

Reported Speech

Direct and Indirect Speech

There are two ways of reporting what somebody says;

- **Direct speech**
- **Indirect (or reported) speech.**

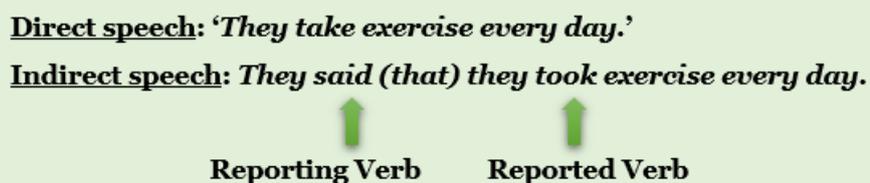
What is Direct & Indirect Speech?

Direct speech - reporting the message of the speaker in exact words as spoken by him/her. For example: *John said 'I am very busy now'.*

In direct speech we use the speaker's own words. In text we put speech marks [""] around the words spoken. Speech marks are also called inverted commas.

Indirect speech: When we tell **what somebody said or thought**, we often use **indirect speech**. It means that we report the message of the speaker in our own words. Indirect speech is also called **reported speech**. For example: *John said that he was very busy then.*

An indirect speech statement consists of a **reporting verb** such as **say** in the main clause, followed by a **that clause**. The word **that** is optional and is often omitted when speaking.



Direct speech: *'They take exercise every day.'*
Indirect speech: *They said (that) they took exercise every day.*

Reporting Verb Reported Verb

Tenses, here-and-now words like (this, here, today) and **pronouns** (like I, you) may change in indirect speech after past reporting verbs. This is because the time, place and speaker may be different.

- *'I'm going to stay **here** for the rest of **this** week.'*
Susan said that **she was going to stay **there** for the rest of **that** week.**

Past perfect tenses and some **modal verbs** (e.g. *should, must*) don't change in indirect speech.

- *'I **had seen** him somewhere before.'* → *I said I **had seen** him somewhere before.*
- *'You **must** fill in these three forms.'* → *They told me I **must** fill in three forms.*

We often leave out **that**, especially after common verbs like **say** and **think**.

- Susan **said** she really liked there.

Indirect questions have a different structure from direct questions.

- ‘Where **is your luggage?**’ → He asked me where **my luggage was**.
- ‘**Do you know Karen?**’ → She asked me **if I knew Karen**.

We can use **object + infinitive** after some verbs, like **ask** and **tell**.

- I **asked him to talk** more quietly.
- We **told Oliver not to lock** the garage.

And we can use **infinitives** after most question words.

- Tell us **what to do**.
- I don’t know **how to switch** on this computer.

‘HERE’ AND ‘NOW’ WORDS

Some words may be changed in indirect speech because the original speaker’s ‘here’ and ‘now’ are not the same as the reporter’s.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
here	there
now	then
this	that
tomorrow	the next day
yesterday	the day before
today	that day
tonight	that night
last week	the week before
next week	the next week

There is often more than one way of reporting ‘here’ and ‘now’ words.

- ‘I don’t like **this** house.’ → She said she didn’t like **that** house/ **the** house/ **their** house.

TENSES

After reporting expressions like **he said, I asked, she thought, tenses** are usually **different** from those in the original words (because the reporter’s time is different from the original speaker’s time). The verb shifts to express a past time. Verbs become **more past**.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
Present simple	Past simple
Present continuous	Past continuous
Present perfect	Past perfect
Past simple	Past perfect
will / can / may	would / could / might

Examples	
Direct speech	Indirect speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You look nice. I can't swim. I'm learning French. Has he forgotten? John phoned. Will you marry me? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I told her she looked nice. He pretended he couldn't swim. She said she was learning French. I wondered if he had forgotten. She told me John had phoned. I asked her if she would marry me.

Note the difference between **say** and **tell**.

- **Tell** must have a **personal object**: we **tell somebody something**.
 - They **told me** I was wrong. (NOT *They told I was wrong.*)
 - Karen **told us** a joke.
- **Say** doesn't need a personal object: we **say something (to somebody)**.
 - They **said** I was wrong. (NOT *They said me I was wrong.*)
 - We **said** nothing to anybody.

Tenses don't change after present or future reporting verbs, because there is no important change of time.

- **He says** he **doesn't** want to play anymore. ('I don't want ...')
- I **will tell** her your idea is great.

Tenses do not usually change after present perfect reporting verbs, either.

- The government **has announced** that taxes **will** be raised.

We often drop that after common reporting verbs.

- He **said** (**that**) he was falling in love with me.
- I **knew** (**that**) he was lying.

PRESENT SITUATIONS

Situations that have not changed: if the original speaker was talking about a **present or future situation that is still present or future** when the words are reported, the tenses are sometimes **not changed** after a past reporting verb.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The earth is round. 'How old are you?' 'What?' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He proved that the earth was/is round. I asked how old you were/are.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does she work? • It will be windy tomorrow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've often wondered where she worked/works. • The forecast said it would/will be windy tomorrow.
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Note:

We do not keep the original speaker's tenses if we do not agree with what he/she said, or if we want to show that the ideas do not come from us.

- Did you hear that? She said she **was** fourteen!
- He announced that profits **were** higher than forecast.
- I didn't know she **was** ill.

INDIRECT QUESTIONS

The **word order** in indirect questions is different in reported speech. There is no inversion of subject and auxiliary verb. **Indirect questions** normally have the **subject before the verb**.

- He wanted to know when **I could start**. (NOT USUALLY ... when could I start.)
- I asked where **the trainer and the team were staying**.

Do is **not used** in indirect questions, and question marks (??) are not used.

- I wondered how **they felt**. (NOT ... how did they feel?)
- Nobody told me why **I had to sign** the paper.

Yes/No questions are reported with **if** or **whether**.

- The driver asked **if/whether** I wanted to go to the town centre.

We prefer **whether** in formal style.

- I enquired **whether** she was coming by road or by air.

INFINITIVES

We use **infinitives** to report sentences about future actions – for example **promises, agreements, orders, offers, advice, suggestions, requests**.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I'll definitely write.' • 'OK, I'll wait until 6 o'clock.' • 'Be careful, Andrew.' • 'Shall I babysit tonight?' • 'You'd better think again.' • 'Please don't be late.' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He promised to write. • She agreed to wait until 6 o'clock. • I told Andrew to be careful. • Ann has offered to babysit tonight. • The manager advised me to think again. • She asked us not to be late.

The structure **question word + infinitive** is common.

- *He asked her **how to make** a white sauce.*
- *Don't tell me **what to do**.*

Infinitives are **not used** after **suggest** or **say**.

- *He **suggested trying** somewhere else. (NOT ~~He suggested to try~~ ...)*
- *The policeman **said I mustn't** park here. (NOT ... ~~said me not to park~~ ...)*

We can use **whether** but not if **before infinitives**.

- *I don't know **whether to go** home. (NOT ... ~~if to go~~ home.)*

SPECIAL CASES

Past tenses are changed to **past perfect** tenses after past reporting verbs, but only if this is necessary in order to make the time relations clear. Compare:

Direct speech	Indirect speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I saw Penny a couple of days ago.</i> • <i>Dinosaurs were around for 250 million years.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In his letter he said he had seen Penny a couple of days before.</i> • <i>This guy on TV said that dinosaurs were around for 250 million years. (NOT ... had been around ...)</i>

Usually **unchanged** after past reporting verbs: **past perfect, had better, could, would, should, ought, might, must**.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I hadn't seen him before.</i> • <i>You'd better go.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>She said she hadn't seen him before.</i> • <i>He said I'd better go.</i>

EXERCISES:

1. **Tenses. Complete the reported sentences with the correct tenses. Use uncontracted forms (e.g. **he would NOT he'd**)**

'You look tired' I told her that she looked tired.

- 1 'We're hungry!' The children said that they _____ hungry.
- 2 'Can you take me home, please?' She asked me if I _____ her home.
- 3 'Sonia's had a baby.' Mum called to say that Sonia _____ a baby.
- 4 'Frank hasn't changed his shirt since the party.' Helen noticed that Frank _____ his shirt since the party.
- 5 'Will you stay for lunch?' We asked them if they _____ for lunch.

2. **'here and now' words. Imagine these sentences were reported in another place a month later. Complete the sentences.**

'Is there anything good on TV tonight?' He asked whether there was anything good on TV that night.

- 1 'We're going on holiday tomorrow.' They said that they were going on holiday _____.
- 2 'I'm seeing the doctor today.' She told us that she was seeing the doctor _____.
- 3 'I don't like it here.' She told us that she didn't like it _____.

- 4 'I'm busy so I can't talk to you now.' He told me that he was busy so he couldn't talk to me___.
- 5 'This coat is Sally's.' She said that_____coat was Sally's.

3. Mixed structures. Change these sentences to indirect speech. Use contracted forms.

He's wrong. (*I knew*) → **I knew he was wrong.**

- 1 I'm not enjoying this sandwich. (*She said*)
- 2 I don't like cheese sandwiches. (*He says*)
- 3 Do you prefer a bath or a shower? (*He asked us*)
- 4 Let's have some lunch. (*She suggested*)
- 5 Their new house is lovely. (*We'll tell them*)
- 6 We'll make the beds. (*They offered*)
- 7 You should be more careful. (*They advised us*)
- 8 I might be late. (*He called to say*)
- 9 My boss doesn't like me. (*She thought*)
- 10 When are you going to start your new job? (*I asked her*)

4. Complete the sentences with the correct form of say, tell, or ask.

Can you _____ me the time, please? → Can you **tell** me the time, please?

- 1 'How old are you?' he _____.
- 2 Can you repeat that, please? I didn't hear what you _____.
- 3 Dad _____ us a story last night.
- 4 Would you mind _____ me your name?
- 5 It's important to _____ questions when you are learning English.
- 6 Speak more clearly, please. I can't understand what you _____.

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