

Phrasal Verbs in Legal English: Challenging Traditions in British and European Contexts¹

Vanessa Leonardi

Sapienza Università di Roma
vanessa.leonardi@uniroma1.it

Patrizia Giampieri

Università di Perugia
patrizia.giampieri@unipg.it

Abstract

Phrasal verbs, frequently associated with informal and idiomatic usage, have traditionally been regarded as stylistically incompatible with the conventions of legal English. Despite this perception, their occurrence within legal discourse across both British and European institutional contexts reveals a more complex linguistic reality. This paper presents a corpus-driven investigation into the frequency, distribution, and functional roles of selected phrasal verbs across a diverse range of spoken and written legal texts, including parliamentary proceedings, judicial decisions, and contractual documentation. By analysing national and supranational legal registers, the study identifies patterns that highlight both commonalities and divergences across genres and institutional levels. The findings challenge prevailing assumptions regarding the unsuitability of phrasal verbs in legal language, emphasising that many possess broad, general meanings not exclusively tied to legal contexts. Although formal lexical alternatives remain predominant, the integration of multi-word verb constructions indicates a register that is more flexible and contextually sensitive than traditionally acknowledged. This research offers valuable insights for legal drafting practices and the teaching of English for Legal Purposes, while also bearing implications for legal translation and multilingual legislative environments. Ultimately, it advocates for recognising phrasal verbs as legitimate, and at times

¹ Although the authors have collaborated closely throughout the study, Vanessa Leonardi is responsible for the following sections: (3), (4.6), (4.7), (4.8), (4.9), (4.10) and Patrizia Giampieri is personally responsible for the following sections: (2), (4.1), (4.2), (4.3), (4.4), (4.5). Sections (1) and (5) are the result of a common effort.

indispensable, components of contemporary legal discourse, thereby encouraging a critical re-evaluation of established stylistic conventions.

Keywords: Phrasal verbs; Legal discourse; Corpus-based study; Legal English; Stylistic variation.

I verbi frasali, spesso impiegati in modo informale e idiomatico, sono stati tradizionalmente considerati incompatibili, dal punto di vista stilistico, con le rigide convenzioni linguistiche dell'inglese giuridico. Tuttavia, la loro presenza nel discorso giuridico, sia in contesti istituzionali britannici che europei, rivela una realtà linguistica più complessa. Il presente articolo analizza la frequenza, la distribuzione e la funzione di tali verbi in vari testi giuridici orali e scritti, tra cui atti parlamentari, sentenze e contratti. Attraverso un'analisi dei registri giuridici impiegati a livello nazionale e sovranazionale, questo studio individua configurazioni linguistiche con analogie e divergenze tra generi ed impieghi istituzionali. I risultati mettono in discussione le ipotesi prevalenti sull'inadeguatezza dei verbi frasali nel linguaggio giuridico, evidenziando come queste strutture assumano talvolta connotazioni ampie e generali, non necessariamente vincolate a specifici contesti settoriali. Sebbene le alternative lessicali formali rimangano predominanti, la presenza di varie costruzioni verbali indica un registro flessibile e sensibile al contesto. La ricerca qui presentata offre quindi implicazioni rilevanti per l'insegnamento dell'inglese giuridico, con ricadute nella traduzione specialistica e nell'uso del linguaggio giuridico in contesti legislativi multilingue. Il presente lavoro riconosce l'importanza dei verbi frasali come componenti indispensabili del discorso giuridico contemporaneo, offrendo una valutazione critica di assunzioni stilistiche radicate.

Parole chiave: verbi frasali; discorso giuridico; inglese giuridico; linguistica dei corpora; variazione stilistica.

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and law has long attracted scholarly attention, particularly with regard to the linguistic choices that shape legal texts. Among the various features that define legal language, phrasal verbs constitute a particularly compelling area of inquiry. Although often associated with informal or colloquial usage, such constructions have traditionally been viewed with scepticism in legal discourse, where formality, precision, and clarity are regarded as paramount. This conventional perspective raises important questions concerning the role of phrasal verbs in a domain governed by institutional norms and stylistic regulation.

Despite their ubiquity in everyday English, phrasal verbs remain underexplored within studies of legal language. Previous research has predominantly concentrated on other lexical and syntactic characteristics of legal discourse—such as Latinate vocabulary, nominalisations, and complex sentence structures—while phrasal verbs have received comparatively limited systematic attention. This omission is particularly noteworthy in light of ongoing debates surrounding the plain language movement in legal drafting, which advocates for greater accessibility and transparency in legal communication. The question of whether phrasal verbs constitute a departure from legal formality or may function as legitimate instruments of clarity and precision remains unresolved. Furthermore, the extent to which these constructions have been integrated into different types of legal texts, from legislative documents to judicial decisions, has not yet been comprehensively documented. A detailed investigation into their presence, distribution, and function is therefore essential to understanding how contemporary legal language is adapting to evolving communicative demands.

This study addresses this gap by adopting a corpus-driven approach to examine the use of phrasal verbs across a range of British and European legal corpora, encompassing both spoken and written texts. The corpora analysed include parliamentary records (ParlaMint, EuroParl), judicial decisions (CoCELD, Eur-Lex Judgments), and terms of service agreements from

national and European Union contexts (ToS_EN, ToS_EU). Through these corpora, the research quantifies the prevalence of phrasal verbs and identifies patterns indicative of broader shifts in linguistic conventions within legal and quasi-legal communication. Particular attention is paid to contrasts between national and supranational discourses, as well as between formal written texts and more dialogic spoken exchanges.

At the core of this investigation lies the hypothesis that, although traditionally marginalised in prescriptive legal English, phrasal verbs perform important functional, semantic, and stylistic roles within legal discourse. These roles vary according to context, genre, and institutional level. For instance, verbs such as “carry out” and “deal with” tend to retain their general meanings, whereas “enter into”, “set out”, “entitle to”, and “lay down” exhibit distinct legal specificity and frequently occur in formal, often formulaic, expressions. Their use reflects an adaptation of legal language to evolving communicative requirements, including greater transparency, textual economy, and accessibility, as legal practitioners strive to render documents intelligible to both expert and lay audiences.

This study challenges the long-standing assumption that phrasal verbs are incompatible with the legal register, arguing that such constructions frequently enhance communicative clarity, procedural coherence, and the rhetorical organisation of legal texts. The tension between tradition and modernisation in legal drafting renders the study of phrasal verbs particularly pertinent, shedding light on the dynamic relationship among linguistic formality, institutional legitimacy, and functional efficiency.

To address these issues, a corpus-driven methodology is employed, enabling a systematic and empirically grounded analysis of the frequency, distribution, and contextual functions of selected phrasal verbs. The principal research questions concern how frequently phrasal verbs occur across different institutional levels and textual genres; what distinctions can be observed between their use in spoken and written legal English; the extent to which specific phrasal verbs acquire technical or formulaic status within legal contexts; and how these constructions influence the clarity, accessibility, and formality of legal texts.

2. Literature Review

Phrasal verbs represent a vital component of the English lexicon, contributing significantly to both informal and formal registers of the language. Although traditionally associated with conversational and informal English, a growing body of research has demonstrated that phrasal verbs also appear in more formal domains, including academic and legal English (Biber et al., 1999; Gardner and Davies, 2007; Haigh, 2009). Despite their colloquial roots, they have evolved to serve communicative functions in specialised and professional contexts, challenging the longstanding perception that they are confined to casual speech.

The study of phrasal verbs within English vocabulary presents a multifaceted and often complex field of inquiry. Bolinger (1971) notes that their intricate structure and idiomatic meanings have led to varying definitions and difficulties in establishing a unified classification. This complexity is especially evident in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where learners often struggle to select and use phrasal verbs correctly. As a result, many tend to avoid them altogether in favour of more transparent single-word equivalents (Cowie, 1992; Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn and Marchena, 1989; Laufer and Eliasson, 1993; Liao and Fukuya, 2004; Siyanova and Schmitt, 2007).

Structurally, phrasal verbs typically consist of a lexical verb combined with one or more particles, either adverbs or prepositions, that together function as a single semantic and grammatical unit (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1150). Researchers such as Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999) have proposed several criteria to distinguish true phrasal verbs from other multi-word verb combinations, focusing on features like idiomaticity, word order flexibility, and the potential to replace the expression with a single verb (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002).

Phrasal verbs occur in a range of forms, from intransitive expressions like “wake up” to transitive types such as “turn off the light”. More elaborate forms also exist, combining a verb, a particle, and a preposition; examples include “get back to”, “put it down to”, or “let someone in on”. These multi-part constructions are less frequently examined in the literature, often due to their syntactic complexity and the need to assess them in context.

The frequency and productivity of phrasal verbs in everyday English have been well established. Gardner and Davies (2007) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the British National Corpus, identifying a set of 100 highly frequent phrasal verbs that collectively account for over half of all phrasal verb occurrences in the corpus. Liu (2011) extended this research to include a comparison between British and American English, finding that many of these common expressions appear consistently across varieties and are most prevalent in spoken and fictional texts.

Further work by Garnier and Schmitt (2015) led to the development of the PHaVE list, which catalogues the key meanings of the most frequent phrasal verbs. Their research revealed that most PVs are used with just a few core senses, reinforcing their regularity and usefulness in everyday communication.

While commonly associated with informal speech, phrasal verbs are not entirely absent from formal writing. Trebits (2009), for example, examined EU institutional texts and found that while PVs were used sparingly, they were not entirely excluded, indicating a controlled but present role even in highly formal documents. The general tendency, however, is for PVs to be less common in formal registers, which helps sustain their reputation as informal or colloquial.

For learners of English, the idiomatic and non-literal nature of PVs presents significant difficulties. Research has shown that factors such as proficiency level (Liao and Fukuya, 2004) and frequency of specific PVs (Schmitt and Redwood, 2011) all influence how well learners acquire and use these expressions. The widespread avoidance of PVs among learners further supports the view that they are among the most challenging elements of English to master (Paquot and Granger, 2012; Dagut and Laufer, 1985).

Despite the growing body of research on PVs across both informal and formal registers, there remains a notable paucity of studies specifically addressing their usage within legal contexts. While previous investigations have examined PVs in institutional and academic writing, the distinctive characteristics and functions of PVs in legal discourse have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This gap is particularly significant given the unique demands of legal language, where precision and clarity are paramount, and where the presence or absence of PVs may carry important implications for interpretation and accessibility. Accordingly, further research is warranted to investigate the role and frequency of PVs in legal texts, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their function within specialised registers.

The analysis of phrasal verbs via corpus linguistics has already been explored by several scholars (Gardner and Davies 2007; Spring 2018; Crawford Camiciottoli 2022; Strong 2025), thus highlighting how corpus analysis helps users grasp meanings and notice language patterns.

Amongst others, the literature has evidenced that phrasal verbs are frequent and feature pragmatic and/or figurative meanings to convey attitudes and stances (Crawford Camiciottoli 2022). Strong (2025) demonstrates how word extraction from corpora allows learners to enhance noticing and retention, thereby improving their L2 skills.

In the legal field, Bilić and Gaspar (2018) develops a corpus-assisted semi-automatic retrieval of phrasal verbs from legal corpora. Their findings indicate a rather low recurrence of phrasal verbs in legal discourse, as they represent only 2% of the words composing the corpus. Additionally, the authors highlight that five most recurrent phrasal verbs account for almost 50% of all phrasal verbs. They also reveal frequent nominalisation (as in “the drawing-up”, “the follow-up”, etc.).

Corpora have also proved to be resourceful in translator training and translator practice. Frankenberg-Garcia (2015) contends that corpora are helpful for both novice and experienced translators as they allow users to grasp technical and unfamiliar terminology. Biel (2017) develops two approaches: corpus consultation to translate, and corpus analysis to reflect on the translation process. Prieto Ramos (2021: 181) posits that corpus-assisted approaches are necessary to meet the challenges of institutional legal translation.

3. Methodology

For the purposes of this study, the investigation focuses on the most frequent phrasal verbs within legal discourse, employing a comparative approach across six distinct corpora that span both written and spoken forms of legal English. To ensure a comprehensive and detailed analysis, this paper examines both national and European legal language in a contrastive manner, placing particular emphasis on parliamentary debates, judicial decisions, and contractual documents such as terms of service. These genres are considered key sites of legal communication and linguistic negotiation, making them critical areas for the analysis of phrasal verb usage.

The corpora selected for this investigation include: the British parliamentary proceedings corpus (ParlaMint) (Erjavec et al. 2021), the English section of the European Parliament spoken corpus (EuroParl) (Koehn 2005), the Corpus of Contemporary English Legal Decisions (CoCELD) (Rodríguez-Puente and Hernández-Coalla 2022), the Eur-Lex judgments corpus, which contains the judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Baisa et al. 2016), and the ToS EN corpus, which consists of English-language terms of service from web hosting providers (Giampieri 2024), along with a corpus of Terms of Service for contracting services offered to EU institutions (ToS EU). Each of these corpora was carefully selected for its ability to provide authentic, contextually rich data on legal language, and together they enable a triangulated, multi-genre perspective on the usage of phrasal verbs in legal contexts.

ParlaMint comprises original, unedited speeches delivered in the British Parliament, containing approximately 110 million tokens, thereby providing an extensive and representative sample of spoken legislative discourse. In contrast, EuroParl is a parallel corpus, which includes both the original speeches and their professionally produced translations into multiple European languages, facilitating not only intra-lingual comparisons but also inter-lingual analyses. This feature allows the identification of translation-induced variations in legal English. The English sub-section of EuroParl, comprising approximately 60 million tokens, was specifically chosen to ensure comparability with ParlaMint and to provide insight into the linguistic features of supranational legislative debate (Koehn 2005; Kilgariff et al. 2004). Both ParlaMint and

EuroParl are accessible via the Sketch Engine platform (Kilgariff et al. 2004), which supports advanced corpus querying and analysis.

The CoCELD corpus offers both diachronic and synchronic perspectives on legal decisions, comprising case law from the United Kingdom and the wider Commonwealth, spanning the period from 1950 to 2021. It is further divided into three main sections, each focusing on a different appellate body, namely, the Privy Council, the House of Lords, and the UK Supreme Court, with a sub-corpus dedicated to the UK Supreme Court comprising 411,922 tokens (Rodríguez-Puente and Hernández-Coalla 2022). This structure allows the examination of both historical shifts and contemporary patterns in judicial language, enabling the isolation of phrasal verb usage specific to the highest levels of the British legal system. The Eur-Lex judgments corpus complements this by providing a parallel set of judicial decisions from the Court of Justice of the European Union, thus offering the opportunity to compare national and supranational judicial discourse and to investigate the extent to which EU legal English either reflects or diverges from its UK counterpart (Baisa et al. 2016). The English Eur-Lex judgments corpus comprises 51,499,120 tokens. The ToS EN and ToS EU corpora were compiled to capture the language of private legal agreements and regulatory compliance. The ToS EN corpus (196,442 tokens) focuses on terms of service from IT service providers, whereas the ToS EU corpus (250,441 tokens) comprises contracts for IT services offered to EU institutions (Giampieri 2024). The ToS EN corpus was assembled through systematic web searches and manual curation, ensuring a representative sample of various providers and service types. The ToS EU corpus, on the other hand, was sourced from publicly available EU procurement documentation.

Phrasal verbs were searched for in the corpora above-mentioned and occurrences per million tokens were calculated. More precisely, the phrasal verbs focused on are as follows: “carry out”, “deal with”, “draw up”, “enter into”, “entitle to”, “lay down”, “limit to”, “provide for”, “refer to”, and “set out”. In addition to examining relative frequencies, this paper also analyses word usages in context to provide both qualitative and quantitative insights. Namely, phrasal verbs present significant challenges for automated detection due to their syntactic variability and semantic ambiguity. To address these issues, a hybrid approach was employed, that is, automatic extraction methods were initially applied, followed by manual verification of a stratified random sample, thereby enhancing both precision and recall. The annotation process also involved the tagging of contextual features, such as surrounding collocates and syntactic patterns, to facilitate subsequent qualitative analysis.

As mentioned, the analytical strategy employed in this study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. From a quantitative perspective, the frequency of phrasal verbs was normalised per million tokens (pmT) to allow meaningful cross-corpus comparisons. Qualitatively, a concordance-based approach was employed to explore the pragmatic functions of selected phrasal verbs in context, with particular attention paid to their role in legal argumentation, judicial reasoning, and the articulation of contractual obligations and rights. This dual methodological approach enables both breadth and depth in analysis, capturing not only the quantitative prevalence of phrasal verbs but also their qualitative significance within legal discourse.

Regarding the selection of phrasal verbs, the study was initially guided by authoritative legal language texts to ensure its scholarly robustness. Two main works underpin this selection, namely, *Legal English* by Rupert Haigh (2009) and *English for Law* by Michael S. Boyd (2018). These texts are widely regarded as foundational resources in the study of legal English, providing comprehensive analyses of the structure and function of legal language, with specific attention to the role of phrasal verbs. Haigh’s *Legal English* offers an extensive overview of legal

terminology and syntax, with particular emphasis on the importance of phrasal verbs in drafting legal documents and constructing legal arguments. His work identifies and explains various phrasal verbs that play critical roles in legal writing and spoken discourse, offering a theoretical foundation that informs the selection of verbs for this study. Boyd's *English for Law* provides similar insights, focusing not only on the practical usage of phrasal verbs in legal writing but also on their pedagogical importance in teaching legal English. Boyd's examination of how phrasal verbs are employed in various legal genres makes his work particularly valuable for understanding the application of these verbs in different legal settings.

While these authoritative texts serve as primary sources for identifying relevant phrasal verbs, a portion of the selection is also informed by experiential knowledge gained from professional legal translation. Legal translators frequently encounter phrasal verbs in both formal and informal legal documents that may not be extensively covered in academic literature but are nonetheless crucial in practice. This experiential insight, derived from real-world application, adds a practical dimension to the selection process, ensuring that the study captures not only the phrasal verbs recognised in scholarly works but also those that are prevalent in everyday legal usage.

A comprehensive list of all the phrasal verbs selected for this study is provided in Appendix 1 of this article. The items are arranged in alphabetical order for ease of reference and to facilitate cross-checking with corpus data. To ensure the focus remains on the most relevant and significant examples, only those phrasal verbs that reached a relative frequency equal to or greater than 200 have been included in the discussion. This threshold was established in light of the large number of phrasal verbs identified across the corpora, enabling the study to concentrate on those verbs that exhibit the highest occurrence rates. By setting this criterion, the analysis prioritises the phrasal verbs that are most central to legal communication, ensuring that the findings are both meaningful and reflective of common usage in legal contexts. Consequently, this selective approach also ensures that the study remains manageable and relevant, highlighting the linguistic forms most likely to offer valuable insights into the nature of legal discourse. This frequency-based threshold was also informed by ethical considerations relating to transparency, representativeness, and fairness in data interpretation. By prioritising phrasal verbs that occur most frequently across multiple corpora, the study seeks to minimise potential bias arising from rare, context-specific, or jurisdictionally limited usages. This selective approach ensures that the findings remain ethically robust, methodologically transparent, and reflective of linguistic patterns that are genuinely characteristic of legal discourse.

4. Corpora Analyses

This section presents two core sets of corpus-based data: one detailing the relative frequencies of selected phrasal verbs, measured per million tokens (pmT), and another providing contextualised, corpus-driven sample phrases that show their actual usage. Each phrasal verb was searched as a lemma, meaning all inflected forms of the base verb were included in the query, thus allowing a holistic measure of its occurrence across varying grammatical forms (e.g., “carried out”, “carrying out”, etc.). Importantly, the frequency tables highlight the highest rate of occurrence for each verb using bold formatting to enhance clarity and comparability.

4.1 Carry out

The first phrasal verb is “carry out” (see Table 1 and Figure 1):

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
105.73	237.50	259.76	410.53	208.71	649.25

Table 1. Relative frequencies of “carry out” across the corpora

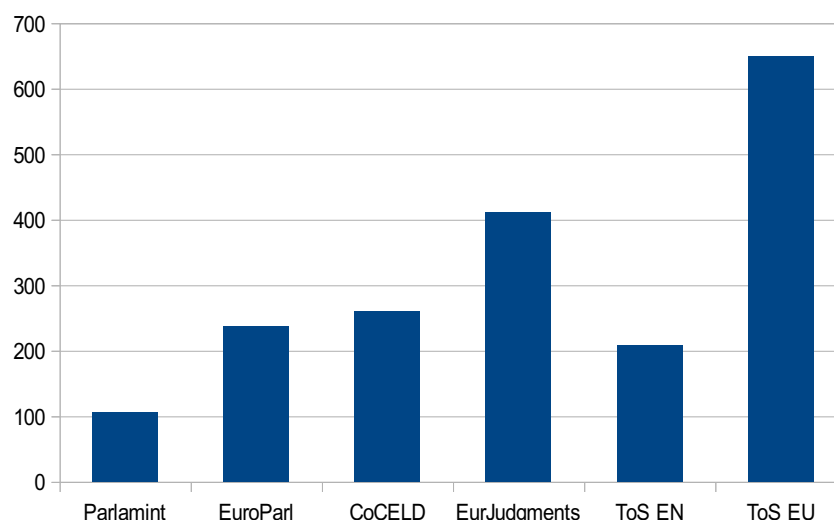


Figure 1. Relative frequencies of “carry out” across the corpora

The quantitative data presented in Table 1 indicate notable variation in the distribution of the phrasal verb “carry out” across the six examined corpora. This verb appears with considerably greater relative frequency in texts associated with legal and institutional discourse, particularly within the Terms of Service EU corpus. Its prominent occurrence in such contexts suggests a strong association with the formalised and procedural language typical of legal and contractual documents, where precision in the articulation of duties and actions is essential. This pattern is similarly evident in corpora such as Eur Judgments and CoCELD, reinforcing the view that “carry out” is favoured in environments that prioritise clarity and explicitness in conveying procedural or regulatory acts. By contrast, corpora that represent spoken political discourse, such as ParlaMint, tend to employ this verb form less frequently. This may reflect the more rhetorical, interactive, and often *impromptu* nature of language in parliamentary settings, which may favour a wider range of verbal constructions or less formal alternatives. The discrepancy between the two Terms of Service corpora is also noteworthy, suggesting that even within a single domain, variation in register or institutional style can influence the preferred lexical choices. Selected examples of usage are provided in Table 2.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
I am grateful for the research that the Government carried out in this area when I first raised this anomaly in the Criminal Courts and Justice Bill.	This state of affairs is partly the result of work carried out by the Commission over recent years.	Both men had failed to carry out the orders of their foreman, Church, and therefore had broken the statutory obligation imposed by Regulation 15 (1).	That assessment cannot, therefore, be carried out solely on the basis of the financial situation of the person concerned.	Any change of host will be carried out with the minimum of disruption possible.	The period applicable to the Provider does not include the period required by the Council of Europe to carry out verification operations.

Table 2. Corpus-driven sample phrases

Turning to the qualitative examples in Table 2, the collocational patterns and contextual deployment of “carry out” shed further light on its functional role within institutional and legal English. Across all six corpus-derived phrases, “carry out” occurs in transitive constructions, taking direct objects that refer to discrete, task-oriented activities. These include nouns such as “research”, “work”, “orders”, “assessment”, “change”, and “verification operations”, each denoting an action initiated and completed within a formalised or procedural framework. The semantic consistency observed across corpora suggests that “carry out” functions primarily as a formal equivalent of “perform” or “execute”, but with connotations of administrative neutrality and procedural precision. Notably, the verb appears in various grammatical forms, with the passive voice, e.g. “be carried out”, used in four of the six examples. This tendency reflects a broader stylistic convention in legal and bureaucratic discourse, where agentless constructions serve to foreground actions over actors, thereby reinforcing an impersonal, institutional tone. Such grammatical and lexical choices contribute to a discourse of objectivity and authority, typical of formal written registers. The recurrent use of “carry out” in these highly regulated contexts also points to its lexical fixity and its strong association with particular collocational partners. Together, these features underline the specialised function of this verb as a linguistic resource for articulating obligations, procedural steps, and institutional responsibilities in contemporary formal English.

4.2 Deal with

The next phrasal verb is “deal with” (see Table 3 and Figure 2).

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
397.62	328.19	339.87	54.95	45.82	12.79

Table 3. Relative frequencies of “deal with” across the corpora

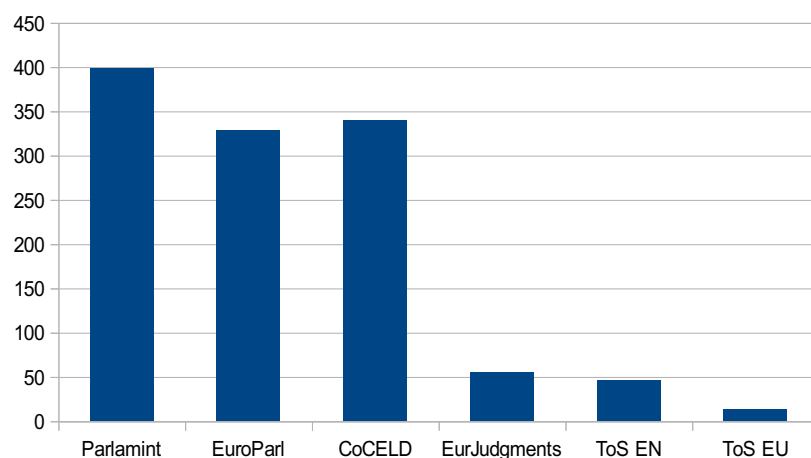


Figure 2. Relative frequencies of “deal with” across the corpora

The frequency data presented in Table 3 for the phrasal verb “deal with” reveal a markedly different distribution from that observed for “carry out”, underscoring how linguistic preferences shift according to domain and communicative function. The highest frequency occurs in the ParlaMint corpus, with similarly elevated figures in CoCELD and EuroParl. In contrast, its occurrence declines substantially in EurJudgments, and even more so in the two Terms of Service corpora, where it appears least frequently. This distribution suggests that “deal with” is primarily favoured in spoken or discursive registers, particularly those reflecting political dialogue or legal commentary, as exemplified by ParlaMint and CoCELD. Such contexts often require speakers or writers to respond to issues, objections, or concerns in a flexible and interactive manner, making this verb an apt choice for managing topical engagement in real time or elaborative discussion. By contrast, the notably low frequency in the Terms of Service corpora reflects the unsuitability of “deal with” in legal or contractual texts, which demand a higher degree of lexical specificity and interpretative clarity. In such domains, more precise or technical alternatives are typically preferred to avoid ambiguity and ensure legal rigour. Overall, “deal with” appears to function as a general-purpose verb for addressing matters in explanatory or dialogic genres, but it is systematically eschewed in regulatory or operative documents, where semantic precision is paramount. Illustrative examples from the corpora are provided in Table 4.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
We are dealing with the mess of the uncontrolled immigration system that was left by the previous Labour Government.	At the same time, it is an especially delicate issue because it deals with the protection of the Community's financial interests.	My Lords, S II of the Act is dealing with the admissibility of documentary evidence on an application for the issue of a warrant of arrest.	Member States shall take the necessary measures to deal with any offence or irregularity and to impose effective penalties.	We may have to suspend the Services if we have to deal with technical problems.	In the absence of derogating contractual provisions, the General Conditions shall apply automatically to all contracts dealing with the purchase by the Court of Auditors of services.

Table 4. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The corpus-driven examples in Table 4 offer further insight into the semantic flexibility and discourse functions associated with “deal with”. Across all six corpora, the verb consistently conveys the sense of “address” or “handle”, typically applied to abstract or multifaceted entities such as “the mess of the uncontrolled immigration system,” “the protection of the Community’s financial interests,” “the admissibility of documentary evidence,” and various “technical problems.” This usage highlights the capacity of this verb to encompass a broad spectrum of referents, including legal issues, technical challenges, and political concerns, without invoking the formal precision demanded by verbs such as “resolve”, “rectify”, or “execute”. The grammatical realisations also display considerable variation, including present continuous forms (“are dealing with”, “is dealing with”), infinitival constructions (“to deal with”), and participial modifiers (“contracts dealing with the purchase...”). Such syntactic versatility contributes to the prominence of this verb in spoken and semi-formal registers, where it facilitates the pragmatic discussion of issues without requiring firm conclusions or definitive outcomes. In contrast to “carry out”, which is closely associated with procedural actions and task completion, “deal with” tends to signal general engagement with a matter rather than its resolution. Its usage often marks an orientation towards a topic, allowing for discursive elaboration rather than juridical precision. The final example from the ToS EU corpus, “contracts dealing with the purchase...”, further illustrates the relatively informal tone of the verb, which may account for its marginal status in highly formalised legal drafting. Although it does appear in legal and technical texts, its role remains peripheral, typically reserved for contexts where terminological specificity is not paramount.

Taken together, these examples reinforce the view that “deal with” operates primarily as a discourse-oriented verb, well-suited to thematising issues or processes in contexts where flexibility and generality are preferred over legal or procedural exactitude.

4.3 Draw up

This section explores “draw up”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
11.81	119.72	7.28	88.35	0.00	211.09

Table 5. Relative frequencies of “draw up” across the corpora

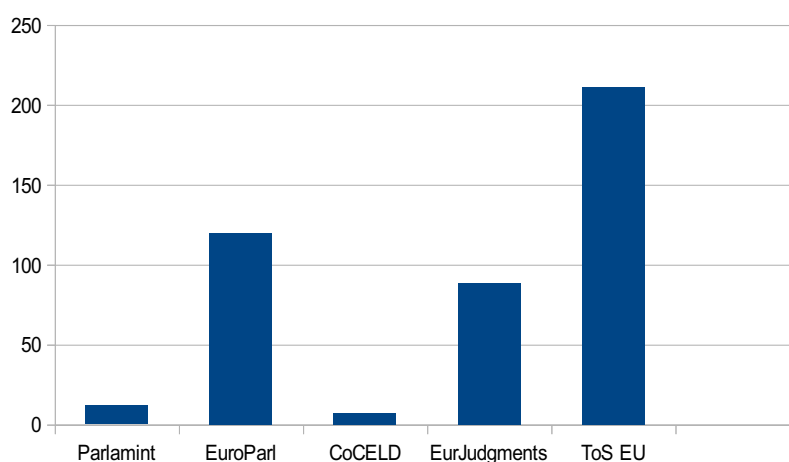


Figure 3. Relative frequencies of “draw up” across the corpora

The frequency data presented in Table 5 reveal a marked domain-specific preference for the phrasal verb “draw up”, particularly within legal and administrative texts. The highest frequency is observed in the ToS EU corpus, followed by EuroParl and Eur Judgments, while ToS EN records no occurrences. ParlaMint and CoCELD exhibit only minimal usage. These disparities highlight the strong association of this verb with formal, legalistic registers in which the composition of official documents, procedural instruments, and contractual clauses constitutes a central communicative concern. The prominence of “draw up” in ToS EU, a corpus characterised by legal and contractual discourse, confirms its specialised role in denoting the formal creation of binding texts. Similarly, its relatively frequent appearance in EuroParl and Eur Judgments suggests that this verb is also integral to contexts prioritising procedural clarity and the authoritative formulation of measures or regulations. The complete absence of “draw up” in ToS EN is notable and may point to institutional variation in drafting conventions or stylistic preferences. Nevertheless, the broader trend confirms the embeddedness of this verb in the language of legal documentation. By contrast, its limited use in ParlaMint and CoCELD suggests that it is less typical in general legal discussion or parliamentary debate, where references to document drafting may be less central or conveyed using alternative expressions. Overall, the

data support the conclusion that “draw up” functions as a specialised lexical item within legal discourse, particularly when precision in the formulation of official texts is required. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 6.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EU
The original contract was engaged with and drawn up by the Minister who preceded the Leader of the Opposition.	Firstly, it is necessary, drawing up the legislation, to produce clear and complete rules.	The certificate of conviction drawn up on 30th November 2004 recites the two offences of which the appellant was convicted.	That board is to draw up a list of suitable candidates and the appointing authority is to decide which of those candidates to appoint to the vacant posts.	The Contractor shall draw up payment requests as follows: Payment of the balance to be admissible.

Table 6. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The examples presented in Table 6 further reinforce the specialised and formalised use of “draw up”, revealing consistent patterns in both collocation and syntactic structure. The verb is employed in reference to the creation or formulation of various official documents, such as “contracts”, “legislation”, “certificates of conviction”, “lists of suitable candidates”, and “payment requests”. Each of these noun complements denotes a tangible, authoritative text with legal or procedural implications, thereby situating *draw up* firmly within a semantic field concerned with institutional documentation and decision-making. The grammatical realisations include passive constructions (“drawn up by”, “drawn up on”), infinitival forms (“to draw up”), and nominalised variants (“in drawing up the legislation”), demonstrating a high degree of morphological flexibility compatible with formal, written registers. This syntactic adaptability enables the verb to function across a range of regulatory statements, procedural descriptions, and institutional directives, genres that require precise reference to the preparatory stages of legally operative texts. The example from ToS EU, for instance, highlights the role of this verb in contractual language, where the drafting of “payment requests” is directly linked to the admissibility of financial claims. Likewise, the instance from Eur Judgments underscores the evidentiary function of formally prepared documents, such as judicial certificates. These uses collectively confirm that “draw up” is typically reserved for contexts in which the formulation of authoritative texts constitutes a central communicative objective. Its infrequent appearance in corpora such as ParlaMint reflects the relatively peripheral role of document production in dialogic or policy-oriented discourse, where such preparatory activities are often implied or delegated to other institutional actors. In sum, “draw up” emerges as a register-sensitive verb, characteristic of domains where legal and procedural o

written instruments.

4.4 Enter into

The next phrasal verb is “enter into”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
22.41	63.65	8.98	109.03	259.62	310.23

Table 7. Relative frequencies of “enter into” across the corpora

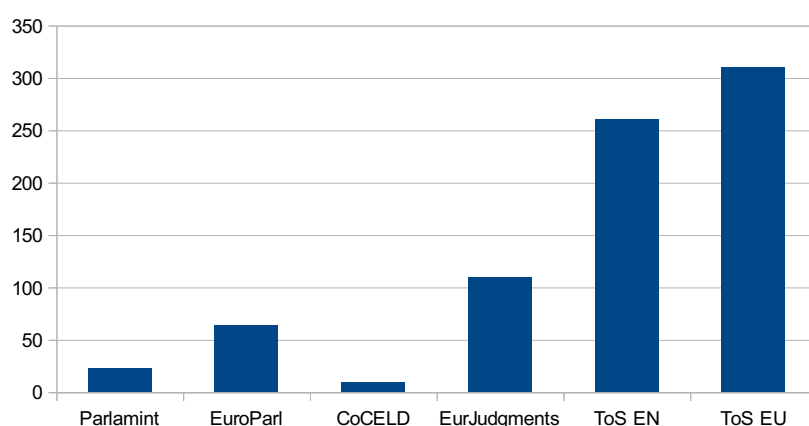


Figure 4. Relative frequencies of “enter into” across the corpora

The data presented in Table 7 indicate a strong association between the phrasal verb “enter into” and formal legal or contractual discourse, particularly within the context of terms of service and legislative documentation. The highest frequency is recorded in the ToS EU corpus, followed closely by ToS EN. These figures suggest that “enter into” is a preferred lexical choice in contexts where the establishment of formal agreements, legal obligations, or operative contractual relations constitutes a primary communicative objective. Eur Judgments also records a notable frequency, further underscoring the relevance of this PV within juridical documentation. By contrast, CoCELD and ParlaMint display markedly lower frequencies, while EuroParl occupies an intermediate position, likely reflecting its hybrid discursive profile, which blends legislative language with elements of debate and policy commentary. The relatively infrequent use of “enter into” in ParlaMint and CoCELD suggests that, in spoken or discursive legal settings, this verb may be supplanted by more accessible alternatives such as “agree to”, “sign”, or “undertake”, which convey similar meanings but with less formal or technical weight. In contrast, the high frequency observed in both ToS corpora affirms the institutional significance of this verb in articulating the formation of binding legal commitments, procedural thresholds, and contractual relationships. Taken together, these patterns confirm “enter into” as a register-specific lexical item, embedded in prescriptive and regulatory genres where legal formality and precision are paramount. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 8.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
I do not think I should enter into a conversation about that and I do not think it is really relevant to this argument.	The Commission has also entered into commitments to cooperate with Parliament in terms of SEM 2000.	The capital of this partnership was I think 100 pounds and then the partnership entered into some trifling transactions.	That directive repealed, inter alia, the Sixth VAT Directive and entered into force on 1 January 2007.	It has the legal right and authority to enter into and perform its obligations under the Agreement.	The Contractor shall provide, prior to applying or entering into such agreement, a copy of the proposed agreement to the Commission without charge.

Table 8. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The qualitative examples presented in Table 8 further substantiate the interpretation of “enter into” as a highly formalised phrasal verb, predominantly employed to denote the establishment of contractual or legal relationships. In five of the six instances, the verb is clearly embedded within legal or quasi-legal contexts, collocating with nouns such as “commitments”, “transactions”, “force”, “obligations”, and “agreement”. These collocations underscore the role of this PV in signalling the initiation of binding or enforceable conditions, whether in the context of commercial arrangements, statutory enactments, or inter-institutional accords. The example from Eur Judgments, “entered into force on 1 January 2007”, exemplifies a technical usage frequently encountered in legal drafting, wherein the phrase marks the moment a law or agreement acquires formal applicability. Similarly, the ToS EN and ToS EU examples emphasise the legal entitlement or obligation of parties to “enter into” agreements, further illustrating the centrality of this verb in articulating points of contractual engagement and regulatory authority. Even the example from CoCELD, though situated in a slightly less formal context, pertains to the financial undertakings of a partnership and thus retains clear legal relevance. By contrast, the lone example from ParlaMint, “enter into a conversation”, represents a metaphorical or idiomatic usage, invoking the sense of “engage with” rather than the initiation of a formal obligation. However, such instances appear highly infrequent and context-specific, and do not significantly detract from the dominant juridico-administrative function of this verb. The evidence seems to confirm that “enter into” operates primarily as a marker of legal formalism, regularly employed to denote the commencement of obligations, rights, or procedural effects. As such, it appears most frequently in discourses concerned with governance, regulation, and institutional responsibility, where lexical precision and formality are paramount.

4.5 Entitle to

This section focuses on “entitle to”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
37.07	33.49	398.13	167.69	447.97	275.05

Table 9. Relative frequencies of “entitle to” across the corpora

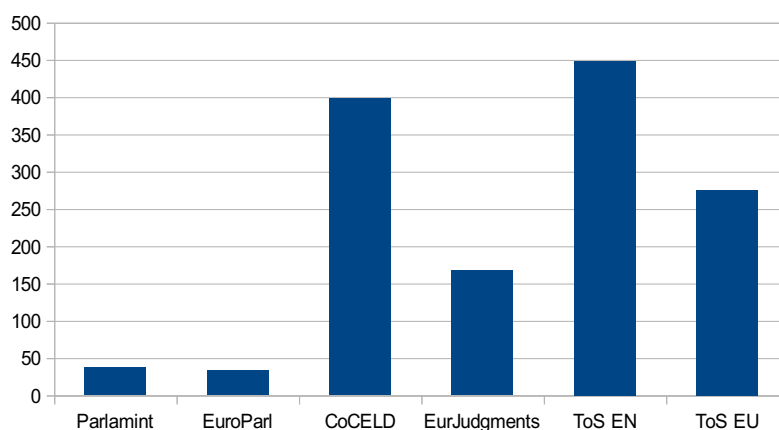


Figure 5. Relative frequencies of “entitle to” across the corpora

The frequency data presented in Table 9 reveal that the phrasal verb “entitle to” displays a marked affinity with legal, procedural, and contractual texts, particularly in corpora dominated by institutional language. The highest frequency occurs in ToS EN, closely followed by CoCELD and ToS EU. These figures underscore the centrality of this verb in contexts where the explicit articulation of rights, entitlements, and legal statuses is essential. The Eur Judgments corpus also demonstrates a notable frequency, reinforcing the importance of this expression within legal rulings and interpretive frameworks. In contrast, ParlaMint and EuroParl register considerably lower frequencies, suggesting that while “entitle to” may surface in policy-oriented or legislative discourse, it plays a less prominent role in the dialogic or rhetorical structure typical of parliamentary speech. The particularly high incidence in ToS EN and ToS EU supports the interpretation of “entitle to” as a formalised lexical mechanism for delineating contractual rights and obligations. Its substantial presence in CoCELD similarly suggests frequent use in case law summaries and judicial opinions, where it serves to define individuals’ legal claims or access to protections and remedies with terminological precision. The data appear to affirm that “entitle to” functions as a semantically specific and institutionally embedded expression, most prevalent in registers where the formal recognition of eligibility, access, or authority within codified legal frameworks is a communicative priority. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 10.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
The taxpayer is entitled to reassurance that there will be careful monitoring of this process.	All asylum-seekers must be entitled to a fair hearing and an appeal with suspensory effect.	The judge was entitled to be impressed by the way in which each of them gave evidence.	Person deemed to be a trainee fellowship student who is not entitled to any rights under the national system of unemployment benefits.	We shall be entitled to submit a new and separate Proposal for Your approval.	The contractor is entitled to payment only for the services provided before termination takes effect.

Table 10. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The examples presented in Table 10 demonstrate a consistent use of “entitle to” in contexts denoting legal or procedural rights, with a pronounced focus on what an individual or party is formally permitted or qualified to do or receive. In all six instances, the phrasal verb governs nominal complements such as “reassurance”, “a fair hearing”, “payment”, or “rights”, each signifying either a benefit, a procedural safeguard, or a material claim. For example, the ParlaMint instance highlights a taxpayer’s entitlement to institutional oversight, while the EuroParl excerpt emphasises asylum-seekers’ rights to due process. These examples illustrate the function of this verb in delineating normative expectations and codified guarantees within administrative and political discourse. The CoCELD example, “the judge was entitled to be impressed”, offers a somewhat broader interpretation, implying not a strict legal right but rather a legitimate judicial discretion, albeit still situated within formal adjudication. Eur Judgments and the Terms of Service corpora revert to more conventional legal uses, referencing statutory exclusions from benefits, contractual propositions, and conditions for remuneration. The syntactic constructions are largely uniform: the verb predominantly appears in the passive voice (e.g. “is entitled to”, “must be entitled to”), frequently followed by either a noun phrase or a non-finite clause (“to payment”, “to reassurance”, “to submit”), thereby indicating that entitlement is conferred upon the grammatical subject rather than actively pursued. These patterns highlight the utility of this phrase in defining and delimiting the scope of individual or institutional rights, particularly within legal and quasi-legal texts. As such, “entitle to” emerges as a formulaic expression closely associated with legal status and procedural legitimacy, functioning less descriptively and more normatively by conferring both recognition and authority within a specific framework of rules and obligations.

4.6 Lay down

This section deals with “lay down”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
7.81	107.31	84.97	825.99	10.18	425.37

Table 11. Relative frequencies of “lay down” across the corpora

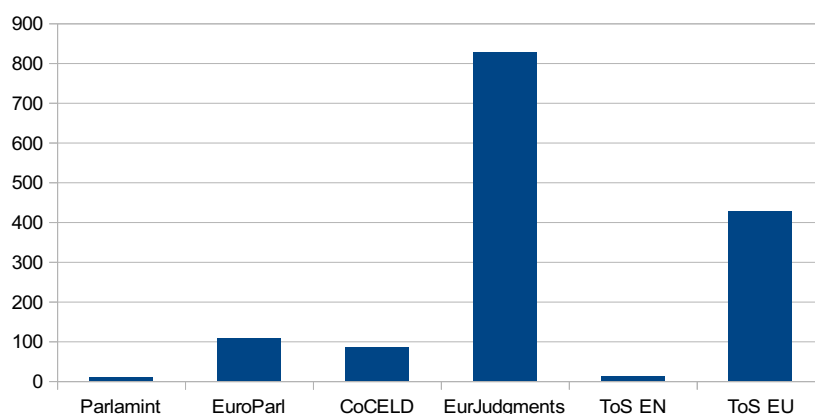


Figure 6. Relative frequencies of “lay down” across the corpora

The markedly high frequency of the verb phrase “lay down” in formal legal and regulatory texts, such as EU Judgments and Terms of Service (ToS) for the EU, can be attributed to several interrelated factors rooted in the nature and function of legal language. Legal texts are fundamentally normative: they serve to prescribe, prohibit, or permit specific actions, and thus require unambiguous, authoritative expressions to articulate rules and obligations. The verb “lay down” is particularly suited to this purpose because it unequivocally signals the establishment of binding norms, procedures, or rights, making it a preferred choice in contexts where legal certainty and precision are paramount. In the context of EU Judgments, the frequent use of “lay down” reflects the need for clear, standardised formulations when courts articulate principles, interpret legislation, or set precedents. The autonomy of EU law and its drive to avoid normative gaps further reinforce the use of such formulaic language, as the legal system must present itself as coherent, self-sufficient, and distinct from national legal orders. Similarly, ToS documents for the EU, which often serve quasi-legislative functions by setting out the terms under which services are provided, adopt this phrase to ensure that their provisions are interpreted as enforceable rules rather than mere guidelines. By contrast, the lower frequency of “lay down” in parliamentary debates and ToS EN (English-language Terms of Service) can be explained by differences in communicative aims and drafting conventions. Parliamentary discourse is often more deliberative and less prescriptive, focusing on debate, persuasion, and the expression of opinion rather than the direct imposition of rules. As a result, alternative expressions such as “set out”, “specify”, or “define” are favoured, as they may be perceived as less formal or more accessible to a wider audience. Furthermore, ToS EN documents, particularly those targeted at general consumers, may intentionally avoid highly formal or legalistic language to enhance user-

friendliness and transparency, reflecting a broader trend towards plain language in consumer-facing legal documents. The distribution of “lay down” seems to reflect the communicative aims, audience, and drafting practices of each context. Its frequent use in legal and regulatory texts highlights its function in expressing prescriptive rules, while its rarity elsewhere suggests a preference for clearer, more accessible language in other settings.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
No doubt, the Minister will indicate in his reply why it was desirable not to lay down a specific maximum time limit.	The relevant standards which have been laid down in another Directive, 95 / 35 / EC, seem sufficiently adequate.	The court also took occasion, though this laid could only be in obiter, to vary the guide lines for personal injury cases laid down in Jefford v. Gee.	Commission Regulation (EC) No 1392/2001 of 9 July 2001 laying down detailed rules for applying Council Regulation (EEC) No 3950/92.	The procedures laid down by the relevant registry will apply and these may include the suspension or revocation of your application.	When a time-limit is laid down in working days, it shall be understood to exclude Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

Table 12. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The examples in Table 12 corroborate the inference that “lay down” is predominantly used in the context of establishing formal rules, standards, or limits. Each corpus-sourced sentence exhibits the PV as part of a construction indicating the imposition or articulation of regulatory or normative content. The ParlaMint example demonstrates the use of “lay down” in reference to legislative time constraints, implying a desire or decision to avoid codifying a strict maximum duration. In the EuroParl example, the phrase “standards which have been laid down” illustrates the semantic function of this expression as a near-synonym for “prescribed” or “established”, particularly in the context of European directives. Similarly, CoCELD reflects the legal domain through the example involving personal injury case guidelines laid down in precedent, further reinforcing the function of this PV in articulating established legal norms. The Eur Judgments and ToS corpora continue this trend. The Eur Judgments sentence refers to Commission Regulation No 1392/2001 laying down rules for the application of a Council Regulation, clearly showing the usage of this PV in legislative or regulatory articulation. In ToS EN and ToS EU, “lay down” is used with “procedures” and “time-limits”, respectively, both clear markers of structured procedural norms. Syntactically, the passive construction (“laid down”) dominates, which is typical of formal legal or bureaucratic register where the actor is often omitted in favour of institutional objectivity. Semantically, “lay down” serves to express the imposition of an external, often higher, authority’s determinations or requirements, thus lending an authoritative tone to the statements. The corpus samples collectively illustrate the limited semantic flexibility of this PV but strong functional utility in legal and procedural domains, reinforcing its status as a conventional expression for establishing prescriptive norms.

4.7 Limit to

This section addresses “limit to”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
13.95	16.96	75.26	45.65	636.32	115.14

Table 13. Relative frequencies of “limit to” across the corpora

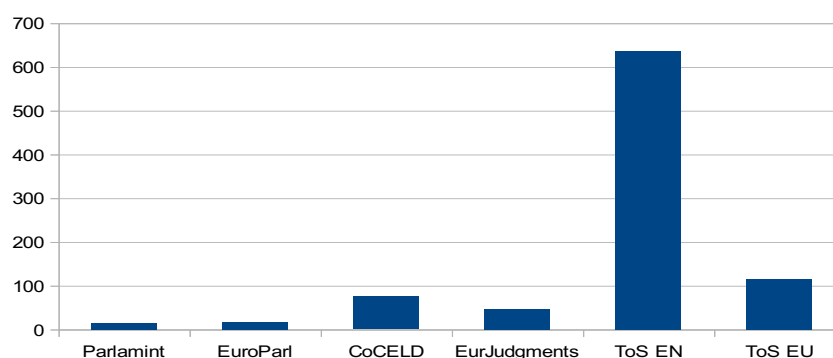


Figure 7. Relative frequencies of “limit to” across the corpora

The data presented in Table 13 appears to indicate a notable variation in the use of the phrasal verb “limit to” across the six corpora. The expression seems particularly prominent in the ToS EN corpus, where its frequency is considerably higher than elsewhere. This might suggest that “limit to” is especially well-suited to terms-of-service or contractual genres, which often prioritise the clear specification of conditions, exclusions, and scope. It is also worth noting that moderate frequencies in corpora such as CoCELD and Eur Judgments may reflect the functional relevance of this verb in legal and judicial contexts, where the articulation of rights and boundaries tends to be of central concern. In contrast, the markedly lower frequencies observed in EuroParl and ParlaMint could imply that “limit to” plays a more peripheral role in political or legislative discourse. These genres may rely on different rhetorical strategies, possibly favouring less formally codified means of expressing constraints. Overall, the distribution may point to “limit to” functioning as a semantically precise, norm-defining construction, particularly favoured in genres that require a high degree of formal clarity. The density observed in ToS EN further supports this impression, suggesting that the expression is especially compatible with texts that aim to codify user obligations or define procedural limits. Nonetheless, the lower frequency in dialogic or deliberative contexts could indicate that such settings typically employ alternative syntactic or lexical resources to achieve similar communicative goals. Table 14 offers illustrative examples of how “limit to” is used in context.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to : psychological; physical; sexual; financial; and emotional.	But this selection of the best instrument must be limited to that which is strictly necessary.	The expression "illegal entrant" is not limited to persons who have entered the country clandestinely.	Those rights are limited to particular situations defined in advance and are no different from a regime of retrospective opposition.	Clause 9.9 includes but is not limited to registration of the site or duplicate site with the following: search engines, web directory or shopping sites.	The maximum penalty shall be limited to 40% of the value of outstanding orders.

Table 14. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The corpus samples presented in Table 14 seem to lend support to the hypothesis that “limit to” tends to occur in formal, often legalistic contexts, where constraints or definitional boundaries are typically articulated. In each instance, the verb appears in its passive past participle form (“limited to”), which appears to reflect a grammatical pattern commonly associated with institutional or bureaucratic registers. A noteworthy feature is the recurring use of the legal idiom “not limited to”, which is attested in ParlaMint, CoCELD, and ToS EN. This phrase appears to function as a means of pre-empting overly narrow interpretations by signalling that enumerated items or categories are not exhaustive. Such usage arguably allows for a degree of interpretive flexibility while maintaining the authority of the text. For instance, the ParlaMint example employs the phrase in reference to forms of abuse, thereby implying an open-ended definition. In a similar vein, the CoCELD and ToS EN instances apply the expression to “illegal entrant” and registration procedures respectively, which may point to its adaptability in both definitional and procedural contexts. Other examples, such as those drawn from EuroParl and Eur Judgments, tend to reflect a more restrictive application of the phrase, as in being “limited to that which is strictly necessary” or “limited to particular situations”. These uses arguably indicate a concern with proportionality and the careful delineation of scope. The ToS EU example appears consistent with this pattern, specifying an upper limit on a penalty, and further suggesting a preference for clarity and precision. These examples seem to suggest that “limit to” frequently serves to delineate the bounds of rights, duties, or meanings in a manner that aligns with the regulatory aims of formal genres. At the same time, the use of “not limited to” seems to offer a mechanism for preserving interpretive openness where needed. In both forms, this phrasal verb arguably functions as a discursive tool that negotiates the tension between precision and flexibility, qualities that are often valued in texts seeking to minimise ambiguity and enhance enforceability.

4.8 Provide for

This section tackles “provide for”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
64.15	103.31	138.38	544.22	45.82	665.24

Table 15. Relative frequencies of “provide for” across the corpora

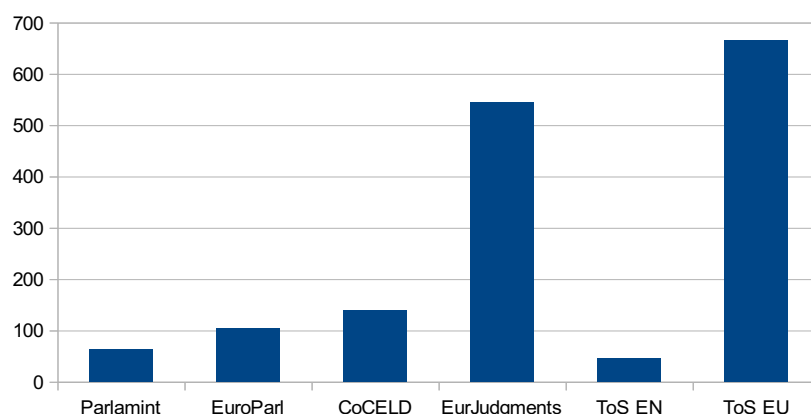


Figure 8. Relative frequencies of “provide for” across the corpora

The frequency distribution presented in Table 15 appears to underscore the prominent role of the verb “provide for” within legal and regulatory corpora, most notably in ToS EU and Eur Judgments, where it is recorded with particularly high frequencies. This pattern suggests that “provide for” may be integral to the expression of contractual and statutory provisions, frequently signalling what is formally stipulated, anticipated, or arranged by legal instruments or institutional mechanisms. The phrase also features with some regularity in CoCELD and EuroParl, indicating its broader presence across legal and legislative discourse. Such occurrences imply that “provide for” is not confined to narrowly defined technical or commercial domains but extends into more generalised legal contexts. In contrast, the lower frequencies observed in ParlaMint and ToS EN could point to functional or stylistic variation across genres. In the case of ParlaMint, parliamentary language may tend to favour more colloquial or policy-driven alternatives, such as “make provision for”. As for ToS EN, although legal in nature, the genre may prioritise clarity and accessibility, possibly favouring more direct verbs like “include”, “cover”, or “stipulate” to achieve a more user-friendly tone. These findings, therefore, appear to suggest that “provide for” functions primarily as a normative device in formal legal drafting, often employed to establish procedural frameworks, define contingencies, or articulate institutional arrangements. Table 16 offers corpus-based examples illustrating the varied applications of this expression.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
The Bill already provides for a specific court procedure whereby the court may only grant an extension of the period.	This is why the mid-term review, provided for under Article 42 of Regulation 1260 / 99, will be of considerable importance.	This provided for the appointment of a manager of every offshore installation.	Without prejudice to any period provided for by decision taken under Council Directive 79/117/EEC.	No refunds are provided for VPS or Dedicated servers under any circumstances.	The contract provides for the payment of instalments at the end of certain stages of the contract performance.

Table 16. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The contextualised examples in Table 16 appear to illustrate how “provide for” functions both semantically and syntactically across a range of formal registers. Across the corpora, this phrasal verb is consistently employed to indicate the formal inclusion, arrangement, or anticipation of a particular procedure, obligation, or condition within a legal or regulatory framework. In the ParlaMint example, the expression occurs within a legislative context, signalling a procedural arrangement set out in a Bill. Likewise, in EuroParl, the phrase “provided for under Article 42” appears to reference a specific statutory review mechanism, thereby reinforcing its role in invoking codified authority. The CoCELD instance reflects its use in a prescriptive regulatory context concerning personnel appointments, further supporting the interpretation of “provide for” as a marker of formal provision. This pattern continues in Eur Judgments, where the expression is embedded in a complex juridical structure involving EU directives, suggesting its utility in signalling binding legal obligations. While the ToS EN and ToS EU examples differ slightly in tone and application, both seem to retain the core function of the expression. In ToS EN, “no refunds are provided for” operates as a contractual exclusion clause, whereas in ToS EU, “provides for the payment of instalments” codifies a financial obligation under the terms of a contract. Syntactically, the expression occurs in both active constructions (e.g., “the contract provides for”) and passive forms (e.g., “no refunds are provided for”), demonstrating a degree of flexibility that likely contributes to its widespread use across legal and quasi-legal texts. Semantically, “provide for” functions as a near-synonym of “establish”, “envisage”, or “make provision for”, often with an implicit agent, typically a statute, regulation, or contract, that lends it procedural or legal authority.

4.9 Refer to

The next phrasal verb is “refer to”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
233.98	190.54	507.38	788.58	325.80	662.04

Table 17. Relative frequencies of “refer to” across the corpora

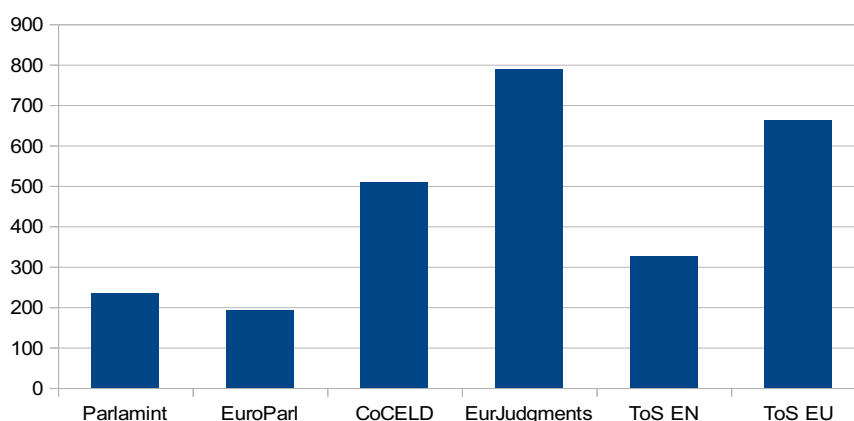


Figure 9. Relative frequencies of “refer to” across the corpora

The frequency data presented in Table 17 appears to indicate that the phrasal verb “refer to” is particularly prevalent in Eur Judgments, ToS EU, and CoCELD, where it occurs at notably high rates. Such frequencies suggest that “refer to” may function as a core linguistic resource within legal and judicial discourse, especially in contexts that demand precise cross-referencing, definitional clarity, or the attribution of responsibility. Its prominence in Eur Judgments and ToS EU seems to underscore the centrality of this verb in framing legal arguments, supporting citations, and articulating contractual language. In these contexts, “refer to” arguably facilitates the unambiguous identification of entities, documents, or prior provisions, which is essential for the interpretive stability of legal texts. Although its occurrence is somewhat lower in ParlaMint, EuroParl, and ToS EN, the data still point to a substantial presence across these corpora. This suggests that “refer to” retains broad utility across institutional registers, even if its function may shift slightly depending on the genre. The relatively reduced frequency in EuroParl and ParlaMint could reflect the more dialogic or deliberative nature of political discourse, where alternative formulations or more elaborative constructions might be preferred. Nevertheless, “refer to” appears to remain an important linguistic device across formal domains, enabling users to manage the complex textual and procedural interconnections that characterise administrative, legal, and legislative communication. Table 18 provides illustrative examples drawn from the corpora.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
Referring to a young person as a child prostitute fuels old-fashioned attitudes that have done so much harm to children over the years.	I have already referred to the regional and savings bank sector, but I would just like to focus on a matter one hears again and again in certain quarters.	It is necessary at the outset to refer to the Act in a little detail.	At the end of each of the periods referred to in Article 1 of Regulation (EEC) No 3950/92	The named Client (hereafter referred to as the 'Client').	The date of receipt, which may be referred to in an acknowledgement of receipt.

Table 18. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The sample phrases in Table 18 appear to highlight the varied yet functionally consistent use of “refer to” across the corpora. In ParlaMint, the phrase is employed in a more general, discursive sense, relating to attitudes or topics under debate. This usage suggests that “refer to” retains the flexibility to function in less formal contexts, where reference may be more thematic than technical. A similar pattern emerges in EuroParl, where “referred to” is used in a relatively conversational manner, typically to reintroduce previously mentioned subjects or ideas. From CoCELD onwards, however, the phrase seems to adopt a more formalised legal function. The CoCELD instance positions “refer to” within the procedural framing of a statutory act, indicating its role in the structured language of legal documentation. In Eur Judgments, the phrase appears within the context of official regulatory discourse, where reference to specific articles or legal instruments is both common and expected. This reinforces the notion that “refer to” operates as a mechanism for anchoring individual statements within a wider statutory or institutional framework. The examples from ToS EN and ToS EU include the canonical legal formulation “hereafter referred to as”, a conventional phrase frequently used in contracts and formal agreements to assign shorthand designations to named entities. This formulation serves an important practical function in promoting clarity and economy within complex documents, and its presence arguably marks “refer to” as a phrase with a highly specialised legal application. In other words, these examples seem to suggest that while “refer to” retains its general semantic function of denoting relation or mention, its most distinctive and recurrent use appears to lie within legal and regulatory discourse. In such contexts, it functions as a technical device employed to define, cite, and categorise elements within formalised textual structures.

4.10 Set out

This section features “set out”.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
295.92	95.52	296.17	372.14	722.86	742.00

Table 19. Relative frequencies of “set out” across the corpora

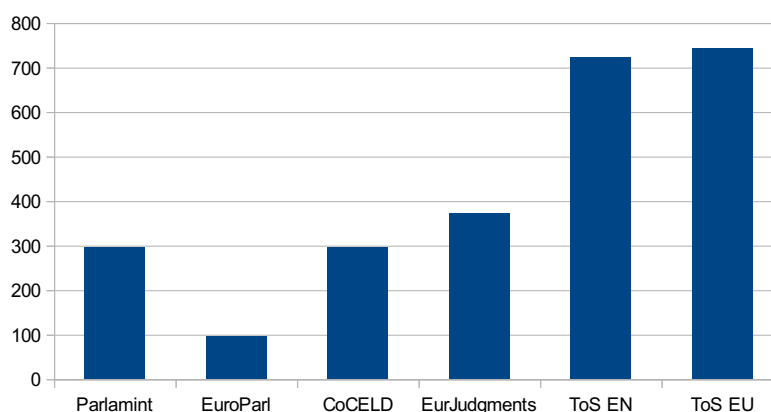


Figure 10. Relative frequencies of “set out” across the corpora

Table 19 shows that the phrasal verb “set out” is most frequently encountered in the ToS EN and ToS EU corpora, with notably high rates of occurrence. These high frequencies seem to underscore the close association of this verb with legal and contractual drafting, where it is commonly employed to articulate terms, conditions, or provisions in a structured and explicit manner. The high incidence in these two corpora stands in contrast to the markedly lower frequency observed in EuroParl, suggesting that although “set out” is indeed used in legislative and parliamentary discourse, it is far less central to the rhetorical strategies typically found in that domain. The intermediate frequencies recorded in ParlaMint, CoCELD, and Eur Judgments point to a more moderate but still meaningful presence, perhaps reflecting the dual capacity of this verb to explain and formalise content, depending on genre and communicative intent. This distribution may support the view that “set out” operates as a versatile expression that spans both political and legal registers. However, its highest frequency within contractual and regulatory texts indicates that it is particularly well suited to contexts in which precision, clarity, and procedural order are paramount. Table 20 presents examples drawn from the corpora that further illustrate these usage patterns.

ParlaMint	EuroParl	CoCELD	Eur Judgments	ToS EN	ToS EU
The Home Secretary set out that that applies not only to the area of economics, but in other areas.	We are setting out a fully challenging and ambitious agenda for change.	The details are set out in the speech of Lord Lowry and I will not repeat them.	The reasons for that provision are set out in the 14th recital in the preamble to Directive 91/414	The Terms apply to the Goods and Services set out in the Quotation.	More detailed invoicing arrangements may be set out in the Specifications and the annexes thereto.

Table 20. Corpus-driven sample phrases

The corpus examples in Table 20 highlight the semantic flexibility and contextual range of the phrasal verb “set out”. In ParlaMint, the phrase functions primarily as a synonym for “indicate” or “explain”, typically within discursive or argumentative contexts, for instance, when a public official outlines a policy position. A similar usage is observable in EuroParl, where “set out” tends to describe the presentation of an agenda or programme. While these instances retain a degree of formality, they remain rooted in the conventions of political rhetoric rather than technical or legal discourse. In CoCELD, however, the phrase begins to assume a more procedural function, signalling the structured exposition of information, such as the content of a speech, which may indicate its transitional role between general commentary and formal legal articulation. This shift becomes more pronounced in Eur Judgments, where “set out” is clearly deployed within a legal framework to reference provisions and recitals found in official directives. In such contexts, the phrase serves a formal explanatory or justificatory role, central to the interpretive clarity required in juridical writing. The examples drawn from ToS EN and ToS EU further reinforce the prominence of this verb within legal and contractual language. Here, “set out” introduces specific terms, obligations, or arrangements, and operates with a degree of procedural authority that closely aligns it with verbs such as “stipulate” or “establish”. In these cases, the expression contributes to the precise formulation of binding clauses, which are essential for ensuring legal enforceability and textual clarity. These examples, therefore, seem to suggest that while “set out” retains applicability across both general and specialised registers, its most salient and frequent use is within legal and contractual domains, where it plays a crucial role in the explicit and structured presentation of binding content.

5. Concluding remarks

The present investigation addresses a notable gap identified in Section 2, namely the paucity of corpus-based research examining phrasal verbs within legal discourse. While previous studies have established that phrasal verbs are characteristic of informal registers (Biber et al., 1999) and tend to be avoided in formal writing (Trebits, 2009), the current findings reveal a considerably more complex picture. This corpus-driven analysis demonstrates that phrasal verbs, despite their traditional association with informal English, constitute a significant and legitimate component of contemporary legal discourse across British and European institutional contexts.

The ten phrasal verbs analysed display marked register specificity, with procedurally oriented expressions such as “carry out”, “lay down”, and “provide for” emerging as strongly preferred in contractual and judicial texts, whereas “deal with” demonstrates a clear affinity with spoken and discursive contexts. This differential distribution suggests that phrasal verbs in legal English serve not as informal alternatives to Latinate equivalents, but rather as genre-specific technical expressions with distinct semantic and pragmatic roles. Notably, some phrasal verbs maintain general semantic functions, while others acquire specialised or formulaic roles within legal registers, particularly in formal written texts such as judicial decisions and contractual documentation. Terms of service agreements exhibit the highest frequency of certain phrasal verbs, reflecting the increasing importance of accessibility and transparency in legal drafting. In contrast, spoken legal discourse tends to feature more dialogic uses, illustrating variation that is closely tied to genre-specific conventions.

These findings challenge both the traditional stylistic hierarchy that privileges single-word verbs in formal registers and the pedagogical assumption that phrasal verbs should be minimised in professional writing. Contrary to the avoidance behaviour documented amongst EFL learners (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Laufer and Eliasson, 1993), native-speaker legal drafters actively select certain phrasal verbs as preferred lexical resources for expressing normative and procedural content. The relative absence of phrasal verbs in some formal contexts thus reflects not linguistic inadequacy but functional specialisation, with particular expressions having become conventionalised within specific sub-registers. Rather than representing stylistic deficiencies, these expressions contribute to clarity, procedural coherence, and textual economy within their respective domains.

These insights bear implications not only for legal drafting practices but also for pedagogy in English for Legal Purposes, as well as the broader domains of legal translation and multilingual legislative environments. Nevertheless, the study is subject to certain limitations. Its scope was confined to a selected range of phrasal verbs and corpora, which, though diverse, cannot comprehensively represent the entirety of legal discourse. The exclusive focus on British and European English also restricts the generalisability of the findings to other legal systems and languages. Furthermore, the investigation predominantly addresses synchronic usage, thereby leaving diachronic developments and the potential influence of evolving legal conventions insufficiently explored.

Several methodological limitations warrant careful consideration. Although the corpora selected for this study are comprehensive and diverse, they are predominantly skewed towards formal, institutional registers. This inherent bias towards official discourse may result in the under-representation of more informal or hybrid legal genres, such as client-lawyer interactions or police interviews, which frequently involve a distinct linguistic register and may present a different profile of phrasal verb usage. This limitation underscores the need for further investigation into non-institutional legal language to gain a more comprehensive understanding of phrasal verb usage in everyday legal practice.

Moreover, the inclusion of translated texts from the EuroParl and Eur-Lex corpora introduces potential concerns regarding the quality of translation. The risk of *translationese*, simplified or distorted renderings of the original legal text, is significant (Author2 2025), as this phenomenon may not accurately reflect the nuances and subtleties of legal language in its source language. While the translation process facilitates cross-linguistic comparisons, it is essential to recognise that such texts may exhibit features that deviate from standard legal English, thus introducing a layer of potential artefacts that might obscure the true nature of phrasal verb usage in original English legal discourse.

Another significant challenge lies in identifying phrasal verbs themselves. Despite employing both automatic and manual annotation methods, the detection of phrasal verbs remains a particularly difficult task due to their syntactic variability and semantic ambiguity. Instances of phrasal verbs in contexts where the meaning is idiomatic or context-dependent can be especially prone to misclassification or omission. Given the complexity of these linguistic forms, it is possible that some occurrences have been overlooked or inaccurately tagged, which may affect the precision of the analysis.

Finally, the ethical considerations surrounding corpus construction and analysis should not be underestimated. Although the corpora used in this study are publicly available and compiled in accordance with relevant copyright and data protection regulations, there remains an ongoing need to scrutinise their representativeness. The selection of texts may inadvertently introduce biases, which, if not adequately addressed, could affect the validity of the findings of this study. The representational skew towards formal legal texts may, for instance, obscure the variation in phrasal verb usage across different legal genres. These ethical considerations must be integral to the research process to ensure the robustness of the analysis and the integrity of the conclusions drawn.

Future research might fruitfully expand the corpus base to encompass additional jurisdictions and languages, enabling comparative studies on the cross-linguistic behaviour of phrasal verbs within legal contexts. Longitudinal analyses could further elucidate how the usage of phrasal verbs in legal English evolves over time, particularly in response to technological and institutional change. Furthermore, experimental or reader-response studies may shed light on how phrasal verbs affect comprehension and perceptions of formality amongst both legal professionals and lay audiences.

In conclusion, recognising phrasal verbs as functional, and at times indispensable, elements of legal English invites a critical re-evaluation of entrenched stylistic norms and opens avenues for more flexible and communicatively effective legal drafting. This study thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between language, law, and institutional practice.

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Appendix 1: Full list of phrasal verbs selected for analysis in this study

Abide by	Break down	Call in	Deal in	Engage in
Accede to	Break off	Call on	Deal with	Enlarge on/upon
Account for	Break up	Call out	Depart from	Enter into
Account to	Bring up	Call over	Dispose of	Entitle to
Adhere to		Carry out	Draw up	Factor in
Amount to		Come into effect	Draw upon/on	File away
Appertain to		Consist in		
		Cover up		

Face up to	Gear to	Hand down	Lay down	Object to
Fill out	Gear up	Hand over	Limit to	Opt for
Find for (in favour of)	Give in	Hold back	Look into	Opt in

	Go over			Opt out
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Pass off	Reckon on	Serve on / upon	Take over	Weigh up
Pass up	Reckon up	Set down	Tamper with	Wind down
Pencil in	Refer to	Set forth	Testify to	Wind up
Point out	Report to	Set out	Trade down	Work around
Press for	Resort to	Set up	Trade in	Work out
Press on	Rest on	Settle up	Trade off	Wrap up
Proceed against	Rest with	Sift through	Turn down	Write off
Proceed from	Result in	Skim through		Yield up
Provide against	Revert to	Speak for		
Provide for	Rough out	Speak out		
Put across	Rule against	Strike off		
Put back	Rule in (favour of)	Strike out		
Put down	Rule out	Subject to		
Put forward		Subscribe to		
Put in		Substitute for		
Put off		Sue for		
		Sum up		