# Reported Speech

What is reported speech? When do we use it? Reported speech is repeating the words of one person to another person. We use it to tell someone else what the first person said.

**Here's how it works:**

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'.)

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.

Occasionally, we don't need to change the present tense into the past if the information in direct speech is still true (but this is only for things which are general facts, and even then usually we like to change the tense):

- Direct speech: The sky is blue.
- Reported speech: She said (that) the sky **is/was** blue.

Look at the chart on the following page for changes in reported speech according to tense. Do you see a pattern?

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

* doesn't change.

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**Reported Questions**

So now you know how to make 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 anymore. 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. |
| Who was that fantastic man? | She asked me who that fantastic man had been. |

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. |

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## 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. |

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## 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 |

## How to Use 'Say' and 'Tell'

In reported statements, we can use either '**say**' or '**tell**'. The meaning is the same, but the grammar is different. For example:

Direct speech:

- John: "I'll be late".

Reported speech:

- John **said** (that) he would be late. / John **told me** (that) he was going to be late.

**With 'tell' we NEED the object (e.g. 'me', 'you', 'her').**
**With 'say' we CAN'T use the object (e.g. 'me', 'them', 'us').**

So we CAN'T say:

- John **said me** (that) he would be late.
- John **told** (that) he would be late.

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Here are some correct examples:

- Julie **said** (that) she'd come to the party.
- I **said** (that) I was going to bed early.
- He **told me** (that) he loved living in London.
- They **told John** (that) they would arrive at six.

(We can also use 'tell' in reported orders. In this case, 'tell' is followed by a direct object and 'to + infinitive': 'She told me to sit down'.)

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**'Said' or 'told'?**

1. Julie _____ that she would join us after work.
2. She _____ me that she was going running this evening.
3. John _____ us that he couldn't come to the party.
4. John _____ that he had been to the cinema at the weekend.
5. She _____ them she wanted to quit.
6. David _____ he was going to arrive at eight.
7. They _____ that they didn't want to meet us on Tuesday.
8. I _____ him I wasn't impressed.
9. Lucy _____ Julie that she was leaving on Wednesday.
10. We _____ that we were going on holiday the following week.
11. Jack _____ my mother he would be in Spain this week.
12. I _____ that I hated mushrooms.
13. She _____ she loved chocolate.
14. They _____ they were meeting Luke today.
15. They _____ us they were going to the museum this afternoon.
16. He _____ he wouldn't start without us.
17. I _____ them I'd bring pudding.
18. Jonathan _____ it would rain today.
19. They _____ us that it was fine to come late.
20. The boss _____ me that I should do some more work on this report.

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**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 _____

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**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 _____

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**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 worry!" 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 _____

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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 _____
11. "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 _____

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