

Past Tense of Tell: Told

Tell is an irregular verb. The past simple and the past participle are the same form: told. You can say he told me and he has told me.

Base	tell
Past	told
Past participle	told
3rd person / -ing	tells / telling

Examples

Please tell me your name. — Tell is followed by the person you speak to.

I always tell my mother the truth. — A habit in the present uses tell.

He told me a funny story. — Told is the past form; it needs no helper.

She told us to wait outside. — Told can be followed by a person and to plus a verb.

I have told him twice. — Have told uses the same form as the past simple.

Nobody has told me the answer. — Has told is present perfect.

Notes

Tell or say? Tell needs a person right after it: tell me, tell her. Say does not: say hello, say that you are tired. So use told me, but said that.

Fixed phrases with tell Use tell with a story, a joke, the truth, a lie and the time: Can you tell me the time? These phrases are very common in daily English.

Common mistakes

She said me the news. → She told me the news. — When a person comes right after the verb, use tell, not say.

He telled me his name. → He told me his name. — Tell is irregular, so the past is told, not telled.

He told that he was late. → He said that he was late. — Without a person after the verb, use said. With a person, use told him.

Exercises

Choose the right form

1. She ___ me her phone number yesterday. (tell / told / telled)
2. Have you ___ your parents about the party? (told / telled / tell)
3. Please ___ me the time. (told / tell / telling)
4. He ___ us a joke at lunch yesterday. (tell / tells / told)

Write the missing form

1. Yesterday my teacher ___ us to open our books.
2. I have not ___ anyone about the party.
3. Can you ___ me where the station is?

Correct the mistake

1. I telled him my name.

Answer key

Choose the right form

1. told — Yesterday is finished, so use the past form told.
2. told — After have, use the past participle told.
3. tell — An instruction uses the base form tell.
4. told — Yesterday is finished, so use the past form told.

Write the missing form

1. told — Yesterday is finished, so use told.
2. told — Have not plus the participle is have not told.
3. tell — After can, use the base form tell.

Correct the mistake

1. told — Tell is irregular: the past is told.

<https://www.fluencyroad.com/irregular-verbs/tell>