

NITTY-GRITTY

Direct and indirect speech

The words that someone says are called **direct speech**. These words are put in single quotation marks ‘ ’ or double quotation marks “ ”.

Jane said, ‘I have lost my key’.

“Have you washed your hands?” asked Dad.

You can report what someone says without using their actual words. This is called **indirect speech** (or **reported speech**). There are some differences between the two.

You do not use **quotation marks** in indirect speech.

Direct Speech

Mary said, “I feel ill.”

Indirect Speech

Mary said that she felt ill.

You often change the **tense** of the verb.

Direct Speech

Mary said, ‘I feel ill.’

Indirect Speech

Mary said that she **felt** ill.

You often change the **pronouns** and **determiners**.

Direct Speech

Mary said, “I feel ill.”

Indirect Speech

Mary said that **she** felt ill.

We do not change the tense while reporting habits and universal truths.

Example: Direct speech: “Saturn has rings,” said the teacher.

Indirect speech: The teacher said that Saturn has rings.

If the main verb or reporting verb is in the present tense then the tenses do not change in indirect speech.

Example: Direct speech: Ravi says, “I am happy.”

Indirect speech: Ravi says that he is happy.

Notice how this changes to that, and these to those.

Reported speech		
	Would → Will	
Present	Past	Past
Continuous/simple / perfect	Continuous/simple / perfect	Continuous/simple
Most Common Transformations		
	Direct speech	Reported speech
After: He said... she told them... I said... We told her ...	is / am	was
	are	were
	have	had
	do	did
	was / were will	had been would

You may often be required to report what you have heard somewhere. There are two ways of doing that. You can reproduce the actual words of the speaker, or you can give the gist of their speech in your own words:

The inspector said. “I am glad to be with you today.”

The inspector said that he was glad to be with us that day.

When the exact words used by a speaker are reproduced, it is called **direct speech**. When the meaning of a speech is conveyed in the reporter’s words it is called **indirect speech**. When the exact words of the speaker are reproduced, the entire speech is put within inverted commas. And this speech is called **reported speech**. The verb *said* which introduces the reported speech is called **reporting verb**. Usually, a comma or a colon separates the reported speech from the reported verb:

The inspector said, “I am glad to be with you today.”

(Reporting verb)

(Reported speech)

Find the differences you see between the sentences written in direct and indirect speech.

“I study,” she said.	She said that she studied.
“I went for a walk” said Mr. Henry.	Mr Henry said that he had gone for a walk.
“I have read the story,” she said.	She said that she had read the story.
“We are playing football,” he said to the coach.	He told the coach that they were playing football.
“This is your book,” he said to me.	He told me that that was my book.
“Will he go to my house?” said Mary to her mother.	Mary asked her mother if he would go to her house.

Change of tense

We can see that when we change sentences from direct to indirect speech, tense shift back.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
The present tense Example: I am late	The past tense. Example: I was late.
The present continuous tense Example: I am working.	The past perfect tense. Example: I was working.
The present perfect tense. Example: I have rested.	The past perfect tense. Example: I had rested.
The past tense. Example: I drank.	The past perfect tense. Example: I had drunk.
The past continuous tense. Example: I was reading.	The past perfect continuous. Example: I had been reading.
The past perfect tense. Example: I had read.	The past perfect tense (no change). Example: I had read.
Future time. Example: I will go.	Would. Example: I would go.

Note:

- We do not change the tense while reporting habits and universal truths.
Example: Direct speech: "Saturn has rings," said the teacher.
Indirect speech: The teacher said that Saturn has rings.
- If the main verb or reporting verb is in the present tense then the tenses do not change in indirect speech.
Example: Direct speech: Ravi says, "I am happy."
Indirect speech: Ravi says that he is happy.
- Notice how this changes to that, and these to those.

Change these sentences into indirect speech.

- "The books have just arrived," said the librarian.
- "The students went on a picnic," said Harbhajan.
- "Peter will go to the post-office," said Grandfather.
- "It is healthy to wake up early," said the teacher to her students.

Changes in pronouns: When changing direct into indirect speech, pronouns and possessive adjectives change in the following ways.

- First person pronouns in the direct speech change according to the subject of the reporting verb in the indirect speech.
- Second person pronouns in the direct speech change according to the subject of the reporting verb in the indirect speech.
- Third person pronouns in the direct speech do not change in the indirect speech.

Note:

While changing the pronouns in the manner stated above, it should be noted that the new (changed) pronoun will have the same case and number as the original one.

Direct speech	Indirect speech
First person pronouns	
He said, "I am late."	He said that he was late.
I said, "We are late."	I said that I was late.
They said, "We are late."	They said that they were late.
Second person pronouns	
He said to me, "You are late."	He told me that I was late.
She said to him, "You are late."	She told him that he was late.
Third person pronouns	
He said, "She is late."	He said that she was late.
She said, "They are late."	She said that they were late.

Look at the tables below to see how the personal pronouns used as subject or objects change when direct speech changes to indirect speech.

	Subject pronoun in direct speech	Subject pronoun in indirect speech
First person	I We	He, she, you You, They
Second person	Singular you plural you	I, she, he We, they
Third person	He, she, it they	He, she, it they

	Subject pronoun in direct speech	Subject pronoun in indirect speech
First person	Me Us	Him, her, you, it You, them
Second person	Singular you plural you	Me, her, him, it us, them
Third person	Him, her, it them	Him, her, it them

No change in indirect speech

Rule	Direct speech	Indirect speech
Could / would / should / might / ought to does not change.	Harry said, "I couldn't meet my friend Ravi." Sheela said, "My sisters should attend the party."	Harry said that he couldn't meet his friend Ravi. Sheela said that her sisters should attend the party.
Must not does not change.	"You must not repeat the mistake," said Harry's teacher.	Harry's teacher said that he must not repeat the mistake.

Change in expressions of time from direct to indirect speech

If the direct speech contains an expression of time, you must change it to fit in which the time of reporting

Changes in expressions of time	
this (evening)	that (evening)
today	That day
Yesterday	The day before / the previous day
These (days)	Those (days)
Now	Then
(a week) ago	(a week) before
Last weekend	The weekend before last / the previous weekend
Next (week)	The following (week)
Tomorrow	The next day / the following day

Note:

While reporting someone's words, the reporting verb should express the feelings of the speaker. Instead of said or asked, verbs such as advised, added, admitted, assured, denied, suggested, explained, observed, objected, promised, protested, reminded, remarked, replied, ordered, complained. Demanded, answered can be used.

In addition, if you report something someone said in a different place from where you heard it, you must change the place here to the place there.

Example:

At work: "How long have you worked here?"

At home: She asked me how long I'd worked there.