1 control	3 - Flexible C2-like control
Accuracy	Frequent repair is needed.	Errors are occasional and rarely obscure meaning.	Control is sustained even with complex or compressed language.
Choice	Uses a safe default.	Chooses from several effective options.	Chooses deliberately for nuance, tone, rhythm, or implication.
Reformulation	Gets stuck when wording fails.	Repairs effectively after a pause.	Recasts smoothly and precisely with minimal disruption.
Transfer	Uses features only in practiced topics.	Transfers them across familiar advanced contexts.	Transfers them naturally across unfamiliar and high-pressure contexts.

Next step

Do not repeat every unit. Repeat the three units that caused the most hesitation, then retest with a new topic.

Alignment and Further Study

This workbook uses CEFR as a proficiency framework rather than as a checklist of mandatory language items.

- **Council of Europe:** Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Companion Volume (2020).
- **English Profile:** research on grammar, vocabulary, and learner language across CEFR levels.
- **Cambridge English:** C1 Advanced and C2 Proficiency handbooks and sample materials.
- **Corpus-informed dictionaries:** use reputable learner and general dictionaries to verify collocation, register, frequency, pronunciation, and usage labels.
- **Style references:** compare conventions across professional, academic, journalistic, and organizational style guides when punctuation or capitalization varies.

Evidence habit

At C1-C2, dictionary definitions alone are not enough. Check authentic examples, collocations, grammar patterns, register labels, and how a phrase behaves across different contexts.

Digital Nutrients study principle

Notice -> retrieve -> produce -> revise -> transfer. The goal is not to sound complicated. The goal is to express the exact meaning you intend, in language appropriate for the audience and situation.