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### **Reported Speech (Indirect Speech)**

Direct and indirect speech can be sources of confusion for English learners. The key distinction between these two grammatical mechanisms is that “direct speech” is used to **repeat** what someone else has said, while “indirect speech or “reported speech” is used to **report** what someone else has said.

**To repeat = to say or write something again or more than once.**

**To report = to give people information about something that you have heard, seen, done, etc.**

#### **a)- Direct Speech**

Direct speech repeats or quotes the speaker's exact words. When we use "direct speech" in writing, we place the uttered words between quotation marks ("..."), and the words remain unchanged.

#### **Examples**

- She says: “What time will you be home?”
- John remarked: “There is an elephant outside the window.”

#### **b)- Indirect Speech**

Reported or indirect speech is usually used to talk about the past; therefore, we normally change the tense of the spoken words using reporting verbs such as “say,” “tell,” “ask,” “show,”

“propose,” “remind,” “forbade,” “threaten,” “warn,” etc. In reported speech, the word “that” may be used to introduce the reported words, and quotation marks are not used.

### Examples

- She said: “I saw him.” (Direct speech) = She said **that she had seen him** (Indirect speech).
- She told him: “I am happy.” (Direct speech) = She told him **that she was happy** (Indirect speech).
- “I work in a bank,” said Daniel (Direct speech) = Daniel said **that he worked in a bank** (Indirect speech).

### ***Please Note!***

- **“Say” and “Speak”**
  - Use “say” when there is no indirect object, e.g., He said that he was busy.
  - Use “tell” when indicating who was being spoken to (i.e. with an indirect object), e.g., He told **me** that he was busy.
- **“Talk” and “Speak”**
  - Use these verbs to describe the action of communicating or interacting with others, e.g., He talked to his co-worker/ She was speaking on the telephone.
  - Use “talk” and “speak” with the preposition “about” to refer to what was mentioned, e.g., He talked to his friends **about his accomplishments**.

### Tense Changes in Reported Speech

In reported speech, the tense of the verb that has been initially used in a sentence is replaced by a tense further back in time. Hence, for converting direct into indirect speech, the tense of the reported speech is changed.

#### 1. Present Simple, Present Continuous, Present Perfect, and Present Perfect Continuous

When we backshift, present simple changes to past simple, present continuous changes to past continuous, present perfect changes to past perfect, and present perfect continuous changes into past perfect continuous.

### Examples

- He said: “I **travel** a lot in my job” = He said that he **travelled** a lot in his job.
- She said: “I **am writing** a letter” = She said that she **was writing** a letter.
- He enunciated: “I **have conducted** an extensive research on illegal immigration” = He enunciated that he **had conducted** an extensive research on illegal immigration.
- They said: “We **have been working** in a factory for three years” = They said that they **had been working** in a factory for three years.

## 2. Past Simple, Past Continuous

When we backshift, past simple usually changes to past perfect, and past continuous changes to past perfect continuous.

### Examples

- He said: “I **did not enjoy** the party” = He said that he **had not enjoyed** the party.
- They said: “We **were watching** a movie” = They said that they **had been watching** a movie.

## 3. Past Perfect, and Past Perfect Continuous

In reported speech, the past perfect and past perfect continuous tenses remain the same.

### Examples

- Leo said: “I **had resolved** the issue” = Leo said that he **had resolved** the issue.
- She declared: “I **had completed** the task” = She declared that she **had completed** the task.
- He said: “I **had been reading** this book since 10 AM = He said that he **had been reading** that book since 10 AM.

- She said: “I **had been using** the same car since 2009” = She said that she **had been using** the same car since 2009.

#### 4. Future Simple, Future Continuous, Future Perfect, and Future Perfect Continuous

In reported speech, the future tense is subject to some slight changes.

##### 1. Future Simple: Will changes into **would be**

**E.g.** He said I **will go** to London = He said that he **would go** to London.

##### 2. Future Continuous: Will be changes into **would be**

**E.g.** The children said: “We **will be playing** in the garden” = The children said that they **would be playing** in the garden.

##### 3. Future Perfect: Will have changes into **would have**

**E.g.** He said: “David **will have spoken** the truth” = He said that David **would have spoken** the truth.

##### 4. Future Perfect Continuous: Will have changes into **would have been**

**E.g.** Noah said: “I will not **have been using** my camera for an entire week = Noah said that she **would not have been using** her camera for an entire week.

**Please Note!** If the reporting verb of the sentence is in the present or future tense, the tense of the reported speech is not changed while converting direct speech into indirect speech.

**E.g.** He says: “Sam **is going** to school” = He says that Sam **is going** to school.

Reporting verb

Reported speech

**E.g.** She will say: “I **have eaten** my food” = She will say that she **has eaten** her food.

Reporting verb

Reported speech

#### Pronouns and Demonstratives

##### 1. Pronouns

Pronouns frequently change in reported speech.

- **She** said: “**I** work in a hospital” = **She** said that **she** worked in a hospital.
- **They** said: “**We** have won the prize” = **They** said that **they** had won the prize.
- **They** said: “**We** have finished revising **our** lectures” = **They** said that **they** had finished revising **their** lectures.
- “**I** enjoy working in **my** garden,” said **Clara** = **Clara** said that she enjoyed working in **her** garden.
- “**We** played volleyball for **our** school,” said **Louis** = **Louis** said that **they** had played volleyball for **their** school.

**Note!** If you are the person or one of the individuals who engaged in conversation, in this case, the pronouns do not change. **E.g.** “I am working on **my** thesis,” I mentioned to Alina = I mentioned to Alina that I was working on **my** thesis.

## 2. Demonstratives

Demonstratives in reported speech also change if they are no longer accurate.

- “**This** is my house,” said Jenny = Jenny said **that** was her house.
- “We like it **here**,” said Lily = Lily said they like it **there**.

## Changes in Time and Adverbs in Reported Speech

To convert direct speech into indirect speech, some changes are made in the sentences. These changes include changes in time (**e.g., yesterday, today, tomorrow**) and adverbs (**e.g., now, ago, hence**). The words expressing time and adverbs are changed according to the following rules:

- Today changes into **that day**
- Tomorrow changes into **the next day**

- Yesterday changes into **the day before** or **the previous day**
- This week/ month/ year changes into **that week/ month/ year**
- Last week/ month/ year changes into **the previous week/ month/ year**
- Next week/ month/ year changes into **the following week/ month/ year**
- Now changes into **then**
- Ago changes into **before**
- Hence changes into **thence**

### Reported Speech for Modals

For converting direct speech into indirect speech, the present modals (**e.g., can/ may/ will/ shall/ must**) are changed into past modals (**e.g., could/ might/ would/ should/ had to**).

- Karl said: “I **can** help you if you want” = Karl said that he **could** help me if I wanted.
- He said: “I **may** go to India” = He said that he **might** go to India.
- He said: “I **will** take a bus to your house” = He said that he **would** take a bus to my house
- They said: “**Shall** we tell him what happened?” = They said if they **should** tell him what happened.
- She said: “I **must** finish the work in time” = She said that she **had to** finish the work in time.

**Note!** Modals including “should, might, could, would, and ought to,” are not changed and remain the same in indirect speech.

- Tom said: “I **should** make a decision” = Tom said that he **should** make a decision.
- They said: “We **might** go to the cinema” = They said that they **might** go to the cinema.
- He said: “I **could** bring some food for you” = He said that he **could** bring me some food.
- She said: “I **would** start a new career in marketing” = She said that she **would** start a new career in marketing.
- The child said: “I **ought** not **to** tell lies” = The child said that he **ought** not **to** tell lies.

### **Exceptional Rules**

1. If the direct speech indicates a **‘general truth’** or **‘universal truth’** and also **‘a continuing habitual action’**, the tense form of the direct speech will not be changed even if the **reporting verb** is in **simple past**.

- **E.g.**, Peter said, “Knowledge **is** power” (general truth) = Peter said that knowledge **is** power (so the tense form is not changed).
- **E.g.**, Children studied, “The Sun **sets** in the West” (universal truth) = Children studied that the Sun **sets** in the West (so the tense is not changed).
- **E.g.:** Martin said yesterday, “I **walk** 10 km daily” (continuing habitual action) = Martin said yesterday that he **walks** 10 km daily (so the tense is not changed).

Here, in the last example, though the reporting verb (**i.e.** said) is in the **“simple past,”** the **tense form** of the direct speech is not changed, **as it indicates a continuing habitual action**. But if it had been a **discontinued habitual action**, its **tense form** would have been **changed**, and the answer would be: *Martin said yesterday that he walked 10 km daily.*