



Reported speech

What is reported speech?

Reported speech is used when we want to report back what somebody said. That is to say, tell someone what you have been told. We usually use reporting verbs like “**say**” or “**tell**” in the sentence. To do this we use direct speech or indirect speech.

Example:

Direct speech: *‘I like to learn new languages,’ said Daniel.*

Indirect speech: *Daniel says (that) he likes to learn new languages.*

In this example, we can see that the present tense (to like) stays the same. Except for the change of the subject from “I” to “he”. Besides, we have the option of adding the word “that” in the reported speech, which doesn’t change the meaning.

In indirect speech, usually, we use a tense which is further back in the past rather than the original one in the direct speech. This is called **backshift**. However, when we are reporting general truth or facts, we don’t need to change the tense in indirect speech.

More Examples:

Direct speech: 'I **go** to the gym next to your house.'

Indirect speech: *my friend told me that she **goes** to the gym next to my house.*

Direct speech: 'I **travel** a lot in my job,' he said.

Indirect speech: *He said (that) he **traveled** a lot in his job.*

Direct speech: 'We **lived** in France for five years.'

Indirect speech: *She told me they **had lived** in Paris for five years.*

As you can see the tense backshift one step to the past in the Indirect speech. To help you understand this better, we are going to cover every tense with examples.

Tense changes in reported speech

1) Reported Speech in the Present Tense:

When using the present tense in the direct speech, the present simple becomes the past simple, the present continuous changes to past continuous, and the present perfect changes to the past perfect in the indirect speech.

Examples:

Direct speech: 'I **like** ice cream.'

Indirect speech: *He said (that) he **liked** ice cream.*

Direct speech: 'I **am living** in Georgia.'

Indirect speech: *She said (that) she **was living** in Georgia.*

Direct speech: 'I **have not seen** the Titanic'

Indirect speech: *He said (that) he **had not seen** the Titanic'.*

2) Reported Speech in the Past Tense:

When using the past tense in the direct speech, past simple changes to past perfect, and past continuous changes to past perfect in the indirect speech.

Direct speech: 'I **wrote** that book last year.'

Indirect speech: *She said (that) She **had written** that book last year.*

Direct speech: 'It **was raining** all day.'

Indirect speech: *He told me (that) it **had been raining** all day.*

3) Reported Speech in the Past Perfect:

The past perfect in the indirect speech doesn't change.

Direct speech: *'I **had read** everything about this topic.'*

Indirect speech: *She said (that) she **had read** everything about this topic.*

Questions in Reported Speech

When talking about questions in reported speech, the tense changes remain the same. However, the words "say/said" or "tell/told" become "asked" in the indirect speech. See the following example:

Direct speech: *'Where is Tom?'*

Indirect speech: *She asked me where Tom was.*

As you can see the present simple verb "to be" in the direct question is inverted with the subject "Tom", before back shifting to past in the indirect speech. let's see more examples:

Direct question	Indirect question
What are you doing?	She asked me what I was doing.
Where do you live?	He asked me where I lived
Where is the police officer, please?	He asked me where the police officer was.

To report 'yes / no questions we use 'if', and as usual the tense changes remain the same. Check these examples:

Direct question	Indirect question
Do you like me?	She asked me if I liked her.
Have you ever been to Paris?	He asked me if I had ever been to Paris.
Are you living with him?	He asked me if I was living with him.

Requests in Reported Speech

we often want to report to our friends when someone asked us for favors in a polite way. We could say for example:

Direct speech: close the window, please.

Or: would you close the window, please?

Or: Could you mind closing the window, please?

To report requests like these all we have to do is use this formula:

Ask me + to + infinitive

Direct speech: Could you close the door, please.

Indirect speech: She asked me to close the door.

More Examples:

Direct request	Indirect request
Please help me.	He asked me to help him.
Could you please hand me the book?	She asked me to hand her the book
Could you pass the salt, please?	She asked me to pass the salt.
Can you bring my son from school?	She asked me to bring her son from school.
Would you mind coming early today	She asked me to come early today.

The negative form of a request in reported speech is easy to make:

Direct speech: Please don't be late.

Indirect speech: The teacher asked us not to be late.

Making Orders in Reported Speech

We form orders in the reported speech the same way we do in request. The only difference is instead of using "asked" we use "told". See the following examples:

Direct order	Indirect order
Sit down!	He told me to sit down.
Don't worry!	He told her not to worry.
Be on time!	He told me to be on time.
Don't smoke!	He told us not to smoke.
Keep quiet!	She told us to keep quiet.

Time expressions in reported speech

We often change time expressions when changing from direct speech into reported speech:

Examples:

Direct speech: *I saw him today, she said.*

Indirect speech: *She said that she had seen him that day.*

Direct speech: *I saw him yesterday, she said.*

Indirect speech: *She said that she had seen him the day before.*

Here's a list of phrases of time in the direct speech and its equivalent in reported speech:

Direct speech	Reported speech
Today	That day
Yesterday	The day before
Tomorrow	The next/ following day
Day before yesterday	Two days before
The day after tomorrow	In two days, times/two days later
Next week/month/year	The following week/month/year
Last week/month/year	The previous week/month/year
Ago	Before

Place and demonstrative expressions in reported speech

Here's a list of phrases of place in the direct speech and its equivalent in reported speech:

Direct speech	Reported speech
Here	there
I was born here	He told me he had been born there

Demonstrative expressions in reported speech:

Direct speech	Reported speech
This	that
This is my book	She said that was her book

Direct speech	Reported speech
These	those
These are my friends	He said those were her friends