

Direct and Indirect Speech

There are many occasions in which we need to describe an event or action that happened, and very often that includes repeating what someone said. To describe what people said there are two different types of speech – direct speech and indirect speech (or reported speech).

Direct Speech

When we want to describe what someone said, one option is to use direct speech. We use direct speech when we simply repeat what someone says. It is mostly used in the written language such as books or in a newspaper article, and the phrase is put between speech marks:

- *Paul came in and said, "I'm really hungry."*
- *The local MP said, "We plan to make this city a safer place for everyone."*

As you can see, with direct speech it is common to use the verb 'to say' ('said' in the past). But you can also find other verbs used to indicate direct speech such as 'ask', 'reply', and 'shout'. For example:

- *When Mrs. Diaz opened the door, I asked, "Have you seen Lee?"*
- *She replied, "No, I haven't seen him since lunchtime."*

Indirect Speech

When we want to report what someone said without necessarily using exactly the same words, we can use indirect speech (also called reported speech). For example:

- Direct speech: *"We're quite cold in here."*
- Indirect speech: *They say (that) they're cold.*

When we report what someone says in the present simple, as in the above sentence, we normally don't change the tense, we simply change the subject. However, when we report things in the past, we usually change the tense by moving it one step back. For example, in the following sentence the present simple becomes the past simple in indirect speech:

- Direct speech: *Jack said, "I have a new car."*
- Indirect speech: *Jack said (that) he had a new car.*

All the other tenses follow a similar change in indirect speech. Here is an example for all the main tenses:

Direct speech	Indirect speech
<i>He said. "I live in the city center."</i>	<i>He said he lived in the city center.</i>
<i>He said. "I'm going out."</i>	<i>He said he was going out.</i>
<i>He said. "I've finished."</i>	<i>He said he had finished.</i>
<i>He said. "I've been studying a lot."</i>	<i>He said he had been studying a lot.</i>
<i>He said. "I arrived before you."</i>	<i>He said he had arrived before you.</i>
<i>He said. "I had already left."</i>	<i>He said he had already left.</i>

<i>He said, "I'll be there at 2pm."</i>	<i>He said he would be there at 2pm.</i>
<i>He said, "I'm going to call Alan."</i>	<i>He said he was going to call Alan.</i>

The same rule of moving the tenses one step back also applies to modal verbs. For example:

Direct speech	Indirect speech
<i>She said, "I can swim."</i>	<i>She said she could swim.</i>
<i>She said, "I must go."</i>	<i>She said she had to go.</i>
<i>She said, "I may drive there."</i>	<i>She said she might drive there.</i>
<i>She said, "Shall we start?"</i>	<i>She asked if we should start.</i>
<i>She said, "I'll call you."</i>	<i>She said she would call me.</i>

Using 'Say' or 'Tell'

As an alternative to using 'say' we can also use 'tell' ('told' in the past) in reported speech, but in this case you need to add the object pronoun. For example:

- *He **told me** he was going to call Alan.*
- *They **told her** they would arrive a little late.*

Changing Time Expressions

Sometimes it's necessary to change the time expressions when you report speech, especially when you are speaking about the past and the time reference no longer applies. For example:

- Direct speech: *"I'm seeing my brother **tomorrow**."*
- Indirect speech: *She said she was seeing her brother **the following day**.*
- Direct speech: *"I had a headache **yesterday**."*
- Indirect speech: *You said you'd had a headache **the day before yesterday**.*
- Direct speech: *"It's been raining since **this afternoon**."*
- Indirect speech: *He said it'd been raining since **that afternoon**.*
- Direct speech: *"I haven't seen them since **last week**."*
- Indirect speech: *She said she hadn't seen them since **the previous week**.*

Reporting Questions

When you report a question you need to change the interrogative form into an affirmative sentence, putting the verb tense one step back, as with normal reported speech.

There are two types of questions that we can report – questions that have a yes/no response, and questions that begin with a question word like 'what', 'where', 'who' etc. When we report a yes/no question, we use 'if'. For example:

- Direct speech: *"Do they live here?"*
- Indirect speech: You asked me **if they lived** here.

As you can see, in the reported version of the question, ‘do’ is eliminated because it is no longer a question, and the verb ‘live’ becomes ‘lived’.

For questions starting with question words like ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘who’, etc., we report the question using the question word but change the interrogative form to the affirmative form. For example:

- Direct speech: “*Where do they live?*”
- Indirect speech: *You asked me **where they lived.***

- Direct speech: “*When are you leaving?*”
- Indirect speech: He asked us **when we were leaving.**

- Direct speech: “*How will they get here?*”
- Indirect speech: *She asked me **how they would get here.***

