

If we report what another person has said, we usually do not use the speaker's exact words (direct speech), but reported (indirect) speech. Therefore, you need to learn how to transform direct speech into reported speech. The structure is a little different depending on whether you want to transform a statement, question or request.

1. Statements

Type	Example
direct speech	"I speak English."
reported speech (no backshift)	He says that he speaks English.
reported speech (backshift)	He said that he spoke English.

Pronouns

In reported speech, you often have to change the pronoun depending on who says what.

Example

She says, "My mum doesn't have time today." – She says that her mum doesn't have time today.

Tenses

No backshift

Do not change the tense if the introductory clause is in **Simple Present** (e. g. He says). Note, however, that you might have to change the form of the present tense verb (3rd person singular).

Example

He says, "I speak English." – He says that he speaks English.

Backshift

You must change the tense if the introductory clause is in **Simple Past** (e. g. He said). This is called *backshift*.

Example

He said, "I am happy." – He said that he was happy.

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
Simple Present	Simple Past
Present Progressive	Past Progressive
Simple Past	Past Perfect Simple
Present Perfect Simple	
Past Perfect Simple	
Past Progressive	Past Perfect Progressive
Present Perfect Progressive	
Past Perfect Progressive	
Future I (going to)	was / were going to
Future I (will)	Conditional I (would)
Conditional I (would)	

The verbs *could*, *should*, *would*, *might*, *must*, *needn't*, *ought to*, *used to* do not normally change.

Example:

He said, "She might be right." – He said that she might be right.

Therefore you always have to think which place and time expressions are logical in a certain situation.

In the following table, you will find ways of transforming place and **time expressions** into reported speech.

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
today	that day
now	then
yesterday	the day before
... days ago	... days before
last week	the week before
next year	the following year
tomorrow	the next day / the following day
here	there
this	that
these	those

2. Questions

When transforming questions, check whether you have to change:

- pronouns
- present tense verbs (3rd person singular)
- place and time expressions
- tenses (backshift)

Also note that you have to:

- transform the question into an indirect question
- use the interrogative or *if / whether*

	Direct Speech	Reported Speech
statement	He said: "She lives in London."	He said that she lived in London
question with interrogative	He asked: "Where does she live?"	He asked where she lived.
question without interrogative	He asked: "Does she live in London?"	He asked whether she lived in London. He asked if she lived in London.

It is also important that you use an indirect question in reported speech, i.e. after the interrogative or *,whether' / ,if'* you continue the sentence as if it were a statement (subject-verb etc.). The auxiliary verb *,do'* is not used in indirect questions.

Example:

He asked: "Where does she live?" – He asked where she lived.

3. COMMANDS AND REQUESTS

A) COMMANDS

Type	Example
direct speech	"Carol, speak English."
reported speech	He told/ordered Carol to speak English.

For pronouns and place / time expressions see statements in reported speech. Tenses are not relevant for requests – simply use *,to' + infinite verb*.

Example:

She said, "Say hello to your mum." – She asked me to say hello to my mum.

For negative requests, use ,not to' + infinite verb.

Example:

He said, "Don't give up, Bob." – He advised Bob not to give up.

B) REQUESTS

Type	Example
direct speech	"Carol, speak English, please." "Carol, can you speak English, please?"
reported speech	He <u>asked</u> Carol to speak English.

EXERCISES

1) Reported Speech without backshift

Helen is in front of the class holding a presentation on London. As Helen is rather shy, she speaks with a very low voice. Your classmate Gareth does not understand her, so you have to repeat every sentence to him.

Complete the sentences in reported speech (no backshift). Note the change of pronouns and verbs.

Helen: I want to tell you something about my holiday in London.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: I went to London in July.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: My parents went with me.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: We spent three days in London.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: London is a multicultural place.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: I saw people of all colours.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: Me and my parents visited the Tower.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: One evening we went to see a musical.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: I love London.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

Helen: The people are so nice there.

Gareth: What does she say?

You: She says that

2) **Backshift**

Rewrite the sentences in reported speech. Change pronouns and time expressions where necessary.

She said, "I am reading."

→ She said that

They said, "We are busy."

→ They said that

He said, "I know a better restaurant."

→ He said that

She said, "I woke up early."

→ She said that

He said, "I will ring her."

→ He said that

They said, "We have just arrived."

→ They said that

He said, "I will clean the car."

→ He said that

She said, "I did not say that."

→ She said that

She said, "I don't know where my shoes are."

→ She said that

He said: "I won't tell anyone."

→ He said that

backshift and Place expressions

Imagine you want to repeat sentences that you heard two weeks ago in another place. Rewrite the sentences in reported speech. Change pronouns and expressions of time and place where necessary.

They said, "This is our book."

→ They said

She said, "I went to the cinema yesterday."

→ She said

He said, "I am writing a test tomorrow."

→ He said

You said, "I will do this for him."

→ You said

She said, "I am not hungry now."

→ She said

They said, "We have never been here before."

→ They said

They said, "We were in London last week."

→ They said

He said, "I will have finished this paper by tomorrow."

→ He said

He said, "They won't sleep."

→ He said

She said, "It is very quiet here."

→ She said

Questions - Exercise 1

Complete the sentences in reported speech. Note the change of pronouns and tenses.

"Where is my umbrella?" she asked.

→ She asked

"How are you?" Martin asked us.

→ Martin asked us

He asked, "Do I have to do it?"

→ He asked

"Where have you been?" the mother asked her daughter.

→ The mother asked her daughter

"Which dress do you like best?" she asked her boyfriend.

→ She asked her boyfriend

"What are they doing?" she asked.

→ She wanted to know

"Are you going to the cinema?" he asked me.

→ He wanted to know

The teacher asked, "Who speaks English?"

→ The teacher wanted to know

"How do you know that?" she asked me.

→ She asked me

"Has Caron talked to Kevin?" my friend asked me.

→ My friend asked me

Questions - Exercise 2

Complete the sentences in reported speech. Note the change of pronouns and tenses.

"What's the time?" he asked.

→ He wanted to know

"When will we meet again?" she asked me.

→ She asked me

"Are you crazy?" she asked him.

→ She asked him

"Where did they live?" he asked.

→ He wanted to know

"Will you be at the party?" he asked her.

→ He asked her

"Can you meet me at the station?" she asked me.

→ She asked me

"Who knows the answer?" the teacher asked.

→ The teacher wanted to know

"Why don't you help me?" she asked him.

→ She wanted to know

"Did you see that car?" he asked me.

→ He asked me

"Have you tidied up your room?" the mother asked the twins.

→ The mother asked the twins

Exercise 1 – Requests (positive)

Complete the sentences in reported speech. Note the change of pronouns in some sentences.

"Stop talking, Joe," the teacher said.

→ The teacher told Joe

"Be patient," she said to him.

→ She told him

"Go to your room," her father said to her.

→ Her father told her

"Hurry up," she said to us.

→ She told us

"Give me the key," he told her.

→ He asked her

"Play it again, Sam," she said.

→ She asked Sam

"Sit down, Caron" he said.

→ He asked Caron

"Fill in the form, Sir," the receptionist said.

→ The receptionist asked the guest

"Take off your shoes," she told us.

→ She told us

"Mind your own business," she told him.

→ She told him

"Don't touch it," she said to him.

→ She told him

"Don't do that again," he said to me.

→ He told me

"Don't talk to me like that," he said.

→ He told her

"Don't repair the computer yourself," she warned him.

→ She warned him

"Don't let him in," she said.

→ She told me

"Don't go out without me," he begged her.

→ He begged her

"Don't forget your bag," she told me.

→ She told me

"Don't eat in the lab," the chemistry teacher said.

→ The chemistry teacher told his students

"Don't give yourself up," he advised her.

→ He advised her

"Don't hurt yourselves, boys," she said.

→ She told the boys

Exercise 3 – Requests (mixed)

Complete the sentences in reported speech. Note the change of pronouns in some sentences.

She said, "Go upstairs."

→ She told me

"Close the door behind you," he told me.

→ He told me

"Don't be late," he advised us.

→ He advised us

"Stop staring at me," she said.

→ She told him

"Don't be angry with me," he said.

→ He asked her

"Leave me alone," she said.

→ She told me

"Don't drink and drive," she warned us.

→ She warned us

"John, stop smoking," she said.

→ She told John

"Don't worry about us," they said.

→ They told her

"Meet me at the cinema." he said.

→ He asked me