

Reported Speech

Introduction: What is Reported Speech?

Reported speech (also called indirect speech) is used when we tell someone what another person said, without repeating their exact words.

Direct speech:

“I am tired,” she said.

Reported speech:

She said that she was tired.

When do we use reported speech?

- To summaries conversations
- To give information second-hand
- To report instructions, requests and questions
- To describe past events more formally

When should we avoid or limit reported speech?

- When the exact wording matters (legal statements, quotations, poetry)
- When tone or emotion is important
- When the speaker’s words are already short and clear
- When reporting current announcements or headlines where tense does not shift

Tense Changes and Meaning

When we report speech, we usually move the tense one step back in time if the reporting verb is in the past (said, told, explained, asked).

Direct: “I am reading.”

Reported: He said that he **was** reading.

However, if the statement is still **true now**, sometimes the tense does not change:

Direct: “Water boils at 100°C.”

Reported: She said that water boils at 100°C.

Subject–Verb Agreement in Reported Speech

Subject–verb agreement becomes even more important because:

Subjects often change (I → he/she, we → they)

Verbs often shift tense

Long sentences make agreement errors easier

Example:

Direct: "We are going to the meeting."

Reported incorrectly: He said that **we was** going to the meeting.

Reported correctly: He said that **they were** going to the meeting.

Always check:

Who is the subject now?

What tense should the verb move to?

Common Conversions

Direct Form	Reported Form
Present Simple → Past Simple	"I work here." → He said he worked there.
Present Continuous → Past Continuous	"She is cooking." → He said she was cooking .
Present Perfect → Past Perfect	"I have finished." → She said she had finished .
Past Simple → Past Perfect	"They left early." → He said they had left early.
Future (will) → would	"I will call." → She said she would call.
Can → could	"I can help." → He said he could help.
May → might	"I may go." → She said she might go.
Must → had to	"You must study." → He said I had to study.
Imperatives (commands)	"Close the door." → She told me to close the door.
Questions (yes/no)	"Do you like tea?" → She asked if I liked tea.
Wh-questions	"Where are you going?" → He asked where I was going .
This/these → that/those	"This book is new." → She said that book was new.
Here/now → there/then	"I am here now." → He said he was there then .

Direct Speech Punctuation Rules

Rule 1: Use quotation marks around the exact spoken words.

Capitalise the first word inside the quotation marks.

- Example 1: The teacher said, “Please hand in your work.”
- Example 2: “I cannot attend the meeting,” he explained.
- Example 3: She asked, “Where are you going?”
- Example 4: “Thank you for your help,” they said politely.

Rule 2: Use a comma, question mark or exclamation mark before closing the speech marks (not after).

The punctuation stays inside the quotation marks.

- Example 1: He replied, “I’m not sure,” and walked away.
- Example 2: The nurse whispered, “You will be fine.”
- Example 3: “Can you help me?” she asked quietly.
- Example 4: “That’s amazing!” they shouted.

Rule 3: When the reporting clause comes first, use a comma before the quotation marks.

(Reporting clause: *he said, she asked, they replied, etc.*)

- Example 1: The coach said, “We need to work as a team.”
- Example 2: My friend asked, “Do you want to join us?”
- Example 3: The doctor warned, “You must rest.”
- Example 4: The manager announced, “The meeting starts at nine.”

Rule 4: When the reporting clause follows the speech, separate them with appropriate punctuation.

If the spoken words end in a full stop, use a comma instead (inside the speech marks).

- Example 1: “We should leave now,” she said.
- Example 2: “It is raining heavily,” he observed.
- Example 3: “I have finished my assignment,” the student replied.
- Example 4: “Please sit down,” the examiner instructed.

Indirect (Reported) Speech Punctuation Rules

Rule 1: Do not use quotation marks.

The reported clause becomes part of the sentence.

- Example 1: She said that she was tired.
- Example 2: The teacher explained that the exam would be next week.
- Example 3: He told me that he could not attend.
- Example 4: They reported that the road was closed.

Rule 2: Change pronouns and time expressions as needed.

(We shift from the speaker's perspective.)

- Example 1: Direct: "**I will come tomorrow.**"
Indirect: He said that he would come **the next day**.
- Example 2: Direct: "**We are leaving now.**"
Indirect: She said that they were leaving **then**.
- Example 3: Direct: "**My car is broken.**"
Indirect: He said that **his** car was broken.
- Example 4: Direct: "**I have finished my work.**"
Indirect: She said that she **had finished** her work.

Rule 3: Questions become statements (no question marks).

Use reporting verbs like *asked*, *wanted to know*, and *enquired*.

- Example 1: Direct: "Where do you live?"
Indirect: She asked where I lived.
- Example 2: Direct: "Did you call the doctor?"
Indirect: He asked whether I had called the doctor.

- Example 3: Direct: “Why are you late?”

Indirect: The teacher asked why I was late.

- Example 4: Direct: “Can you help me?”

Indirect: She asked if I could help her.

(Note: no question mark in indirect form.)

Rule 4: Commands and requests use “to + verb” or polite reporting verbs.

We often use *told*, *asked*, *advised*, *warned*, *invited*, etc.

- Example 1: Direct: “Sit down.”

Indirect: The teacher told us to sit down.

- Example 2: Direct: “Please open the window.”

Indirect: She asked me to open the window.

- Example 3: Direct: “Do not be late.”

Indirect: He warned us not to be late.

- Example 4: Direct: “Finish the report today.”

Indirect: The manager ordered them to finish the report that day.

Reported Speech Practice

Choose the correct reported speech.

1. “I need help,” she said.

- a. She said she needs help.
- b. She said she needed help.
- c. She says she needed help.
- d. She told she needed help.

2. “We are studying,” they said.

- a. They said they are studying.
- b. They told they were studying.
- c. They said they were studying.
- d. They said they study.

3. “He will come tomorrow,” she said.

- a. She said he would come the next day.
- b. She said he will come the next day.
- c. She told he would come tomorrow.
- d. She said he would come tomorrow.

4. “I have finished my work,” she said.

- a. She said she finished her work.
- b. She said she has finished her work.
- c. She said she had finished her work.
- d. She told she had finished her work.

5. “Do you like coffee?” he asked.

- a. He asked did I like coffee.
- b. He asked if I liked coffee.
- c. He asked if I like coffee.
- d. He said that I liked coffee.

6. “Where are you going?” she asked.

- a. She asked where was I going.
- b. She asked where am I going.
- c. She asked where I was going.
- d. She asked that where I was going.

7. “We went home early,” they said.

- a. They said they had gone home early.
- b. They said they have gone home early.
- c. They said they go home early.
- d. They told they had gone home early.

8. “You must listen carefully,” the teacher said.

- a. The teacher said I must listen carefully.
- b. The teacher said I had to listen carefully.
- c. The teacher told I had to listen carefully.
- d. The teacher told me listen carefully.

9. “I can swim very fast,” he said.

- a. He said he can swim very fast.
- b. He said he swam very fast.
- c. He said he could swim very fast.
- d. He told he could swim very fast.

10. “Please open the window,” she said.

- a. She said me to open the window.
- b. She asked me open the window.
- c. She told to open the window.
- d. She asked me to open the window.

11. “I am tired,” he said.

- a. He said he is tired.
- b. He said he was tired.
- c. He told he was tired.
- d. He said that I was tired.

12. “They are going to travel,” she said.

- a. She said they are going to travel.
- b. She told they were going to travel.
- c. She said they were going to travel.
- d. She said they travel.

13. “We have seen that film,” they said.

- a. They said they have seen that film.
- b. They said they saw that film.
- c. They said they had seen that film.
- d. They told they had seen that film.

14. “Will you help me?” she asked.

- a. She asked would I help her.
- b. She asked if I will help her.
- c. She asked if I would help her.
- d. She said I would help her.

15. “Do not touch that,” he said.

- a. He told not to touch that.
- b. He told me not to touch that.
- c. He said me not touch that.
- d. He asked me do not touch that.

16. “This place is beautiful,” she said.

- a. She said that place was beautiful.
- b. She said this place was beautiful.
- c. She told that place is beautiful.
- d. She said that place is beautiful.

17. “I may come later,” he said.

- a. He said he might come later.
- b. He said he may come later.
- c. He told he might come later.
- d. He said he would come later.

18. “Who broke the vase?” she asked.

- a. She asked who had broken the vase.
- b. She asked who broke the vase.
- c. She said who had broken the vase.
- d. She asked that who had broken the vase.

19. “We will meet here,” they said.

- a. They said they would meet here.
- b. They said they would meet there.
- c. They told they would meet there.
- d. They said they meet there.

20. “I was writing a letter,” he said.

- a. He said he has been writing a letter.
- b. He said he had written a letter.
- c. He said he was writing a letter.
- d. He said he had been writing a letter.

21. “I was thinking about changing jobs,” she said.

- a. She said she is thinking about changing jobs
- b. She said she had been thinking about changing jobs
- c. She said she was thinking to change jobs
- d. She told she had been thinking about changing jobs

22. “We have been waiting here for hours,” they said.

- a. They said they were waiting there for hours
- b. They said they had waited there for hours
- c. They said they had been waiting there for hours
- d. They told they had been waiting for hours there

23. “You should speak to your tutor,” he said.

- a. He said I should have spoken to my tutor
- b. He said I should speak to my tutor
- c. He said that I must speak to my tutor
- d. He said I had to speak to my tutor

24. “I will be travelling at that time,” she said.

- a. She said she would be travelling at that time
- b. She said she is travelling at that time
- c. She told she would be travelling that time
- d. She said she would travel that time

25. "Where have you been?" he asked.

- a. He asked where had I been
- b. He asked where I have been
- c. He asked where I had been
- d. He asked that where I had been

Task 2: Transformations

Rewrite these sentences using reported speech.

1. "We will review the plan tomorrow," the director said.

2. "Why did you arrive late?" the tutor asked.

3. "Do not share this file," she said.

4. "I have never worked on this project before," he said.

5. "Can you finish this by Monday?" the manager asked me.

Task 3: Short Writing Task

Write a short paragraph (150 words) describing a meeting or conversation. Use at least four examples of reported speech.