Reported Speech

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.

**Statements**

When transforming statements, check whether you have to change:

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

First person changes into 3rd persons (singurlar or plural)

* present tense verbs (3rd person singular)
* place and time expressions
* verbal tenses

| 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. |

**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*

| Type | | Example |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **with interrogative** | **direct speech** | “Why don’t you speak English?” |
| **reported speech** | He asked me why I didn’t speak English. |
| **without interrogative** | **direct speech** | “Do you speak English?” |
| **reported speech** | He asked me whether / if I spoke English. |

**Requests**

When transforming questions, check whether you have to change:

* pronouns
* place and time expressions

| Type | Example |
| --- | --- |
| **direct speech** | “Carol, speak English.“ |
| **reported speech** | He told Carol to speak English. |

| 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

Time Expressions:

| 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 |