Indirect speech

1. Statements

If we want to say what other people said, thought or felt, we can use direct or indirect speech.

- Direct speech: *"I like it," he said. "Irene is late," he thought. "I will pass the exam," she hoped.*
- Indirect speech: *He said he liked it. He thought that Irene was late. She hoped she would pass the exam.*

Indirect speech is typically introduced by "reporting verbs" such as *say, tell, admit, complain, explain, remind, reply, think, hope, offer, refuse* etc. in the **past tense**.

> *He **said** (that) he didn't want it.*
> *She **explained** that she had been at the seaside.*

If these reporting verbs are in the **past** tense, we **change** the following in the rest of the statement:

- A) verb tenses and verb forms
- B) pronouns
- C) the adverbs of time and place.

A) Verb tenses

We **change** the tenses in the following way:

- **Present → past**

  "I don't understand you," she told me. → She told me she didn't understand me.
  "We are doing exercises," he explained. → He explained that they were doing exercises.

- **Present perfect → past perfect**

  "I have broken the window," he admitted. → He admitted that he had broken the window.
  "I have been waiting since the morning," he complained. → He complained that he had been waiting since the morning.

- **Past → past perfect**

  "She went to Rome," I thought. → I thought that she had gone to Rome.
  "He was thinking of buying a new car," she said. → She said he had been thinking of buying a new car.

- **Will → would**

  Will changes into the conditional form "would" (the grammatical past of *will*) :
  I will come on Sunday," he reminded me. → He reminded me that he would come on Sunday.

- **May → might, Can → could**

  May changes into "might" (the grammatical past of *may*) :
  "I may write to him," she said. → She said she might write to him.

  Can changes into *"could"* (the grammatical past of *can*) :
  "George can help you," he said. → He said that George could help me.

The **direct speech/indirect speech** verb forms remain the **same** in the following cases.

- If the reporting verb is in the present tense ("he says", "I think" etc.).

  *Bill: "I **am enjoying** my holiday." → Bill **says** he **is enjoying** his holiday.*
  *Sandy: "I **will never go** to work." → Sandy **thinks** she **will never go** to work.*

- When we report something that is **still true**:

  *Dan: "Asia **is** the largest continent." → Dan said Asia **is** the largest continent.*
  *Emma: "People in Somalia **are starving**." → Emma said people in Somalia **are starving**.*
  *Michael: "I **am** thirsty." → Michael said he **is** thirsty (Can you give him a drink, please?).*

- With modal verbs *would, might, could, should, ought to, used to* :

  *George: "I **would** try it." → George said he **would** try it.*
  *Mimi: "I **might** come." → Mimi said she **might** come.*
  *Steve: "I **could** fail." → Steve said he **could** fail.*
  *Linda: "He **should/ought to** stay in bed." → Linda said he **should/ought to** stay in bed.*
  *Mel: "I **used to** have a car." → Mel said he **used to** have a car.*

- After *wish, would rather, had better, it is time* :

  *Margo: "I wish they **were** in Greece." → Margo said she wished they **were** in Greece.*
  *Matt: "I would rather **fly**." → Matt said he would rather **fly**.*
  *Betty: "They had better **go**." → Betty said they had better **go**.*
  *Paul: "It is time I **got up**." → Paul said it was time he **got up**.*

- In **if-sentences:**

  Martha: "If I tidied my room, my dad would be happy." → Martha said that if she tidied her room, her dad would be happy.

- In **time-sentences:**

  *Joe: "When I **was staying** in Madrid I **met** my best friend." → He said that when he **was staying** in Madrid he **met** his best friend.*

- We do not change the past tense in **spoken English** if it is clear from the situation **when** the action happened:

  "She **did** it **on Sunday**," I said. → I said she **did** it **on Sunday**.

- We do not usually change the **modal verbs** *must* and *needn't*. But *must* can become *had to* or *would have to* and *needn't* can become *didn't have to* or *wouldn't have to* if we want to talk about an **obligation:**

  *"I must wash up." → He said he **must** wash up / he had to wash up.*
  *"I needn't be at school today." → He said he **needn't be** / didn't have to be at school that day.*

Would/wouldn't have to are used to talk about **future obligations**:

"We must do it in June." → He said they would have to do it in June.

If the modal verb *must* does **not** express obligation, we do not change it.

"You must be tired after such a trip." (certainty) → He said we must be tired after such a trip.

B) Pronouns

We have to change the **pronouns** to keep the same meaning of a sentence:

"We are not the best players," he said. → He said they were not the best players.
"They called us," he said. → He said they had called them.
"I don't like your jeans," she said. → She said she didn't like my jeans.
"I can lend you my car," he said. → He said he could lend me his car.

- Sometimes we use a **noun** instead of a pronoun, for clarity:

"He stole the money," Kevin said. → Kevin said that the man had stolen the money. ("Kevin said he had stolen the money" can mean Kevin himself stole the money)

- *This/these* are usually replaced by *that/those* or *the* :

"They will finish it this year," he said. → He said they would finish it that year.
"I brought you this book," she said. → She said she had brought me the book.
"We want these flowers," they said. → They said they wanted those flowers.

C) Time and place

We usually have to modify **time expressions** in indirect speech. For example, *"yesterday"* in direct speech becomes *"the day before"* in indirect speech (like *hier* and *la veille* in French).

"Greg came yesterday," said Mary. → Mary said that Greg had come the day before.

- The **time expressions** change as follows:

Direct speech	Indirect speech
today	*that day*
tomorrow	*the next day/the following day*
the day after tomorrow	*in two days' time*
yesterday	*the day before*
the day before yesterday	*two days before*
next week/month	*the following week/month*
last week/month	*the previous week/month*
a year ago	*a year before/the previous year*

Bill: "She will leave tomorrow." → Bill said she would leave the next day.
Sam: "She arrived last week." → Sam said she had arrived the previous week.
Julie: "He moved a year ago." → Julie said he had moved a year before.

- If something is said and reported **at the same time**, the time expressions can remain the same.

  *"I will go on holiday **tomorrow**," he told me today. → He told me today he would go on holiday **tomorrow**.*

  *"We painted the hall **last weekend**," she told me this week. → She told me this week they had painted the hall **last weekend**.*

- *Here* usually becomes *there*.
  "I'll be here at 10 o'clock," he said. → He said he would be there at 10 o'clock.

2. Questions

Questions become statements, so there is **no subject/verb inversion**.

  "Who are you?" she asked me. → She asked me who I was (NOT "She asked me who was I").

An appropriate reporting verb is used (NOT *say*): *ask, want to know, wonder...*

  "Where have you been?" he said. → He asked me where I had been.

  "What time did it start?" he said. → He wanted to know what time it had started.

  "Why won't he do it?" she said. → She wondered why he wouldn't do it.

In **yes/no questions** we use *if* or *whether* when expressing the question in indirect speech. *If* and *whether* are interchangeable in this type of yes/no sentence.

  "Will you come?" she asked me. → She asked me if/whether I would come.

  "Did he marry Sue?" she said. → She wondered if/whether he married Sue.

3. Suggestions, commands, requests and advice

Suggestions or **offers** are often made in the 1st person with *Shall I...? , Shall we...?*.   In indirect speech this changes into "should" (the grammatical past of *shall*) :

  "Shall I open the window?" he asked. → He asked if he should open the window.

Suggestions made in the 1st person plural with *Let's* are put into indirect speech as follows:

  "Let's go for a pizza," he said. → He suggested going for a pizza

  OR *→ He suggested they/we went for a pizza.*

  OR *→ He suggested they/we should go for a pizza.*

Commands, requests and advice mostly have the same form in English: **verb + object + infinitive** (*advise, ask, beg, forbid, order, persuade, recommend, tell, urge, warn* etc.).

Unlike direct speech, the person addressed must be mentioned in indirect speech.

  "Get up!" he said. → He told me to get up.

  "Put on your coat," I said. → I advised him to put on his coat.

Negative commands, requests and advice are made by **verb + object + not + infinitive**.

> *"Don't hesitate," he said. → He urged me not to hesitate.*
> *"Don't smoke," the doctor warned my father. → The doctor warned my father not to smoke.*

Tell can introduce statements, commands, requests or advice. The form is different, however.

- **Statements** use the structure *tell + object + that...* **:**

  "I'm leaving," he told me. → He told me that he was leaving.

- **Commands**, **requests** or **advice** use the structure *tell + object + infinitive* **:**

  "Leave the room," he told John. → He told John to leave the room.

Ask is used in reported questions, commands, requests or advice in different forms.

- **Questions** use the structure *ask someone if...* **:**

  "Will you make coffee?" he said. → He asked me if I would make coffee.

- **Commands**, **requests** or **advice** use the structure *ask someone to...* **:**

  "Make coffee, please," he said. → He asked me to make coffee.
  "Don't park in my place," said Greg. → Greg asked me not to park in his place.