

Say, Tell, Speak and Talk

The simple way to think of say and tell is:

You say something:

Rosy said that she was tired.

You tell someone something:

Rosy told Fiona that she was tired.

Tell = to give information to somebody, to tell them something. We usually say who is being told (personal object) and what they were told:

I **told him** about the accident.

He **told his** co-worker the news.

I **told him** we had done really well on the project.

Say = you say something, or say something to somebody. Say never has a person as the object.

Tell me what he **said** to you.

I want to **say** something on this subject.

The use of, '... said that' is very common, but 'that' is often omitted if we are being informal:

He **said (that)** he was happy.

Rosy **said that** Felipe would be late for work.

Both say and tell can be used in direct or indirect speech:

DIRECT SPEECH: I **said**, "I'm thirsty." / I **told** him, "I'm thirsty."

INDIRECT SPEECH: I **said** that I was thirsty. / I **told** him that I was thirsty.

Speak = often used for one-way communication, and also for more serious or formal situations. It is also used to refer to someone's ability to 'speak' a language:

I need to **speak** to you after the meeting.

Do you **speak** English?

Talk = usually refers to two or more people exchanging or sharing information.

We **talked** about my big project.

Let's **talk** about it!

In reality, speak and talk have very similar meanings. The only small difference is that speak has maybe a more serious or formal tone:

I **spoke** to her about the meeting.

I **talked** to her about the meeting.

Exercises:

1. Your mum _____ me that you are good at _____ Russian.
2. _____ me, do you love your dog Rosy?
3. He always _____ me some interesting stories about his trips.
4. Yesterday, we were sitting, drinking tea and we _____ about the weather.
5. Can we _____ tomorrow? I have to go to work now.
6. You should _____ to your boss about that.
7. I don't want to have to _____ you again and again to do your homework.
8. English is _____ all over the world.
9. I don't have anything more to _____.
10. They never stop _____.
11. The president _____ about her strategy for the next 4 years.
12. Some girls love to _____ about fashion.
13. _____ up! I can't hear what you're _____.
14. "Who is _____?" "This is Fernando speaking."
15. Listen to me. I wanna _____ you a joke.
16. My teachers don't always _____ the same language as they're from different countries.
17. I'm confused by his behaviour. That's why I _____ to him yesterday.
18. She _____ goodbye and went away.
19. I never believe anything politicians _____.
20. He probably knows five languages. Can he _____ Spanish?
21. I love it when my dad _____ me a bed time story.
22. I _____ to my dad every Sunday afternoon at 5.