

English Verbs: Say / Speak / Tell / Talk / Ask / Answer

1) Say (*transitive*)

'Say' is used to repeat what someone said. If the receiving person is reported, we use the preposition 'to'. If we don't directly repeat the conversation, we use the preposition 'that'.

Examples:

- I **said (to him)** "I've won the lottery".
He **said (to me)** "No way!".
I **said (to him)** "It's true!".
He **said (to me) that** it's true.
- My brother **said (to me) that** you quit your job. Is it true?
- I can **say** "Hello" in Mandarin.
- Can you **say** "Bye" in Russian?

2) Speak (*transitive/non-transitive*)

'Speak' is used for languages and referral to someone speaking. We use 'speak' in two ways:

- 1) to refer to a language ability
- 2) to refer to a conversation:

A primarily one-direction conversation – use the preposition 'to'

A two-way conversation – use the preposition 'with'

If we refer to the subject of the conversation we use the preposition 'about'

Examples:

1. Maria **speaks** eight languages, but I only **speak** two.
2. OK – you can **speak** now – thanks for being patient.
3. He **spoke** so quickly – we couldn't understand anything!
4. He **spoke to** me so quickly, I didn't understand anything!
5. I will **speak to** the students **about** the new classroom.
6. I need to **speak with** you **about** our vacation.

3) Tell (*transitive*)

'Tell' is used to refer to the content of what is/was said by someone. The receiving person is required, but no preposition is used. If we refer to the subject of the conversation we use 'about'.

Examples:

1. Daddy, can you please **tell me** a story?
2. He **told me about** his travel plans. Sounds great!
3. **Tell me about** your new boyfriend!
4. I **will** never **tell you** my secret!
5. He **didn't tell me** that he will get married!
6. To **tell you** the truth, I don't eat meat. (*Para falar a verdade,*)

4) Talk

'Talk' is used when two or more people exchange information. We use the prepositions 'to' (for a 'one-way' conversation) or 'with' (for a 'two-way' conversation). It's similar to the verb "converse".

Examples:

1. The teacher wants to **talk to** you after class.
2. My father always talks **with me** when we are in the car.

Suggested video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INzc9nU_IJE (11 mins)

5) Ask (*transitive*)

We use 'ask' in two ways:

- to **ask** someone a **question** (*preguntar*) – if the receiving person is reported, no preposition is used. If we refer to the subject of the question we use the preposition 'about'.
- to **ask** someone a **favour** (*pedir*) – if the receiving person is reported, no preposition is used. We use the preposition 'to' or 'for' (before a **verb** or **noun** respectively) for the details.

Examples:

1. Can I **ask** you a question? (type 1)
2. He **asked** the teacher why there were so many wars. (type 1)
3. He **asked** me **about** the new smoking regulations. (type 1)
4. She **asked** me **to** wash her car. (type 2 – with verb)
5. The students always **ask** me **for** more time in tests. (type 2 – with noun)

6) Answer (*transitive*)

When someone asks a question, we '**answer**' it. We also '**answer**' the telephone. We can also "**respond to**" a question, but this is very formal.

Examples:

1. He never **answers** me.
2. He never **answers** my questions.
3. You must **answer** the teacher if she asks you a question.
4. He never **answers** the phone.

Summary: **say words (to someone) / speak a language / tell the truth / tell lies**
ask a question / answer a question / answer the phone

Exercise. Complete using an appropriate verb (say, speak, tell, talk, ask, answer).

1. Please don't _____ him about our plans.
2. I waited for an answer, but she didn't _____ anything to me.
3. He _____ that he would wait for me at the library.
4. He _____ us that he was going to buy a new car.
5. Excuse me teacher – I want to _____ a question about the pyramids.
6. Do you _____ German?
7. To _____ you the truth, I don't remember anything.
8. Did your boss _____ at the conference?
9. Do you know how to _____ "Goodbye" in Arabic?
10. It's rude not to _____ me when I ask you a question.
11. My brother is terrible – he always _____ lies to our parents.
12. Bob is so rude! He always _____ when the teacher _____.