

Reported (Indirect) Speech

We often need to tell others what someone else said. There are two ways to do this. One is to say the same words and use quotation marks. That is "direct speech." The other method is to summarize, or tell *about* what someone said. This is called "reported speech."

Reported Statements

When do we use reported speech? Sometimes someone says a sentence, for example "I'm going to the cinema tonight". Later, maybe we want to tell someone else what the first person said.

- ✧ We use a '*reporting verb*' like '**say**' or '**tell**'.
- ✧ If this verb is in the present tense, it's easy. We just put 'she says' and then the sentence:

Direct speech: I like ice cream.

Reported speech: She **says** (that) she **likes** ice cream.

- ✧ We don't need to change the tense, though probably we do need to change the 'person' from 'I' to 'she', for example. We also may need to change words like 'my' and 'your'.

(As I'm sure you know, often, we can choose if we want to use 'that' or not in English. I've put it in brackets () to show that it's optional. It's exactly the same if you use 'that' or if you don't use 'that'.)

- ✧ Changes to *Personal Pronouns* in indirect reports depend on whether the person reporting the speech and the person(s) who said the original words are the same or different.

- ♦ I, you —→ he/she
- ♦ we —→ they

- ✧ changes to *Adjectives/Adverbs* and *Demonstratives* We often change *Adjectives/Adverbs* and *Demonstratives* because indirect speech happens at a later time than the original speech, and perhaps in a different place.

- my —→ his/her
- our —→ their
- here —→ there
- today —→ that day
- yesterday —→ the day before
- two days ago —→ two days before
- tomorrow —→ the next day
- this —→ that
- these —→ those

- ✧ **But**, if the reporting verb is **in the past tense**, then usually we change the tenses in the Reported Speech:

Direct speech: I like ice cream.

Reported speech: She **said** (that) she **liked** ice cream

Tense	Direct Speech	Tense in	Reported Speech
Present Simple	I <i>like</i> ice cream	Past Simple	She said (that) she liked ice cream.
Present Continuous	I <i>am living</i> in London	Past Continuous	She said (that) she was living in London.
Past Simple	I <i>bought</i> a car	Past Perfect	She said (that) she had bought a car OR She said (that) she bought a car.
Past Continuous	I <i>was walking</i> along the street	Past Perfect Continuous	She said (that) she had been walking along the street.
Present Perfect	I <i>haven't seen</i> Julie	Past Perfect	She said (that) she hadn't seen Julie.
Past Perfect*	I <i>had taken</i> English lessons before	Past Perfect	She said (that) she had taken English lessons before.
Future Simple (will)	<i>I'll see</i> you later	Future in-the-Past (would)	She said (that) she would see me later.
would*	I <i>would help</i> , but..”	would	She said (that) she would help but...
can	I <i>can</i> speak perfect English	could	She said (that) she could speak perfect English.
could*	I <i>could</i> swim when I was four	could	She said (that) she could swim when she was four.
shall	I <i>shall</i> come later	should	She said (that) she would come later.
should*	I <i>should</i> call my mother	should	She said (that) she should call her mother
might*	I <i>might</i> be late	might	She said (that) she might be late
must	I <i>must</i> study at the weekend	had to	She said she had to study at the weekend

* doesn't change.

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Indirect speech: *Reporting questions*

Reporting *yes-no* questions and alternative questions

Indirect reports of *yes-no* questions and questions with *or* consist of a reporting clause and a reported clause introduced by *if* or *whether*. *If* is more common than *whether*. The reported clause is in statement form (subject + verb), not question form:

[S] [V]

[V] [S]

She asked if I was Scottish. (original *yes-no* question: 'Are you Scottish?')

[S] [V]

The waiter asked whether we wanted a table near the window. (original *yes-no* question: 'Do you want a table near the window?')

[S] [V]

He asked me if I had come by train or by bus. (original alternative question: 'Did you come by train or by bus?')

So now you have no problem with *making reported speech* from positive and negative sentences. But how about questions?

- *Direct speech:* Where **do** you **live**?

How can we make the reported speech here?

In fact, it's not so different from reported statements. The *tense changes are the same*, and we *keep the question word*. The very important thing though is that, once we tell the question to someone else, ***it isn't a question any more***. So we need to change the grammar to a normal positive sentence. A bit confusing? Maybe this example will help:

- *Direct speech:* Where **do** you **live**?
- *Reported speech:* She asked me where **I lived**.

Do you see how I made it? The direct question is in the present simple tense. We make a present simple question with 'do' or 'does' so I need to take that away. Then I need to change the verb to the past simple.

Another example:

- *Direct speech:* Where **is** Julie?
- *Reported speech:* She asked me where Julie **was**.

The direct question is the present simple of 'be'. We make the question form of the present simple of be by inverting (changing the position of) the subject and verb. So, we need to change them back before putting the verb into the past simple.

Here are some more examples:

Direct Question	Reported Question
Where is the Post Office , please?	She asked me where the Post Office was .
What are you doing ?	She asked me what I was doing .

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Who was that fantastic man ?	She asked me who that fantastic man had been .
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So much for 'wh' questions. But, what if you need to report a 'yes / no' question? We don't have any question words to help us. Instead, we use '**if**':

- *Direct speech*: Do you **like** chocolate?
- *Reported speech*: She asked me **if I liked** chocolate.

No problem? Here are a few more examples:

Direct Question	Reported Question
Do you love me?	He asked me if I loved him.
Have you ever been to Mexico?	She asked me if I had ever been to Mexico.
Are you living here?	She asked me if I was living here.

Reported Requests

There's more! What if someone asks you to do something (in a polite way)? For example:

- *Direct speech*: **Close** the window, please
- Or: **Could** you **close** the window please?
- Or: **Would** you **mind closing** the window please?

All of these requests mean the same thing, so we don't need to report every word when we tell another person about it. We simply use '**ask me + to + infinitive**':

- *Reported speech*: She asked me **to close** the window.

Here are a few more examples:

Direct Request	Reported Request
Please help me.	She asked me to help her.
Please don't smoke .	She asked me not to smoke .
Could you bring my book tonight?	She asked me to bring her book that night.
Could you pass the milk, please?	She asked me to pass the milk.
Would you mind coming early tomorrow?	She asked me to come early the next day.

To report a negative request, use '**not**':

- *Direct speech*: Please **don't be** late.
- *Reported speech*: She asked us **not to be** late.

Reported Orders

And finally, how about if someone doesn't ask so politely? We can call this an 'order' in English, when someone tells you very directly to do something. For example:

- *Direct speech:* **Sit down!**

In fact, we make this into reported speech in the same way as a request. We just use 'tell' instead of 'ask':

- *Reported speech:* She told me **to sit down**.

Direct Order	Reported Order
Go to bed!	He told the child to go to bed.
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 .

Time Expressions with Reported Speech

Sometimes when we change direct speech into reported speech we have to change time expressions too. We don't always have to do this, however. It depends on when we heard the direct speech and when we say the reported speech.

For example:

It's Monday. Julie says "I'm leaving **today**".

- If I tell someone on Monday, I say "Julie said she was leaving **today**".
- If I tell someone on Tuesday, I say "Julie said she was leaving **yesterday**".
- If I tell someone on Wednesday, I say "Julie said she was leaving **on Monday**".
- If I tell someone a month later, I say "Julie said she was leaving **that day**".

So, there's no easy conversion. You really have to think about when the direct speech was said.

Here's a table of some possible conversions:

now	then / at that time
today	yesterday / that day / Tuesday / the 27th of June
yesterday	the day before yesterday / the day before / Wednesday / the 5th of December
last night	the night before, Thursday night
last week	the week before / the previous week
tomorrow	today / the next day / the following day / Friday

Practice

A. Reported Statements Mixed Exercise

Change this direct speech into reported speech:

1. "He works in a bank"

She said _____

2. "We went out last night"

She told me _____

3. "I'm coming!"

She said _____

4. "I was waiting for the bus when he arrived"

She told me _____

5. "I'd never been there before"

She said _____

6. "I didn't go to the party"

She told me _____

7. "Lucy'll come later"

She said _____

8. "He hasn't eaten breakfast"

She told me _____

9. "I can help you tomorrow"

She said _____

10. "You should go to bed early"

She told me _____

11. "I don't like chocolate"

She told me _____

12. "I won't see you tomorrow"

She said _____

13. "She's living in Paris for a few months"

She said _____

14. "I visited my parents at the weekend"

She told me _____

15. "She hasn't eaten sushi before"

She said _____

16. "I hadn't travelled by underground before I came to London"

She said _____

17. "They would help if they could"

She said _____

18. "I'll do the washing-up later"

She told me _____

19. "He could read when he was three"

She said _____

20. "I was sleeping when Julie called"

She said _____

B. Reported Questions

Change these direct questions into reported speech:

1. "Where is he?"

She asked me _____

2. "What are you doing?"

She asked me _____

3. "Why did you go out last night?"

She asked me _____

4. "Who was that beautiful woman?"

She asked me _____

5. "How is your mother?"

She asked me _____

6. "What are you going to do at the weekend?"

She asked me _____

7. "Where will you live after graduation?"

She asked me _____

8. "What were you doing when I saw you?"

She asked me _____

9. "How was the journey?"

She asked me _____

10. "How often do you go to the cinema?"

She asked me _____

11. "Do you live in London?"

She asked me _____

12. "Did he arrive on time?"

She asked me _____

13. "Have you been to Paris?"

She asked me _____

14. "Can you help me?"

She asked me _____

15. "Are you working tonight?"

She asked me _____

16. "Will you come later?"

She asked me _____

17. "Do you like coffee?"

She asked me _____

18. "Is this the road to the station?"

She asked me _____

19. "Did you do your homework?"

She asked me _____

20. "Have you studied reported speech before?"

She asked me _____

C. Reported Requests and Orders

Change the direct speech into reported speech:

1. "Please help me carry this"

She asked me _____

2. "Please come early"

She _____

3. "Please buy some milk"

She _____

4. "Could you please open the window?"

She _____

5. "Could you bring the book tonight?"

She _____

6. "Can you help me with my homework, please?"

She _____

7. "Would you bring me a cup of coffee, please?"

She _____

8. "Would you mind passing the salt?"

She _____

9. "Would you mind lending me a pencil?"

She _____

10. "I was wondering if you could possibly tell me the time?"

She _____

11. "Do your homework!"

She told me _____

12. "Go to bed!"

She _____

13. "Don't be late!"

She _____

14. "Don't smoke!"

She _____

15. "Tidy your room!"

She _____

16. "Wait here!"

She _____

17. "Don't do that!"

She _____

18. "Eat your dinner!"

She _____

19. "Don't make a mess!"

She _____

20. "Do the washing-up!"

She _____

D. Mixed Reported Speech 1 (Statements, Questions, Requests and Orders)

Change the direct speech into reported speech. Choose the past simple of 'ask', 'say'

or 'tell':

1. "Don't do it!"

She _____

2. "I'm leaving tomorrow"

She _____

3. "Please get me a cup of tea"

She _____

4. "She got married last year"

She _____

5. "Be quick!"

She _____

6. "Could you explain number four, please?"

She _____

7. "Where do you live?"

She _____

8. "We went to the cinema and then to a Chinese restaurant"

She _____

9. "I'll come and help you at twelve"

She _____

10. "What are you doing tomorrow?"

She _____

"Don't go!"

She _____

12. "Do you work in London?"

She _____

13. "Could you tell me where the post office is?"

She _____

14. "Come here!"

She _____

15. "I've never been to Wales"

She _____

16. "Have you ever seen 'Lord of the Rings'?"

She _____

17. "I don't like mushrooms"

She _____

18. "Don't be silly!"

She _____

19. "Would you mind waiting a moment please?"

She _____

20. "How often do you play sport?"

She _____

Have
a good
time