

Reporting verbs: say, tell, ask, advise and warn

CEFR B1-B2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

A reporting verb decides the shape of the sentence: tell needs a person, say does not, and verbs like advise and warn take an object plus an infinitive.

The rule

Say and tell

- Say takes a that-clause or direct words: "She said (that) she was tired."
- Tell needs a person: "She told me (that) she was tired."
- Never say "tell that" without a person, and never say "say me".
- Say can take to with a person in a formal pattern: "She said to me that she was ready."

Ask, advise and warn

- Ask takes an object plus a to-infinitive for a request: "She asked me to wait."
- Advise takes an object plus a to-infinitive: "The doctor advised me to rest."
- Warn takes an object plus a to-infinitive or about: "He warned us not to swim."
- The negative infinitive is not to, never do not to.

Offer, promise and agree

- Offer takes a to-infinitive: "She offered to help."
- Promise takes a to-infinitive or a that-clause: "He promised to call."
- Agree takes a to-infinitive or a that-clause: "They agreed to meet."
- These verbs do not need an object before the infinitive.

Admit, deny and suggest

- Admit and deny take a gerund or a that-clause: "He admitted stealing."
- Suggest takes a gerund or a that-clause: "She suggested going home."
- Do not use an infinitive after suggest: "She suggested to go" is wrong.
- Deny often answers an accusation: "He denied breaking the window."

Tense, time and place

- Reported speech usually moves the tense back: "I am busy" becomes "He said he was busy."
- When the situation is still true, the tense can stay: "He said he is busy."
- Time and place words shift too: today becomes that day, here becomes there.
- Infinitive patterns such as offered to help avoid the tense shift entirely.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. She ___ me that she was tired.

2. He ___ that he would be late.

3. She ___ me to close the window.

4. The doctor ___ me to rest for a week.

5. They ___ us not to swim near the rocks.

6. He ___ to help with the bags.

7. She ___ to call me at six.

8. They ___ to meet at the station.

9. He ___ taking the money.

10. She ___ going to the beach.

11. He ___ that he had made a mistake.

12. The guide ___ us not to feed the animals.

13. Choose the correct sentence.

14. She ___ that she was busy.

15. The manager ___ to answer our question.

16. The police ___ him about the accident.

17. He ___ to pay for the damage.

18. She ___ stealing the idea.

19. I ___ that we leave early.

20. The sign ___ visitors not to touch the paintings.

Answer key

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1. **told** — Tell is the reporting verb that takes a person before the that-clause.
2. **said** — Say takes a that-clause and needs no person after it.
3. **asked** — Ask takes an object and a to-infinitive to report a request.
4. **advised** — Advise takes an object plus a to-infinitive, so advised me to rest is correct.
5. **warned** — Warn takes an object and the negative infinitive not to swim.
6. **offered** — Offer takes a to-infinitive directly, with no object before it.
7. **promised** — Promise takes a to-infinitive for an action in the future.
8. **agreed** — Agree takes a to-infinitive to report a shared decision.
9. **denied** — Deny is a reporting verb that takes a gerund, because it refuses a fact about the past.
10. **suggested** — Suggest takes a gerund, so suggested going is the correct reporting pattern.
11. **admitted** — Admit takes a that-clause and reports the speaker's own action.
12. **told** — Tell takes a person and the negative infinitive not to feed.
13. **He told me to wait.** — Tell takes a person before the to-infinitive: told me to wait.
14. **said** — Say takes a that-clause without a person after it.
15. **agreed** — Agree takes a to-infinitive, here agreed to answer.
16. **asked** — Ask takes a person plus about to report a question on a topic.
17. **promised** — Promise takes a to-infinitive for a future action he committed to.
18. **denied** — Deny is a reporting verb that takes a gerund when it rejects an accusation.
19. **suggest** — Suggest takes a that-clause with the base verb leave.
20. **warns** — Warn takes an object and the negative infinitive not to touch.