

Here is Audio Word Study #033 from Jane Lawson at DailyStep.com

In this word study, I'll teach you the differences – and the similarities – between two very common verbs – SPEAK and TALK. Thank you for all your emails asking me to explain these words. Please take a look at [Audio Blog #032](#) to learn the differences between SAY and TELL.

SPEAK

Form: SPEAK, SPOKE, SPOKEN

Meaning: to say words, to use the voice, or to have a conversation with someone

TALK

Form: TALK, TALKED, TALKED

Meaning: to say words aloud or to speak to someone

Grammar: SPEAK and TALK can be transitive or intransitive verbs. In other words, they can be followed by a direct or indirect object, or no object at all.

In many cases it does not matter which one you use – but the nuance can be a bit different. Take a look at these examples:

1. I spoke to Mary yesterday. (*note: here, it sounds as if I did not say very much to Mary, maybe just a few words.*)
2. I talked to Mary yesterday. (*note: here, it sounds as if I had a conversation with Mary.*)
3. He spoke to me about the future of the company. (*note: here, it sounds as if the conversation was quite formal, or as if the conversation was rather one-sided. In other words, I did not say much!*)
4. He talked to me about the future of the company. (*note: here, it sounds as if we had more of a conversation, and also perhaps it was not formal.*)

In other cases, SPEAK and TALK are **not interchangeable. In other words, only one of them is correct.**

5. Do you speak English? (*note: we always say 'speak a language' not 'talk a language'.*)
6. He was talking total nonsense! (*note: we always say 'talk nonsense' not 'speak nonsense'.*)
7. "Can I speak to Mary please?" "Yes, this is Mary speaking." (*note: we always 'speak' at the beginning of a telephone call.*)
8. I don't understand! What are you talking about? (*note: we never say 'what are you speaking about', unless we are asking about the topic of someone's forthcoming speech at a conference or other event.*)

There are some expressions where we always use SPEAK. Look at these examples:

9. He speaks very highly of Paul. Paul sounds like a very clever man. (*note: this means 'He says very good things about Paul.'*)
10. Who is going to speak for the defendant? (*note: this means 'Who is going to represent the defendant in the court of law.'*)

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11. "Neither of us wants to go to that exhibition." "Speak for yourself! I certainly want to go!" (**note:** the expression 'speak for yourself' means 'Do not speak on my behalf, because I do not agree with what you just said'.)

That is all for Audio Word Study #033 from DailyStep English. Please try to write your own examples using these verbs, as this will help you to remember how to use them correctly.

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