

# The verbs 'say' and 'tell'

Hello and welcome back, in this lesson we will be exploring the differences between the verbs 'say' and 'tell'. What makes them different and how to use them?



## Verb

### What is a verb again?

A verb is a word used to describe an action, state, or occurrence, such as

*Hear*



*Become*



*Fly*



### ***Irregular forms:***

Say and *tell* are irregular verbs. The past simple of say is *said*, the past simple of *tell* is *told*:

*They asked if I was looking for work and I **said** yes.*

*Then he **told** me how he had got the job by lying about his age.*



## Which to use?

We use 'say' and 'tell' in different ways in reported speech.

Say focuses on the words someone said.

*'Hello,' she **said**.*



Not: 'Hello,' she told.



We use *say* with direct speech. We don't normally use *tell* in this way:

*He **said**, 'I'm not buying that.'*

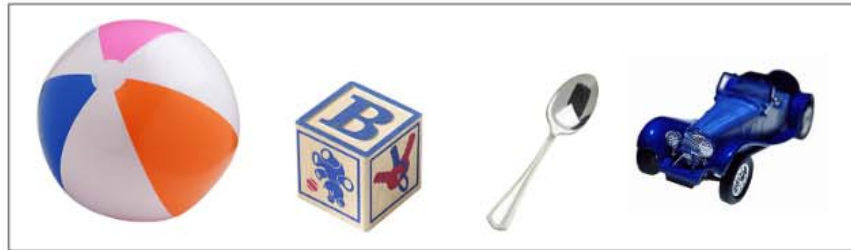


*Tell* focuses more on the content or message of what someone said:

*She **told** him they were late. (The focus is on the information.)*



## Say and *tell* with objects



Both *say* and *tell* take a direct object. The object is most commonly the reported clause (the report of what someone said).

reporting clause	reported clause (direct object)
<i>She <b>said</b></i>	<i>'I don't know what you mean.'</i>
<i>I <b>told</b> her</i>	<i>why it had happened.</i>



We use *tell* without an indirect object with words such as *the truth, a lie, a joke, a story*:

You should never **tell a lie**.



You're good at **telling jokes**



Say does not take an indirect object. Instead, we use a phrase with '**to**':  
*And then she **said to me**, 'I'm your cousin. We've never met before.'*

## ***Giving instructions:***



We use *tell* with an indirect object and a *to*-infinitive to report a command or an instruction. We don't normally use *say* in this way:

***They told us to come back.***



***I told her to wait.***





## Spoken English:



But in informal speaking, we sometimes use *say* + *to*-infinitive to report a command or an instruction:

*I asked him if he wanted to buy it today, but he **said to leave** it till tomorrow.*

