

# Reported speech

## 04/05/2020

### Direct speech vs reported speech (indirect speech)

- **Direct speech**

**Direct speech** refers to the exact words said by a person. To show the direct speech we put the words said inside quotation marks.

*"I am making good progress in learning English," Peter said.*

the verb 'said' in the example above is called 'the reporting verb'.

- **Reported speech**

**Reported speech** or indirect speech is the exact meaning of what someone said but not the exact words.

*Peter said (that) he was making good progress in learning English.*

Notice in the reported sentence above that **quotations marks are not used**. In addition, the word *that* can be omitted in everyday speech, especially after the verb *said*. We can say:

*Peter said he was making progress in learning English.*

- **The most common reporting verbs**

The verbs *say*, *tell* and *ask* the most commonly used verbs in both direct and reported speech. The verbs *say* and *tell* are used to report statements, whereas *ask* is used to report questions and commands. The reporting verb 'say' can be used with or without a personal object.

1. "I want to learn foreign languages," she said.
2. "I want to learn foreign languages," she said to me.
3. He asked, "Are you still working on that project?" (question).
4. "Stop eating much fatty food," he said to me (command) ⇒ He asked me to stop eating fatty food.

As you can see in sentence 2 above, '*said*' is used with a personal object (me) that is why it is followed by 'to'. Now, let's turn sentence 1 above into reported speech (indirect speech). Because the reporting verb, in direct speech, is in the past tense, in reported speech, it should go one step backwards in time.

The reported sentence (1) would look like this:

She said that she wanted to learn foreign languages.

So the present simple (want) becomes past simple (wanted). Also, the pronoun 'I' becomes she.

*Tip: The tense in the reported part moves one step backwards in time (but you can't go further back than the past perfect).*

### Examples of direct and reported speech with different tenses

- He said, "The food is really delicious."  
He said that the food was really delicious.
- "I have stopped lying," he said to his father.  
He told his father (that) he had stopped lying.
- "We have been studying English for hours," she said.

She said (that) they had been studying English for hours.

## Modals in reported speech

Modal verbs also change in reported speech.

- Will ⇒ would
- Would ⇒ would
- Shall ⇒ should / would
- Can ⇒ could / would be able to
- Could ⇒ could
- May ⇒ might
- Might ⇒ might
- Must ⇒ must / had to
- Have to ⇒ had to
- Needn't ⇒ didn't need to / didn't have to
- Had better ⇒ had better

## Examples of direct and reported speech with modals

a. "I *can* sing for long hours," Tom said.  
→ Tom said (that) he *could* sing for long hours. (ability)

b. "I *can* finish all my tasks tomorrow," she said to her mother.  
→ She told her mother (that) she *would be able to* finish all her tasks the next day. (ability)

**Tips:** *Can (ability in present)* ⇒ *could*  
*Can (ability in the future)* ⇒ *would be able to*

a. "You *must* respect our school rules," she said.  
→ She said I *we must / had to* respect their school rules. (obligation/necessity)

b. "You *must* be a hard-working learner," she said.  
→ She said that I *must* be a hard-working learner. (deduction/conclusion)

**Tips:** *When must expresses obligation, keep it (must) or change it to had to in reported speech.*  
*If must expresses deduction or conclusion, it does not change in reported speech.*

a. "We have plenty of food at home. You *needn't* buy any now," she said to her husband. (present)

→ She told her husband (that) they had plenty of food at home and that he *didn't need to / didn't have to* buy any food then.

b. "You *needn't* come next Monday," he said.  
He said (that) I/we *wouldn't have to* come the following Monday.

**Tips:** *Needn't (present)* ⇒ ⇒ *didn't need to / didn't have to*  
*Needn't (future)* ⇒ ⇒ *wouldn't have to*

## Adverbials of time and place in reported speech

Today → that day  
Now → then / at that time / at that moment  
Tonight → that night  
Last night → the previous night  
Yesterday → the day before  
Last week / year ... → the following week/ year ...

Two days...ago → two days... before (earlier)  
Tomorrow → the next day / the following day  
The day after tomorrow → in two days' time.  
Next week ... → the following week  
Here → there  
This → that

These → those