

How to use Reported Speech

If you have a sentence in Direct Speech, try to follow our 5 steps to put the sentence into Reported Speech..

1. Define the type of the sentence (statement, questions, command)
2. What tense is used in the introductory sentence?
3. Do you have to change the person (pronoun)?
4. Do you have to backshift the tenses?
5. Do you have to change expressions of time and place?

1. Statements, Questions, Commands

Mind the type of sentences when you use Reported Speech. There is more detailed information on the following pages.

- [Statements](#)
- [Questions](#)
- [Commands, Requests](#)

2. The introductory sentence

If you use Reported Speech there are mostly two main differences.

The **introductory sentence** in Reported Speech **can be in the Present or in the Past**.

If the introductory sentences is in the Simple Present, there is *no backshift* of tenses.

Direct Speech:

- Susan: “**Mary works** in an office.”

Reported Speech:

- Introductory sentence in the Simple Present → Susan **says** (that)* **Mary works** in an office.
- Introductory sentence in the Simple Past → Susan **said** (that)* **Mary worked** in an office.

3. Change of persons/pronouns

If there is a pronoun in Direct Speech, it has possibly to be changed in Reported Speech, depending on the situation.

- Direct Speech → Susan: “**I** work in an office.”
- Reported Speech → **Susan said** (that)* **she** worked in an office.

Here **I** is changed to **she**.

4. Backshift of tenses

If there is backshift of tenses in Reported Speech, the tenses are shifted the following way.

- Direct Speech → Peter: “**I work** in the garden.”
- Reported Speech → Peter said (that)* **he worked** in the garden.

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Simple forms	
Simple Present	Simple Past
Simple Past	Past Perfect
Present Perfect	
Past Perfect	
will	would
Progressive forms	

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
am/are/is	was/were
was/were	had been
has been	
had been	

5. Conversion of expressions of time and place

If there is an expression of time/place in the sentence, it may be changed, depending on the situation.

- Direct Speech → Peter: "I worked in the garden **yesterday**."
- Reported Speech → Peter said (that) he had worked in the garden **the day before**.

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
this evening	that evening
today / this day	that day
these days	those days
now	then

a week ago	a week before
last weekend	the weekend before / the previous weekend
next week	the following week
tomorrow	the next/following day
here	there

6. Additional information

In some cases backshift of tenses is not necessary, e.g. when statements are still true. *Backshift of tenses is never wrong.*

- John: "My brother **is** at Leipzig university."
- John said (that) his brother **was** at Leipzig university. *or*
- John said (that) his brother **is** at Leipzig university.

or

when you use general statements.

- Mandy: "The sun **rises** in the east."
- Mandy said (that) the sun **rose** in the east. *or*
- Mandy said (that) the sun **rises** in the east.

* The word *that* is optional, that is the reason why we put it in brackets.

Statements in Reported Speech

If you use a statement in Reported Speech, follow the steps described on our page [Reported Speech – Summary](#).

- changing of the person, backshift of tenses, shifting of expressions of time/place

1. The introductory sentence

1.1. The introductory sentence in the Simple Present

If the introductory sentence is in the Simple Present, there is no backshift of tenses.

- Direct Speech → Susan: “**Mary works** in an office.”
- Reported Speech → **Susan says** (that)* **Mary works** in an office.

The introductory sentence is here: Susan **says** ... → this sentence is in the Simple Present, so there is **no backshift** of tenses.

1.2. The introductory sentence in the Simple Past

If the introductory sentence is in the Simple Past, there is mostly backshift of tenses.

- Direct Speech → Susan: “**Mary works** in an office.”
- Reported Speech → **Susan said** (that)* **Mary worked** in an office.

The introductory sentence is here: Susan **said** ... → this sentence is in the Simple Past, so there is **backshift** of tenses.

1.3. Types of introductory sentences

The word say in introductory sentences can be substituted with other words, e.g.

- add
- decide
- know
- mention
- remark
- tell *
- think

2. Change of persons/pronouns

The person/pronoun used in Direct Speech may be adapted in Reported Speech, depending on the situation.

Emily and John are talking about fashion at school. Emily says to John:

- Emily: “**I like your** new T-shirt.”

Possibility 1:

John says to his friend Max in the afternoon:

- Emily said (that) **she liked my** new T-shirt.

Possibility 2:

Emily says to her friend Julia in the afternoon:

- I said (that) **I liked his** new T-shirt.

3. Backshift of tenses

If the introductory sentence is in the Simple Past, there is *backshift of tenses* in Reported Speech. We shift the tense used in Direct Speech one step back in Reported Speech. If we use Past Perfect or the modals would, could, should, might, must, ought to and needn't in Direct Speech there is possibility to shift the tense back in Reported Speech.

3.1. Simple Present → Simple Past

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Peter: "I work in the garden."	Peter said (that) he worked in the garden.

3.2. Simple Past, Present Perfect, Past Perfect → Past Perfect

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Peter: "I worked in the garden."	Peter said (that) he had worked in the garden.
Peter: "I have worked in the garden."	
Peter: "I had worked in the garden."	

3.3. Auxiliaries, Modals

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Peter: "I will work in the garden."	Peter said (that) he would work in the garden.
Peter: "I can work in the garden."	Peter said (that) he could work in the garden.
Peter: "I may work in the garden."	Peter said (that) he might work in the garden.
Peter: "I would work in the garden." could might should ought to	Peter said (that) he would work in the garden. could might should ought to

3.4. Present Progressive → Past Progressive

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Peter: "I'm working in the garden."	Peter said (that) he was working in the garden.
Peter: "I was working in the garden."	Peter said (that) he had been working in the garden.
Peter: "I have been working in the garden."	
Peter: "I had been working in the	

garden.”

3.5. Past Progressive, Present Perfect Progressive, Past Perfect Progressive → Past Perfect

Progressive

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Peter: “I was working in the garden.”	Peter said (that) he had been working in the garden.
Peter: “I have been working in the garden.”	
Peter: “I had been working in the garden.”	

4. Shifting/Conversion of expressions of time and place

If there is an expression of time/place in the sentence, it may be shifted, depending on the situation.

Emily is at school, writing in her workbook. She misses her red pen at lunchtime. Emily says to John:

- “I lost my red pen **here this morning**.”

Possibility 1:

John says to his friend Max who is in the same room.

- Emily said (that) she had lost her red pen **here this morning**.

Possibility 2:

One day later, John sees his friend Gerry at his house. They talk about school.

- John says to Gerry → Emily said (that) she had lost her red pen **at our school that morning**.
- John says to Gerry → Emily said (that) she had lost her red pen **there yesterday morning**.

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
this evening	that evening
today/this day	that day
these days	those days
now	then
a week ago	a week before
last weekend	the weekend before / the previous weekend
next week	the following week
tomorrow	the next/following day
here	there

* Do not forget the *person* after the word *tell*:

- She told *me* (that) ...

- She told *George* (that) ...

The indirect question in English

There must always be taken into account the following things (see: [Indirect speech \(Reported Speech\) in English](#)(Summary)):

- Customize person, tense, place and time specified

In indirect questions should be borne in mind that from a question in reported speech a declarative sentence is. Therefore applies here in the **word order**: **subject** - verb.

1. The introductory sentence in the indirect question

1.1. Introductory sentence in the presence of

If the **introductory phrase of the question in the present** is, the time form of direct speech is retained even in reported speech.

- direct speech → Susan: "**Do it Mary work** in an office?"
- indirect speech → Susan **asks** if / Whether **Mary work s** in an office.

The introductory sentence is here: Susan **asks** ... → the sentence is in the present. The time form of direct speech is also in the indirect the same. The auxiliary verb **do** fall away in the indirect sentence.

1.2. Introductory phrase in the past

If the **introductory phrase of the question in the past** is, then the tense in indirect speech is mostly changed.

- direct speech → Susan: "**Do it Mary work** in an office?"
- indirect speech → Susan **asked** if / Whether **Mary work ed** in an office.

The introductory sentence is here: Susan **asked** ... → the set is in the past. The time form of direct speech is adjusted, it will be "shifted" in the past.

1.3. Variants of Introduction sets

In the introductory phrase of indirect questions, in addition to the verb *ask* also are other verbs, eg

- want to know
- Wonder

2. questions with and without question words

Questions can **with** start or a question word without.

Substituting a **question without a question word** in the indirect speech, then added, in reported speech **Whether or IF**(German: a if).

- Peter: "Do you **play** football?" Peter asked me → **Whether (if) I play ed** football.

Substituting a **question with a question word** in the indirect speech, then **used** it in reported speech **this** interrogative.

- Peter: "**When** do you **play** football?" Peter asked me → **When I play ed** football.

1. Reported Commands

There is **no backshift of tenses with commands/requests** in Reported Speech.

You only have to change the person and shift expressions of time/place described on our page [Reported Speech – Summary](#).

Form

- affirmative commands → **to** + **infinitive**
- negative commands → **not** + **to** + **infinitive**

1.1. Affirmative commands

- Direct Speech → Dad: "Do your homework."
- Reported Speech → Dad **told** me **to do** my homework.

1.2. Negative commands

- Direct Speech → Teacher: "Don't talk to your friend."
- Reported Speech → The teacher **told** me **not to talk** to my friend.

1.3. The introductory sentence in commands

The word *tell* in introductory sentences in Reported Commands can be substituted with other words, e.g.

- advise
- ask

There is no backshift of tenses, no matter which tense is used in the introductory sentence.

Direct Speech

- Dad: "Do your homework."

Reported Speech

- Dad **tells** me **to do** my homework.
- Dad **told** me **to do** my homework.

2. Suggestions

Direct Speech

- Father: "Let's watch a film."

Reported Speech

- Father **suggested** watching a film.
- Father **suggested** that they should watch a film

Do not use the infinitive after *suggest*. Father **suggested** ~~to watch~~ a film.