

# Direct & Indirect Narration

## Reported statements

In reported speech (also known as indirect speech), the tense used in the speaker's original words is usually (but not always) moved back a tense when the reporting verb (*said, told, etc.*) is in the past. The tense does not change if the reporting verb is in the present, present perfect or future.

In the reported speech First Person (I/We) changes into 3<sup>rd</sup> Person (He, she, they, it, one etc).

Second Person (You) is either changed into 3<sup>rd</sup> Person or 1<sup>st</sup> Person.

When we use reported speech, we are usually talking about the past. So verbs usually change to the past in reported speech. For example:

am/is → was      have/has → had      can → could  
are → were      will → would      do/want/know → did/wanted/knew, etc.

## When the tense doesn't change

The past simple and continuous often remain unchanged in reported speech, in both written and spoken English, if this can be done without causing any confusion about the time of the actions.

It is also possible for other tenses to remain unchanged in reported speech in spoken English.

### *Past continuous*

- The past continuous usually remains unchanged in reported speech:  
*'When they arrived, I was still cooking the dinner.'*  
*He said that when they arrived, he was still cooking the dinner.*

### *Past simple*

- When the past simple is used in a time clause, it does not generally change. When there is a time clause, the verb in the main clause can remain in the past simple or change to the past perfect:  
*'When I got there the place was almost empty.'*  
*She said that when she got there, the place was/had been almost empty.*

The simple past (I did) can usually stay the same in reported speech, or you can change it to the past perfect (I had done): did → did or had done

*direct* Tom said "I woke up feeling sick and so I stayed in bed."

*reported* Tom said (that) he woke (or had woken) up feeling sick and so he stayed (or had stayed) in bed.

## Verbs used in reporting

Many different verbs are used in reporting. We do not usually report every word that was said or written and these different verbs can help to summarize the original words:

*'Would you like to come and stay for the weekend?'*  
→ *He invited us to stay for the weekend.*

*'No, no, I don't want your money. I'm definitely going to pay for the meal and that's that.'*

→ *She insisted on paying for the meal.*

## Summarizing when reporting

When we are reporting, we do not repeat everything that was said or written. As we report, we summarize.

A range of different verbs are used and these help to summarize. (See page 134.) In addition, we often use adjectives to describe how someone responded, instead of reporting their words:

*'Oh, that's fantastic. I'm just so pleased. This is the best news we've had in ages.'*  
→ *She was delighted when we told her the news.*

## Written reporting

In written reports, we tend to use reported speech consistently rather than switching from one style of reporting to another. If we are reporting what one person said, it is not necessary to keep repeating *She/He/It said ...*. However, we continue to use the reported speech tenses if it is understood that we are still reporting. For example:

The meeting was concluded by the Chair of the Governors, who said that although it had been a difficult year, the staff of the school had managed very well. The financial cutbacks had hit hard and it was to be hoped that there would be no further cutbacks in the coming year. Library stocks were severely depleted and he suggested that there should be a series of fundraising activities to help raise money for books. He thanked all the staff for their hard work and hoped that the coming year would be successful. The Headteacher then thanked the Chair of the Governors for his contribution to the school and the meeting was closed at 9.00 p.m.