

Pass It On! The Art of Reported Speech

Direct → Indirect speech, the way news reporters do it

Your friend says something in the canteen, and by evening the whole class knows. Every time you pass on someone's words, you are using **reported (indirect) speech**. Journalists do this hundreds of times a day!

Direct speech = the exact words, inside inverted commas.
Meera said, "I am tired."

Reported speech = the meaning, in our own sentence, without inverted commas.
Meera said that she was tired.

Three things change: ① **tense (backshift)**, ② **pronouns**, ③ **time and place words**. Let's take them one by one.

1 Tense: walk down the staircase

Reporting verb in the PAST? Step one stair back in time.

present simple: "I play"

→ past simple: he played

→ past perfect: had played

"I am playing" → was playing

"I have played" → had played

"I played" → had played

Modals: will → would · can → could · may → might · shall → should
must → had to (or must) · could, would, should, might → no change

No backshift when ① the reporting verb is in the present (**says / tells**): She **says** she is tired. ② it is a **universal truth**: Our teacher **said** that the earth revolves around the sun.

Spot all three changes in one sentence:

Arjun said, "I **will meet** you **here tomorrow**."

→ Arjun said that **he would meet** me **there the next day**.

pronoun · **tense** · **place and time**

2 Pronouns: the S-O-N rule

Person in quotes	Changes according to...	Example
1st (I, me, my, we)	Subject of the reporting verb	Ravi said, "I lost my pen." → Ravi said that he had lost his pen.
2nd (you, your)	Object of the reporting verb	He said to me, "You are late." → He told me that I was late.
3rd (he, she, they)	No change	She said, "He is kind." → She said that he was kind.

3 Time and place words travel too

Direct	Reported	Direct	Reported
now	then	today / tonight	that day / that night
tomorrow	the next day	yesterday	the previous day
next week	the following week	last week	the previous week
ago	before	here / this / these	there / that / those

Why? The words "today" and "here" only make sense to the person who first spoke them. By the time you report them, it may be another day and another place, so English shifts them to "that day" and "there".

4 Four kinds of sentences, four reporting verbs

Kind	Reporting verb + link	Example
Statement	said / told + that	"I will help you," said Arjun. → Arjun said that he would help me.
Yes/No question	asked + if / whether	"Are you coming?" she asked. → She asked if I was coming.
Wh- question	asked + wh-word	"Where do you live?" he asked. → He asked where I lived.
Command / request	ordered / requested / advised + to / not to	"Please sit down," said the doctor. → The doctor requested me to sit down.
Exclamation	exclaimed with joy / sorrow + that	"What a beautiful view!" she said. → She exclaimed with delight that it was a beautiful view.

Question → statement order! In reported questions, the subject comes before the verb and there is no question mark.

~~He asked where did I live?~~ → **He asked where I lived.**

5 Exam Corner: reporting a dialogue

Boards often give a short dialogue and ask you to complete a report. Watch how the reporting verb changes with the purpose:

Teacher: Why haven't you submitted your project?

Kabir: I was unwell last week, Ma'am.

Teacher: Submit it by tomorrow.

The teacher asked Kabir why he had not submitted his project. Kabir replied respectfully that he had been unwell the previous week. The teacher then instructed him to submit it by the next day.

Reporting verbs that make you sound smart

replied · explained · complained · admitted ·
insisted · suggested · warned · promised ·
reminded · apologised · enquired

"Said" is fine, but a precise verb shows **tone**: ~~He complained~~ that the food was cold tells us much more than he **said**!

6 Your turn: pass it on!

1. Riya said, "I am reading a novel now."
2. The coach said to us, "Don't lose hope."
3. "Have you finished your lunch?" Mother asked me.
4. He said, "I visited Jaipur last month."
5. Grandpa said, "Honesty is the best policy."

Answers: 1. Riya said that she was reading a novel then. · 2. The coach advised us not to lose hope. · 3. Mother asked me if I had finished my lunch. · 4. He said that he had visited Jaipur the previous month. · 5. Grandpa said that honesty is the best policy.

Report back soon!