

RULES

REPORTED SPEECH

To report what another person said, we can either quote directly or report it using indirect speech. Generally, when we report what someone said, the verb moves one tense back in the past. We can report three main kinds of direct speech: *statements, imperatives and questions.*

STATEMENTS

DIRECT SPEECH

Present Simple / Continuous

"I **prefer** the smaller computer," she said.

"We **are doing** an experiment," he said.

Present Perfect Simple / Continuous

"I still **haven't mastered** the new program," Paul said.

"We **have been living** on the island for years," Sarah said.

Past Simple / Continuous

"We **took** a fascinating tour of Florence," she said.

"We **were waiting** anxiously for the results," he added.

will

"The product **will be** a great market success," he said.

Present Modals

"John **can / may** help us later," she said.

Some modals change in different ways according to their meaning:

"When **shall** we leave?" he asked. (*asking for information*)

"What **shall** we do?" she asked. (*request for advice*)

"I **can** speak French," Sue added. (*referring to the present*)

"We **can** finish it later," he said. (*referring to the future*)

"You **needn't** apologise." (*referring to the present*)

"You **needn't** phone tonight." (*referring to the future*)

"It **may** rain," she said. (*possibility*)

"You **may** leave now," he said. (*permission*)

"You **must** work harder," the teacher said. (*necessity / obligation*)

"You **must** visit the museum," she said. (*strong recommendation*)

"Sheila **must** be in her early twenties." (*deduction / conclusion*)

REPORTED SPEECH

Past Simple / Continuous

She said that she **preferred** the smaller computer.

He said that they **were doing** an experiment.

Past Perfect Simple / Continuous

Paul said he still **hadn't mastered** the new program.

Sarah said **they'd been living** on the island for years.

Past Perfect Simple / Continuous

She said they **had taken** a fascinating tour of Florence.

He added that they **had been waiting** anxiously for the results.

would

He said that the product **would be** a great market success.

Past Modals

She said that John **could / might** help them later.

He asked when they **would** leave.

She asked what they **should** do.

Sue added that she **could** speak French.

He said they **would be able to** finish it later.

He said I **needn't / didn't need to / didn't have to** apologise.

She said we **wouldn't have to** phone that night.

She said it **might** rain.

He said I **could / might** leave then.

The teacher said I **must / had to** work harder.

She said we **must / should** visit the museum.

He said that Sheila **must** be in her early twenties.

IMPERATIVES AND QUESTIONS

DIRECT SPEECH

Imperative

"**Be** careful," the doctor instructed me.

"**Don't move!**" the policeman ordered the thief.

Yes / No questions: auxiliary + subject + verb

"**Do you want** the report today?" the secretary asked me.

Wh- questions: Wh- word + auxiliary + subject + verb

"**Where are you going?**" Susan asked her friend.

REPORTED SPEECH

Full infinitive

The doctor instructed me **to be** careful.

The policeman ordered the thief **not to move**.

if / whether + subject + verb (= word order of a statement)

The secretary asked me **if I wanted** the report that day.

Wh- word + subject + verb (= word order of a statement)

Susan asked her friend **where she was going**.

Remember When we report answers, we repeat the auxiliary verb from the reported question. For a negative answer, we add *not*.

"**Are** you flying out tonight?" he asked. "**Yes,**" she said.

→ He asked if she **was** flying out that night. She answered that she **was**.

Notes

- Many verbs are used to report speech. For statements, the most common are *say* and *tell*. *Say* and *tell* are used differently.
We say something (to somebody): She **said** (that) she would arrive late. (**not**: *She said me ... X*)
We tell somebody something: She **told me** (that) she would arrive late. (**not**: *She told that ... X*)
Say and *tell* are not used to report questions.
- Whether* and *if* are used when we report *yes / no* questions. *If* is common in questions where the answer is *yes* or *no*. *Whether* is usually used in formal English or where there is a clear choice between alternatives. It is also often used after *wonder* and *want to know*.
Sue asked me **if** I wanted to go to the opera. He wondered **whether** I preferred to travel **by car or by bus**.
- In reported speech, we don't have to make tense changes when we report facts, general truths or things which are still true.
He said that the giant panda **is** / **was** an endangered species. Peter said he **has** / **had** a bad cold.
- There is no tense change:
 - when the reporting verb is in present or future tense.
She **says** she **likes** chocolate. He **will argue** that he's **going to** win.
 - when the tense cannot move one step back into the past. (Past Perfect, third conditional, *had better*, *used to*, etc.)
"I **had already heard** the news," he said. → He said (that) he **had already heard** the news.
"I **used to be** a sailor," he said. → He said (that) he **used to be** a sailor.
 - in certain expressions that use the unreal past: *It's time* / *would rather* / *as if* / *as though* / *wish*
"It's time we **sent** the supplies." → He said it was time they **sent** the supplies.
 - in the modals *might*, *should*, *ought to*, *could* and *would*
"**Could** I **borrow** your pen?" she asked. → She asked if she **could borrow** my pen.
- In reported speech, we also make changes in:
 - demonstrative adjectives: *this* → *that*; *these* → *those*
 - adverbs of place: *here* → *there*
 - time expressions: *today* → *that day*; *now* → *then*; *yesterday* → *the day before*, etc.
(See Grammar Appendix, page 217.)

REPORTING VERBS (See Grammar Appendix for full list, page 217-218.)

- In certain verbs, we can report the exact words that were said, or we can report the general meaning of the sentence.
- When we report general meaning, we use specific verbs that carry a similar meaning to the action / function in the sentence.

"You really **should consult** a lawyer!" she said. (*function: giving advice*)

She told me I **should consult** a lawyer. (*exact words*) or: She **advised me to consult** a lawyer. (*general meaning*)

FORM	DIRECT SPEECH	REPORTED SPEECH
verb + infinitive <i>agree, decide, demand, offer, prefer, promise, propose, refuse, etc.)</i>	"Shall I carry your cases?" he asked. "I will definitely keep in touch." "I won't give you the number."	He offered to carry my cases. She promised to keep in touch. He refused to give me the number.
verb + that + clause <i>agree, complain, explain, suggest, etc.)</i>	"You always leave such a mess." "You have to check the oil regularly," he said.	She complained that I always leave a mess . He explained that I had to check the oil regularly .
verb + object + infinitive <i>beg, instruct, invite, warn, etc.)</i>	"Please help me!" she cried. "Insert the disk now," he said. "Please come to the reception." "Don't trust him with money."	She begged me to help her. He instructed me to insert the disk then . She invited me to come to the reception. She warned me not to trust him with money.
verb + gerund <i>accuse sb. of, admit, advise against, blame sb. for, deny, insist on, suggest, etc.)</i>	"Let's have lunch together." "I didn't break the window!" "You gave the details to the press."	He suggested having lunch together. She denied breaking the window. He accused me of giving the details to the press.

SUBJUNCTIVE

The subjunctive refers to the use of the bare infinitive in *that* clauses which follow certain verbs, adjectives and nouns to express obligation, importance or intention. The form does not change in the third person singular and can be used for past, present or future.

after certain verbs (e.g., *advise, ask, demand, insist, order, propose, recommend, require, request, suggest*)

The lecturer **insists that we be** on time.
I **propose that Max not attend** the conference.
She **requested that the child be named** after her mother.
(passive)

after certain adjectives (e.g., *advisable, anxious, certain, desirable, eager, essential, important, necessary, preferable, vital*)

It is **vital that he attend** the conference.
It is **important that she be informed** immediately. (passive)

after certain nouns (e.g., *idea, order, proposal, recommendation, request, suggestion*)

The **recommendation was that the money be invested** until she reached the age of 18. (passive)

Note

Subjunctives are more common in American English than in British English. In British English, although considered formal, **should + bare infinitive** is more usual.

The lecturer insists that we **should be** on time.

PRACTICE

A. Rewrite the following statements in reported speech. Use the verbs *say* or *tell*.

- Rick: "I can't imagine living anywhere but my hometown."
Rick **said that he couldn't imagine living anywhere but his hometown.**
- Fiona: "These plants have to be kept somewhere sunny."
.....
- Personal assistant: "I've booked you an appointment for tomorrow, Mrs Green."
.....
- Nurse to David: "You mustn't get out of bed until tomorrow morning."
.....
- Jan: "I'm really looking forward to my holiday."
Jan said
- Sam to me: "I can help you later tonight."
Sam said that
- Jack to me: "I'd rather they didn't sign the contract."
Jack told me
- Pilot: "The plane will be landing in half an hour."
The pilot said

B. Report the following questions and commands, beginning as shown.

- "Should these chairs be left out here overnight?" she asked.
She asked me whether **those chairs should be left out there overnight.**
- She said, "Are you looking for work?" "Yes, I am," he replied.
She asked
- "When did you first notice these symptoms, Miss Harrison?" the doctor asked.
The doctor asked
- "What time are you expecting the guests to arrive, Mary?" Ivor asked.
Ivor wanted to know
- "You really should eat more fresh fruit," his mum said.
His mum advised