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# Reported Speech

*to report* (verb): to tell somebody what you have heard or seen  
If we want to say what somebody has said, we basically have two options:

1. We can use the person's exact words - in quotation marks "..."  
if we are writing **(direct speech)**.
2. We can change the person's words into our own words  
**(reported speech)**.

<b>direct speech (exact words)</b>	<b>reported speech (my words)</b>
He said: "I love you"	He said that he loved me.

Reported speech is not really difficult. It is more a matter of logic and common sense. You probably have the same concept in your own language, where you use your own words to say what somebody has said or written.

In this lesson we learn about **reported speech**, the structure that we use when we **report** what another person has said, and reported speech rules.

Reported speech is divided in:

- Reported Statements
- Backshift
  
- Time and Place
- Reported Questions
- Reported Request
- Reported Orders

Reported speech is called "indirect speech" by some people. Other people regard reported speech simply as one form of indirect speech. Other forms are, for example:

questions-within-questions: Can you tell me if they are expensive?

mental processes: He believes that politics is a dirty game.

## Reported Statements

Reported statements are one form of reported speech.

Direct statement	Reported statement
He said, "I am sick"	He said that he was sick

We usually introduce reported statements with "reporting verbs" such as "say" or "tell":

He said (that)...

He told me (that)...

When we report a statement, we can say "He said that..." or simply "He said...". Both are possible. "He said that..." is more formal.

When we use our own words to report speech, there are one or two things that we sometimes change:

- **pronouns** may need to change to reflect a different perspective
- **tense** sometimes has to go back one tense (eg, present becomes past) - this is called **backshift**

<b>Personal pronouns change</b>	
<b>Direct speech</b>	<b>Reported speech</b>
I	he, she
You	I, he, she, we, they
We	they
Me	him, her
You	me, him, her, us, them
Us	them

<b>Possessive pronouns change</b>	
<b>Direct speech</b>	<b>Reported speech</b>
My	his, her
Your	my, his, her, our, their
Our	their
Mine	his, hers
Yours	mine, his, hers, ours, theirs
Ours	mine, his, hers, ours, theirs

		<b>pronoun change</b>	<b>tense change</b>	
<b>direct statement</b>	He said,	"I	am	sick"
<b>reported statement</b>	He said (that)	he	was	sick.

There are sometimes other things too that we may need to change, such as time or place. Look at these examples:

		<b>pronoun change</b>	<b>tense change</b>		<b>time change</b>
<b>direct statement</b>	Jane said,	"I	was	sick"	yesterday"
<b>reported statement</b>	Jane said that	she	had been	sick"	the day before

			<b>tense change</b>		<b>place change</b>
<b>direct statement</b>	She said,	"It	is	hot	in here"
<b>reported statement</b>	She said (that)	it	was	hot	in there

We also sometimes need to think about the third person singular "s":

		<b>pronoun</b>	<b>person change</b>	
<b>direct statement</b>	Mary said	"I	fix cars	in London"
<b>reported statement</b>	Mary said (that)	she	fixes cars	in London.

Notice that in the above example, we do not change the tense. Usually, with the present simple, if something is still true now - she still works in London - we don't need to change it.

Typical reporting verbs for statements: say, tell, mention, inform

He said that...

He said...

He told me that...

He told me...

He mentioned that...

He informed me that...

## Backshift in Reported Speech

Direct statement	Reported statement
He said, "I feel sad"	He said (that) he felt sad.

In simple terms, the structure of reported speech is:

**reporting** clause [+ conjunction] + **reported** clause

reporting clause	conjunction	reported clause
John said	(that)	he was hungry
John's original words: "I am hungry"		

We sometimes change the tense of the **reported** clause by moving it **back one tense**. For example, **present simple** goes back one tense to **past simple**. We call this change "**backshift**".

# When do we use backshift?

We use backshift when it is **logical** to use backshift.

So, for example, if two minutes ago John said "I am hungry" and I am now telling his sister, I might NOT use backshift (because John is still hungry):

- John just said that he **is** hungry.

But if yesterday John said "I am hungry" and I am now telling his sister, I would likely use backshift:

- Yesterday, John said that he **was** hungry.

*[We hope that John has eaten since yesterday ;-)]*

So we use backshift SOMETIMES but not always. And WHEN we use backshift, here's how it works with these common tenses and modals:

<b>backshift</b>	
<b>this</b>	<b>goes back to this</b>
<b>present simple</b> "I work at BIG"	→ <b>past simple</b> She said <b>she works/worked</b> at BIG.
<b>present continuous</b> "I am studying English"	→ <b>past continuous</b> He said <b>he was</b> studying English
<b>past simple</b> "I wrote a book"	<b>past perfect</b> She said that <b>she had written</b> a book.
<b>present perfect</b> "We have been to Australia"	→ They told me that <b>they had been</b> to Australia.

<b>past continuous</b> "I <b>was listening</b> to music"	→ <b>past perfect continuous</b> He said <b>he had been listening</b> to music.
<b>can</b> "We <b>can</b> cook lasagna"	→ <b>could</b> They said <b>they could</b> cook a lasagna.
<b>may</b> "I <b>may</b> go to the hospital"	→ <b>might</b> She said that <b>she might</b> go to the hospital.
<b>will</b> "I <b>will</b> travel on the weekend"	→ <b>would</b> He said that <b>he would</b> travel on the weekend.
<b>shall</b> "I <b>shall</b> open the window"	→ <b>should</b> He said <b>he should</b> open the window.

We NEVER use backshift when the original words are:

- past perfect
- could
- might
- would
- should

Remember:

- If a situation is still true, backshift is optional.
- For a general truth there is no need for backshift.

Look at the following examples. See if you can understand when and why they use backshift:

tenses	direct speech	reported speech
present simple*	He said, "I like coffee."	He said (that) he likes coffee.
		He said (that) he liked coffee.
present continuous *	She said, "Moo is living here with us."	She said Moo is living there with them.
		She said Moo was living there with them.
past simple	John said, "We bought a house last week."	John said they had bought a house the week before.

<b>present perfect</b>	Ram said, "I haven't seen Avatar."	Ram said he hadn't seen Avatar.
<b>past continuous</b>	Wayne said, "Were you watching TV when I called?"	Wayne asked if I had been watching TV when he called.
<b>past perfect**</b>	Ati said, "I had never lived in Thailand before."	Ati told us that he had never lived in Thailand before.
<b>can*</b>	She said, "Tara can't swim."	She said Tara can't swim.
		She said Tara couldn't swim.
<b>could**</b>	He said, "Could you swim when you were three?"	He asked me if I could swim when I was three.
<b>may*</b>	She said: "I may be late."	She said she may be late. (the time to be late has not yet arrived)
		She said she might be late. (and she was late)
<b>might**</b>	She said, "I might come early."	She said she might come early.
<b>will*</b>	She said, "I'll call you tomorrow."	She said she will call me tomorrow. (tomorrow has not come)
		She said she would call me the next day.
<b>would**</b>	She said, "I wouldn't like to go."	She said she would not like to go.
<b>shall*</b>	He said: "Shall I open the door?"	He asked if he should open the door.
<b>should**</b>	John said, "You should come here."	John said I should go there.
<b>must</b>	The kidnapper phoned me and said: "You must come here now."	The kidnapper phoned me and said I had to go there then.
	Ati said, "I must find a job next year."	Ati said he must find a job next year. (next year hasn't come yet)
<b>have to</b>	Tara said: "I have to do my homework."	Tara says she has to do her homework.
		Tara said she had to do her homework.

\* if still true, change is optional (sometimes a matter of emphasis)

\*\* never changes