

English VI

Rules for Indirect (Reported) Speech

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Lesson 5

Direct and Indirect (Reported) Speech

If we want to report what other people said, thought or felt, we can use direct or indirect (reported) speech.

Direct Speech:

Helen: "I want a cookie."

Indirect Speech:

Helen said that she wanted a cookie.

Direct and Indirect (Reported) Speech

The indirect (reported) speech is typically introduced by verbs such as:

say, tell, admit, complain, explain, remind, reply, think, hope, offer, refuse, etc.

These *introducing* verbs are called reporting verbs.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Let's define some general terms:

Subject noun or pronoun	Reporting verb	Conjunction	Reported clause
Helen	said (say)	that	she wanted (want) a cookie

Direct and Indirect Speech

The first rule is to choose a reporting verb and its tense:

Change of reporting verb tense often happens because what the person said and the action (reported clause) is now in the past.

Helen: “I feel very lucky.”

She *said* she *felt* very lucky.

Direct and Indirect Speech

However, if the event is current (still true), repeated, or will happen in the future, the reporting verb may be in the present tense.

Helen: “Chocolate ice cream is delicious.”

She *says* chocolate ice cream is delicious.

Peter: “I am so hungry!”

Peter *says* he is hungry. So we will go to lunch.

Direct and Indirect Speech

The second rule is to change the perspective, or point of view of the speaker in the reporting clause:

That means:

Mary: “*I* ate the pie.” becomes:

Mary (She) said that *she* ate the pie.

The team: “*We* are coming tomorrow.” becomes:

The team said *they* are coming *tomorrow*.

Direct and Indirect Speech

The third rule is deciding to include a conjunction:

You can say, "Peter said he was at home." or "Peter said *that* he was at home." *That* is a conjunction linking the two parts of the sentence. It is optional.

For reporting questions, the conjunction "*if/whether*" is often required.

He asked (me) *if* I knew how to play tennis.

Direct and Indirect Speech

The fourth rule is to “backshift” the tense:

This is the trickiest part of reported speech. When the reporting verb is in the past tense, the verb in the reported clause must be in the past tense as well. Matching the *verb aspect*, indicates whether the action was completed.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Backshift:

Peter: "I *am buying* my ticket at the station."

(present continuous)

Peter said he *was buying* his ticket at the station.

(past continuous)

Ashley: "I *have fixed* my bicycle tire."

(present perfect)

Ashley said she *had fixed* her bicycle tire.

(past perfect)

Direct and Indirect Speech

A backshift is not always necessary:

Peter: “*I am buying my* ticket at the station.”
(present continuous)

Peter *said* he *was buying his* ticket at the station.
(Backshift)

Peter *says* he *is buying* his ticket at the station.
(No backshift)

Direct and Indirect Speech

When we report questions, we have to pay attention to the auxiliary verb. These are verbs such as: *do*, *be*, and *have*. Yes or no questions begin with *if* or *whether* in the reported clause.

Gary: "Do you like pizza?"

Gary *asked* me *if I liked* pizza.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Informational questions that start with a question word (interrogative):

Nancy: "Where *are you going*?"

To report on these, simply change the pronoun and word order.

Nancy asked me where *I was going*.

Direct and Indirect Speech

A similar word order switch appears with the verb "*be*" in questions.

Gary: "When is the party?"

Gary *asked* me when *the party was*.

The question word "*when*" remains. "*Be*" moves from a position before the noun to after the noun.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Pay attention to whether the speech you are reporting uses a modal verb. *Will*, *can*, and *shall* change to *would*, *could*, and *should* when reported. *Will* is used to make statements about the future in English. When reporting this kind of statement, *will* becomes *would*.

Kelly: "I will pick up the sandwiches."

Kelly said *she would* pick up the sandwiches.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Modal verbs may appear in questions, as well:

Cat: "Can you answer the phone while I'm out?"

Cat *asked* (me) *if I could* answer the phone while *she was* out.

If the modal verb is already in its past tense, it does not change when reported.

George: "*I could not* do that."

George said *he could not* do that.

Direct and Indirect Speech

Pay attention to change in time phrases (adverbs of time) to reflect overall changes in perspective:

Cat: "I will help you tomorrow."

Cat *said* she *would help* me the next day.

George: "I moved a year ago."

George said he *had moved* a year before.