Your English Toolbox

VOCABULARY · EPISODE 231

Say or Tell? The Small Difference That Changes Your Sentence | Fix It in Five

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

8 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

say something

DEF

Speak words or express a message.

Say can take the words or a message as its object, as in say something; a listener can be introduced with to.

What did she say?

He said something surprising.

2

say something to someone

DEF

Speak words or give a message to a particular person.

Use to before the listener with say: say something to me.

She said hello to everyone.

He said a few words to the group.

3

tell someone something

DEF

Give a person information or a message.

Tell normally takes the person directly, without to, in this pattern.

She told me the news.

Please tell him the answer.

4

tell the truth

DEF

Say what is true rather than lying.

A fixed expression that can stand without naming the listener.

Please tell the truth.

She told the truth about the mistake.

5

tell a story

DEF

Narrate a sequence of events.

This fixed expression can appear without a person immediately after tell.

Can you tell us a story?

He told a story about his first job.

6

say hello

DEF

Greet someone using hello.

Use to if you name the people receiving the greeting.

He said hello to everyone.

Say hello to your family for me.

7

say goodbye

DEF

Use words to leave or part from someone.

Say goodbye to someone names the person; say goodbye does not use tell in this expression.

She said goodbye to her colleagues.

We said goodbye before leaving.

8

say sorry

DEF

Use words to apologise.

A fixed expression with say; say sorry to someone names the person receiving the apology.

He said sorry and left.

She said sorry to her friend.