

Direct and indirect speech

Get cracking



Srikant met Rohit for the first time near a construction site. They were both on a walk. There was a lot of noise and they couldn't hear each other clearly. They had to scream in order to be heard. Here is their conversation.

Srikant said, "Good morning. Are you new here?"

Rohit said, "No, I am a lawyer."

"Oh! I thought you are a lawyer," said Srikant.

Rohit said, "No, I am new here."

Now complete these sentences to rewrite their conversation in the reported speech.

Srikant greeted Rohit and asked him if _____.

Rohit replied that _____.

Srikant told Rohit that he thought Rohit _____.

Rohit replied that _____.



Read the two sentences given below.

Gini said, "I'm tired."

Gini said that she was tired.

In the first sentence we have repeated Gini's actual words. This is called **direct speech**. Note the inverted commas. In the second sentence we have not repeated Gini's words: we have only given the meaning of what he said. This is called the **reported (or indirect) speech**. You may have noticed the following changes in the reported statement.

The reported words are introduced by **that**. (The *that* can be omitted.)

The inverted commas are removed.

The verb **am** has become **was**.

The pronoun **I** has become **he**.

Here are detailed notes on the changes that should be made when we turn direct speech into reported speech.

When the reporting verb (e.g. the verb **said** in the example above) is in the past tense, the tenses of the verb in direct speech usually change as follows:

- the simple present changes to the simple past.

Direct : He said, "Anne **looks** sad."

Reported : He said Anne **looked** sad.

- the present continuous changes to the past continuous.

Direct : He said, "I'm **writing** to my uncle."

Reported : He said that he **was writing** to his uncle.

- the present perfect changes to the past perfect.

Direct : She said, "I've **finished** the work."

Reported : She said she **had finished** the work.

- the simple past changes to the past perfect or stays the same.

Direct : "They **went** for a picnic," Ramesh said to me.

Reported : Ramesh told me they **had gone** (or went) for a picnic.

- the **will/can/may** forms change to the **would/could/might** forms.

Direct : The boy said, "My father **will be** back soon."

Reported : The boy said his father **would be** back soon.

Direct : "He **may pass** the exam." Isha said to us.

Reported : Isha told us he **might pass** the exam.

- the past continuous and the past perfect stay the same.

When the reporting verb is in the present tense, the tenses do not change.

Direct : He says, "I'm feeling ill."

Reported : He says he is feeling ill.

Direct : She has just said, "I've finished the work."

Reported : She has just said she has finished the work.

The pronouns change according to the context or situation.

Study these examples:

- Direct : "I'll call you at five," he said to me.
Reported : He told me he would call me at five.
Direct : "I'll call you at five," she said to him.
Reported : She told him she would call him at five.
Direct : "I'll call you at five," I said to her.
Reported : I told her I would call her at five.

Words or phrases expressing nearness in time generally change to those expressing distance.
Study the table below.

Direct speech	Reported speech
now/today/tonight	then/at that time/that day/that night
last (week, month)	the previous (week, month, etc.)/the (week, month) before
next (month, year)	the next (month, year, etc.)/the (month, year) after
yesterday	the previous day/the day before
tomorrow	the next day/the following day/the day after

But if the speech is made and reported during the same period, these changes are not necessary. Read the sentences below.

- Direct : On last Friday he said, "My father will come today."
Reported : On last Friday he said his father would come that day.
Direct : This afternoon he said, "My father will come today."
Reported : This afternoon he said his father would come today.

Similarly, *here* changes to *there* unless the speech is reported at the same place; *this* and *these* change to *that* and *those* unless the thing or things pointed out are near at hand at the time of reporting the speech.

We use **say** when we do not mention the person spoken to.

Tom **said** he was busy.

We use **tell** when we mention the person spoken to.

Tom **told me** he was busy.

Common errors

He **said me** he was busy. ✗

He **told** he was busy. ✓

A. Change the following into the reported speech.

1. Ravi said, "I am free."
Ravi said that he was free
2. She said, "I'm reading an interesting book."
She said that she was reading an interesting book
3. "I've done my homework already," he said.
He said that he had done his homework
4. "I paid ₹75 for the basket," she said to us.
She told us that she paid ₹75 for the basket
5. She said, "I forgot to post the letter."
She said that she had forgot to post the letter
6. "I've bought jeans," Anand said.
Anand said that he'd bought new jeans
7. "I like orange juice," she said.
She said that she liked orange juice
8. "I was reading all afternoon," he said.
He said that he had been reading all afternoon
9. "My uncle may come tomorrow," he said to me.
he told me that his uncle may come tomorrow
10. "I have just bought the tickets," he said.
he said that he had bought tickets
11. "I'll meet you again," he said to me.
he told me that he'll meet me again
12. "I may see you again this evening," I said to her.
I told her that I might see her again that evening
13. "My grandfather will be sixty tomorrow," she said (three days ago).
She said that her grandpa would be 60 the following
14. "My grandfather will be sixty tomorrow," she said (this morning).
She said that her grandpa would be 60 the following
15. "We saw the exhibition three days ago," she said.
She said that they saw the exhibition three days ago
16. "I didn't see Mohan at the theatre," he said.
he said that he didn't see Mohan at the theater

17. "I've lost the key," he said.

he said that he had lost the key

18. Suresh said, "She's coming tomorrow."

Suresh said that she's would come

19. "I don't know his phone number," she said.

She said that she didn't know his

20. "My father has gone out," said the boy.

The boy said that his father had gone out

Pattern of reported orders and requests

The pattern of reported orders and requests is: reporting verb (tell/ask) + person spoken to + to-infinitive. We **tell** or **ask** somebody to do something. We often use **tell** in reported orders and **ask** in reported requests. We can also use verbs like **order**, **command**, **advise** and **request**.

Direct : "Clean the blackboard," the teacher said to the boy.

Reported : The teacher told the boy to clean the blackboard.

Direct : "Turn off the TV," she said.

Reported : She told him to turn off the TV.

Direct : "Don't talk loud," he said to the children.

Reported : He told the children not to talk loud.

Direct : "Please open the window," she said.

Reported : She requested him to open the window.

Direct : "Don't shoot!" said the officer.

Reported : The officer ordered the soldier not to shoot.

Direct : "Improve your spelling," the teacher said.

Reported : The teacher advised me to improve my spelling.

The teacher advised the students to improve their spelling.



Note

Don't + go/speak/drive and so on

not to go/speak/drive and so on

(Not: to not go/speak/drive and so on)

B. Change these sentences into the *reported speech*.

1. "Come in," he said to her.

he asked her to come in

2. "Don't make a noise," he said to the boys.

he told the boys' to not make noise

3. "Please help me with the homework," Radha said to her mother.
Radha requested her mother for help with
4. "Take the tablets before meals," the doctor said to her. her homework
The doctor told her to take the tablets
5. "Don't go there," he said.
he told to not go there
6. "Please don't disturb me," she said.
She requested not to disturb her
7. "Don't touch the wire!" they said.
They ordered not to touch the wires.
8. "Wash your face," she said to the boy.
She told the boy to wash his face
9. "Please give me a glass of water," he said.
he requested a glass of water
10. "Don't drive so fast," I said.
I order him to not drive so fast

C. Mrs Das has four children: Isha, Tarun, Anmol and Ria. Yesterday, she was ill, so she told her children to do certain things. Report what she said.

1. Sweep the house, Isha.
She told Isha to Sweep the house
2. Wash the plates, Anmol.
She told Anmol to wash the plates
3. Water the plants, Ria.
She told Ria to water the plants
4. Clean the windows, Tarun.
She told Tarun to Clean the windows
5. Don't forget to feed the dog, Isha.
She told Isha to not forget to feed the dog
6. Go to the market, Anmol and Ria.
She told Anmol and Ria to go to the market
7. Boil the eggs, Tarun.
She told Tarun to boil the eggs
8. Make tea, Anmol.
She told Anmol to make tea.

Question sentences

Study the following sentences.

1. Direct : "What are you doing?" the policeman said to them.
Reported : The policeman asked them what they were doing.
2. Direct : "Where have you put my glasses?" she asked.
Reported : She asked where he had put her glasses.
3. Direct : "What do you want?" I asked.
Reported : I asked what she wanted.
4. Direct : He said, "Who phoned you?"
Reported : He asked who had phoned me.
5. Direct : "Have you switched off the TV?" she said.
Reported : She asked whether I had switched off the TV.
6. Direct : "Are you from Nepal?" I asked.
Reported : I enquired whether they were from Nepal.
7. Direct : "Is your father in?" he asked.
Reported : He enquired whether my father was in.
8. Direct : "Can you drive?" I asked her.
Reported : I asked whether she could drive.

Here are some rules we follow while changing questions into reported speech.

Rule 1

Tenses and pronouns in reported questions change in the same way as in reported statements and commands.

Rule 2

Reported questions do not have the same word order (auxiliary + subject) as direct questions often have. As in statements, the verb comes after the subject. *Do/does/did* is not used. Question marks are removed.

Rule 3

If the question begins with a question word (*what, when, where, who*), this word serves as a link between the reporting verb and the reported question. (See examples 1 to 4.)

Rule 4

If the direct question has no question word (if the question is one which can be answered by *Yes* or *No*), the conjunction *whether* or *if* is placed before the reported question. (See examples 5 to 8.)

homework.

D. Rewrite the following in the *reported speech*.

1. "Where have they gone?" he said.

2. "Have they gone to the park?" I asked her.

3. "Why are you smiling?" he said.

4. "Will you return the CDs tomorrow?" I said.

5. "Who told you the news?" I said to her.

6. "Is that the Town Hall?" he asked.

7. "Did you record that television programme?" he said.

8. "How old are you?" he said to me.

9. "Have they videoed the function?" I asked.

10. "Where do you work?" he said.

11. "How long have you been waiting?" I asked her.

12. "Do you know how to operate the computer?" he said to me.

13. "Did you see Tom at the party?" he asked.

14. "Can you swim?" I asked her.

15. "Has the film come out on video?" I asked them.

Fill in each blank by choosing the correct word from the brackets.

1. They sell stationary in this shop. (stationary/stationery)
2. The sweater is made of coarse material. (course/coarse)
3. We play hockey and tennis on alternate days. (alternate/alternative)
4. Who is the principale of your school? (principle/principal)
5. I'm reading; please be quiet. (quiet/quite)
6. Go to the dairy and buy a kilo of butter. (diary/dairy)
7. This medicine will heal your wounds. (heel/heal)
8. The weather is very hot today. (weather/whether)
9. I am going to book a berth for the journey. (birth/berth)
10. I often lose my keys. (lose/loose)
11. I advise you to read this book. (advice/advise)
12. They have found a suitable site for the college. (site/sight)
13. He sat beside me on the bench. (beside/besides)
14. Who will you canvass for? (canvas/canvass)
15. He seized my bag and ran off. (seized/ceased)
16. His problems had a bad effect on him. (affect/effect)
17. Don't work so hard; it can affect your health. (affect/effect)
18. There were four people in the room, beside me and Anand.
(beside/besides)
19. This shirt is very loose; it doesn't fit me. (lose/loose)
20. This is the shortest route to the airport. (route/root)