



## Reporting Verbs: Say vs Tell: The Core Distinction

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

1. She \_\_\_\_ that she was feeling tired.  
a) told  
b) asked  
c) spoke  
d) said
2. He \_\_\_\_ me that the meeting was cancelled.  
a) said  
b) told  
c) spoke  
d) talked
3. The teacher \_\_\_\_ us to open our books.  
a) said  
b) spoke  
c) told  
d) talked
4. "I'll be late," she \_\_\_\_ to her boss.  
a) told  
b) asked  
c) said  
d) spoke
5. Can you \_\_\_\_ me the truth?  
a) tell  
b) say  
c) speak  
d) talk
6. Did he \_\_\_\_ anything about the project?  
a) tell  
b) talk  
c) speak  
d) say
7. She \_\_\_\_ him a lie about where she had been.  
a) told  
b) said  
c) spoke  
d) asked
8. They \_\_\_\_ goodbye and left the party.  
a) said  
b) told  
c) spoke  
d) talked
9. The doctor \_\_\_\_ her that she needed more rest.  
a) said  
b) spoke  
c) asked  
d) told
10. "I don't agree," \_\_\_\_ Tom.  
a) told  
b) said  
c) asked  
d) talked
11. Could you \_\_\_\_ me how to get to the station?  
a) say  
b) talk  
c) speak  
d) tell

12. He \_\_\_ sorry for being late.  
a) told  
b) spoke  
c) said  
d) talked
13. My parents always \_\_\_ me not to talk to strangers.  
a) told  
b) said  
c) asked  
d) spoke
14. She didn't \_\_\_ a word during the whole meeting.  
a) tell  
b) say  
c) speak  
d) talk
15. The guide \_\_\_ the tourists that the museum closed at five.  
a) said  
b) spoke  
c) told  
d) talked
16. What did the weather forecast \_\_\_?  
a) say  
b) tell  
c) speak  
d) talk
17. Please \_\_\_ me the time. I don't have a watch.  
a) say  
b) talk  
c) tell  
d) speak
18. He \_\_\_ to me that he would help with the move.  
a) told  
b) said  
c) talked  
d) asked
19. The children were \_\_\_ a bedtime story by their grandmother.  
a) said  
b) spoken  
c) talked  
d) told
20. It is \_\_\_ that the company will close next year.  
a) told  
b) said  
c) spoken  
d) talked



## Answers

1. d) said
2. b) told
3. c) told
4. c) said
5. a) tell
6. d) say
7. a) told
8. a) said
9. d) told
10. b) said
11. d) tell
12. c) said
13. a) told
14. b) say
15. c) told
16. a) say
17. c) tell
18. b) said
19. d) told
20. b) said



# Explanations

## 1. “said” (d)

'Say' is used when we report someone's words without mentioning the listener. We say 'said that...' — not 'told that...' (tell needs a person: told me/him/her).

## 2. “told” (b)

'Tell' is used when we mention the listener (me, him, her, us, them). The pattern is: tell + person + that clause. 'Said me' is incorrect.

## 3. “told” (c)

When reporting instructions or commands, we use 'tell + person + to-infinitive': told us to open. 'Said us to open' is grammatically incorrect.

## 4. “said” (c)

'Say' can be followed by 'to + person' when we want to mention the listener: said to her boss. Note: 'told to her boss' is wrong — tell takes a direct object without 'to'.

## 5. “tell” (a)

'Tell the truth' is a fixed expression. Other common 'tell' expressions include: tell a lie, tell a story, tell a joke, tell the time, tell the difference.

## 6. “say” (d)

'Say' is used with words, sentences, or something/anything/nothing: say something, say a few words. We don't use 'tell' without a person here.

## 7. “told” (a)

'Tell a lie' is a fixed expression, and here we also have the listener 'him'. The structure is: tell + person + a lie/the truth/a story.

## 8. “said” (a)

'Say goodbye' is a fixed expression. Other 'say' expressions include: say hello, say sorry, say thank you, say a prayer, say a word.

## 9. “told” (d)

'Tell + person + that clause' is the standard pattern when we mention who received the information. 'The doctor told her that...' is correct.

## 10. “said” (b)

When we quote someone's exact words, we use 'said' (not 'told') because no listener is mentioned. This is very common in storytelling and dialogue.

## 11. “tell” (d)

'Tell + person + how/what/where/when' is used for giving information or instructions. 'Could you tell me how to...' is a common polite request.

## 12. “said” (c)

'Say sorry' is a fixed expression meaning to apologize. We don't say 'told sorry' or 'spoke sorry'.

## 13. “told” (a)

'Tell + person + not to do something' is used to report negative instructions or rules. 'Asked me not to' is also grammatically possible, but 'told' is more natural here because parents give instructions with authority, not polite requests.

**14. “say” (b)**

'Say a word' means to speak at all. 'She didn't say a word' means she stayed completely silent. This is a common expression with 'say'.

**15. “told” (c)**

'Tell + person + that clause' is the correct pattern. The guide gave specific information to the tourists, so 'told' is correct.

**16. “say” (a)**

'Say' is used when we talk about the content of messages, reports, or signs: 'What does the sign say?' 'What did the forecast say?' There is no personal object here.

**17. “tell” (c)**

'Tell the time' is a fixed expression meaning to read a clock. We always use 'tell' (not 'say') with: the time, the truth, a lie, a story, a joke, the difference.

**18. “said” (b)**

'Said to me' is correct when using 'say' with a listener. Note: 'told to me' is wrong — with 'tell', we say 'told me' (no 'to').

**19. “told” (d)**

'Tell a story' is a fixed expression. Here it is in the passive voice: 'were told a story'. 'Say a story' is not correct English.

**20. “said” (b)**

'It is said that...' is a common impersonal passive structure meaning 'people say that...' or 'according to reports...'. We cannot use 'told' in this pattern.