

Reported Speech (Indirect Speech)

What is reported speech?

Reported speech is when you tell somebody else what you or a person said before.

Distinction must be made between direct speech and reported speech.

Direct speech vs Reported speech:

Direct speech	Reported speech
She says: "I like tuna fish."	She says that she likes tuna fish.
She said: "I'm visiting Paris next weekend"	She said that she was visiting Paris the following weekend.

Different types of sentences

When you use reported speech, you either report:

- statements
- questions
- requests / commands
- other types

A. Reporting Statements

When transforming statements, check whether you have to change:

- pronouns
- tense
- place and time expression

1- Pronouns

In reported speech, you often have to change the pronoun depending on who says what.

Example:

She says, "My dad likes roast chicken." - She says that her dad likes roast chicken.

2- Tenses

- If the sentence starts in the present, there is **no backshift** of tenses in reported speech.
- If the sentence starts in the past, there is often **backshift** of tenses in reported speech.

	Direct speech	Reported speech
(no backshift)	"I write poems."	He <i>says</i> that he writes poems.
(backshift)	"I write poems."	He <i>said</i> that he wrote poems.

No backshift

Do not change the tense if the introductory clause is in a present tense (e. g. *He says*). Note, however, that you might have to change the form of the present tense verb (3rd person singular).

Example:

He says, "I write poems." - He says that he writes English.

Backshift

You must change the tense if the introductory clause is in a past tense (e. g. *He said*).

Example:

He said, "I am happy." - He said that he was happy.

Examples of the main changes in tense:

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Simple Present He said: "I am happy"	Simple Past He said that he was happy
Present Progressive He said: "I' m looking for my keys"	Past Progressive He said that he was looking for his keys
Simple Past He said: "I visited New York last year"	Past Perfect Simple He said that he had visited New York the previous year.
Present Perfect He said: " I' ve lived here for a long time "	Past Perfect He said that he had lived there for a long time
Past Perfect He said: "They had finished the work when I arrived "	Past Perfect He said that they had finished the work when he had arrived "
Past Progressive	Past Perfect Progressive

He said: "I was playing football when the accident occurred "	He said that he had been playing football when the accident had occurred
Present Perfect Progressive He said: "I have been playing football for two hours."	Past Perfect Progressive He said that he had been playing football for two hours
Past Perfect Progressive He said: "I had been reading a newspaper when the light went off "	Past Perfect Progressive He said that he had been reading a newspaper when the light had gone off
Future Simple (will+verb) He said: "I will open the door."	Conditional (would+verb) He said that he would open the door.
Conditional (would+verb) He said: "I would buy Mercedes if I were rich"	Conditional (would+verb) He said that he would buy Mercedes if he had been rich"

The modal verbs *could, should, would, might, needn't, ought to, used to* do not normally change.

Example:

He said, "She might be right." - He said that she might be right.

Other modal verbs may change:

Modal	Direct speech	Reported speech
can	"I can do it."	He said he could do it.
may	" May I go out?"	He wanted to know if he might go out.
must	"She must apply for the job."	He said that she must/had to apply for the job.
will	"They will call you."	He told her that they would call her.

3- Place, demonstratives and time expressions

Place, demonstratives and time expressions change if the context of the reported statement (i.e. the location and/or the period of time) is different from that of the direct speech.

In the following table, you will find the different changes of place; demonstratives and time expressions.

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Time Expressions	
today	that day

now	then
yesterday	the day before
... days ago	... days before
last week	the week before
next year	the following year
tomorrow	the next day / the following day
Place	
here	there
Demonstratives	
this	that
these	those

B. Reporting Questions

When transforming questions, check whether you have to change:

- pronouns
- place and time expressions
- tenses (backshift)

Also note that you have to:

- transform the question into an indirect question
- use the question word (*where, when, what, how*) or *if / whether*

Types of questions	Direct speech	Reported speech
With question word (what, why, where, how...)	"Why" don't you speak English?"	He asked me why I didn't speak English.
Without question word (yes or no questions)	"Do you speak English?"	He asked me whether / if I spoke English.

C. Reporting requests / commands

When transforming requests and commands, check whether you have to change:

- pronouns
- place and time expressions

Direct speech	Reported speech
"Nancy, do the exercise."	He told Nancy to do the exercise.
"Nancy, give me your pen, please."	He asked Nancy to give him her pen.

Tenses are not relevant for requests - simply use *to* / *not to* + verb (infinitive without "to")

Example:

She said, "Sit down." - She asked me to sit down.

She said, "don't be lazy" - She asked me not to be lazy

For affirmative use *to* + infinitive (without to)

For negative requests, use *not to* + infinitive (without to).

D. Other transformations

- Expressions of advice with **must**, **should** and **ought** are usually reported using *advise* / *urge*.
Example:
"You must read this book."
He advised / urged me to read that book.
- The expression **let's** is usually reported using *suggest*. In this case, there are two possibilities for reported speech: gerund or statement with *should*.
Example:
"Let's go to the cinema."
1. He suggested going to the cinema.
2. He suggested that we should go to the cinema.

Main clauses connected with **and/but**

If two complete main clauses are connected with *,and* or *,but*, put *,that* after the conjunction.

Example:

He said, "I saw her **but** she didn't see me." - He said that he had seen her **but** that she hadn't seen him."

If the subject is dropped in the second main clause (the conjunction is followed by a verb), do not use *,that*'.

Example:

She said, "I am a nurse **and** work in a hospital." - He said that she was a nurse **and** worked in a hospital."