

REPORTED SPEECH

Reporting questions

· The word order in reported questions is like a normal statement (this is the same rule as for indirect questions). Tense changes follow those given above.

*'Where **is** it?'* _ *He asked me where **it was**.* (NOT where was it)

· When we report question word questions (*when, what, why, where, how*, etc.) we use the question word.

*'When **will** the goods **arrive**?'* _ *They asked me **when** the goods **would arrive**.*

*'Why **have** your sales **gone down**?'* _ *I was asked **why** our sales **had gone down**.*

*A year ago, I was asked **how** this wonderful merger between Daimler and Chrysler **would work**, and I said I was waiting for the interpersonal problems. They were bound to happen, as our experiences with Seat had shown.'* – CEO of Volkswagen (Der Spiegel website)

· When we report *yes/no* questions (*Do you, Did you, Are you*, etc.) we use *if* or *whether*.

*'Do you **speak** French?'* _ *She asked me **if I spoke** French.*

'Are you going to pay in cash?' _ *He asked me **whether I was** going to pay in cash.*

· Notice in the examples that reported questions have no question mark in writing.

Reporting commands and requests

· Commands are reported with *tell* and the infinitive.

'Take us to the airport.' _ *She **told** the driver **to take** us to the airport.*

'Don't worry. I'll deal with it.' _ *She **told** me **not to worry**.*

· Requests are reported with *ask* and the infinitive.

'Would you mind waiting for a moment?' He **asked** me **to wait**.

'Please don't wait for me, I'll come along later.' He **asked** us **not to wait**.

Say or tell

· We *say* something and we *tell* somebody.

*Simon **said** he was confident about the success of the Beta project.*

*Simon **told** me the project was going well.*

· We never use *to* between *tell* and the object.

*He **told** me what happened in the meeting.* (NOT told to me)

- We can use *to* after *say*, especially when the actual words are not reported.

*What did he **say** to you?*

*I think the boss wanted to **say** something **to** Susan.*

EXERCISES

1) Rewrite each sentence in reported speech.

1. 'Are you on holiday for the whole of August?' she asked me.

She asked me if/whether I was on holiday for the whole of August.

2. 'What do the letters 'URL' mean?' I asked him.

I asked him _____.

3. 'Have you prepared the figures?' my boss asked me.

My boss asked me _____.

4. 'When is your birthday?' I asked Francesca.

I asked Francesca _____.

5. 'Did you remember to back up the file?' she asked him.

She asked him _____.

6. 'Why have you turned off the air conditioning?' Ellen asked me.

Ellen asked me _____.

7. 'Do you speak Italian?' they asked me at the interview.

They asked me at the interview _____.

8. 'How much did you pay for your car?' I asked Pablo.

I asked Pablo _____.

2) Underline the correct words.

1. Sally told/told me that she had lost the catalogue.

2. This is confidential, please don't say/tell anything about it.

3. This is confidential, please don't say/tell anyone about it.

4. Chris said/said me he must leave early.

5. I said/told them about the meal, and they said/told they would come.

6. 'You see,' told/said Steve, 'I always told/said you'd get a promotion.'

7. 'You see,' told/said Steve, 'I always told/said you you'd get a promotion.'

8. 'Look,' I told to/said to her, 'why don't you tell/say me what you mean?'

Self-check exercises (below)

Reported speech

Speech can be reported using the same tense when the fact is still true or we're reporting soon after the direct speech.

'Jan is leaving in a minute.'

→ She said (that) Jan is leaving in a minute.

We often change tense, time and pronouns when reporting speech.

'They are auditing the accounts now.'

→ She confirmed (that) they were auditing the accounts then.

'We will meet here tomorrow.'

→ They agreed (that) they would meet there the next day.

'I haven't met her.'

→ He told me (that) he hadn't met her.

'I can't advise you about that.'

→ She regretted (that) she couldn't advise us about that.

Reporting verbs are used in these ways.

- + (that) clause, e.g. complain, explain, feel, point out, report, suggest
'The advice wasn't very helpful.'
→ She pointed out (that) the advice wasn't very helpful.
- + infinitive, e.g. agree, ask, decide, demand, offer, promise, refuse, want
'I'll reduce the fees if you like.'
→ He agreed to reduce the fees.
- + object + infinitive, e.g. advise, ask, instruct, invite, remind, warn
'You should lower your prices.'
→ They advised us to lower our prices.
- + gerund, when the subject stays the same, e.g. admit, deny, mention, report, suggest
'Let's go over the figures again.'
→ He suggested going over the figures again.
- when there is a change of subject, we use a (that) clause
'Why don't you go over the figures again?'
→ He suggested (that) I go/went over the figures again.

Speech can also be reported by summarising the gist of what the speaker said.

Jacques stressed the importance of good design.

Gina raised the question of reliability.

Exercises

1 Report each sentence, starting with the phrases in brackets.

- 1 'The office will be too crowded if we have two more staff.'
(People felt ...)
- 2 'Can you please take care of the accounts?'
(I've asked Tim ...)
- 3 'Can you please remember to send your reports in by next Friday?'
(The Chair reminded everybody ...)
- 4 'We heard the alarm at 10pm last night.'
(Witnesses reported ...)
- 5 'Would you like to present the figures at the meeting tomorrow?'
(Joy suggested ...)
- 6 'The engineers haven't repaired the equipment yet.'
(He admitted ...)

2 Choose a reporting verb from the list to report what John said.

deny offer ask agree refuse

- 1 'Shall I draw up a list of potential suppliers?'
- 2 'Why hasn't the project been completed?'
- 3 'I'm not going to fund your travel expenses.'
- 4 'I didn't take the documents out of the office.'
- 5 'You're right – it's too early to decide.'

KEY

Exercise 1

- 1) People felt that the office would be too crowded if they had two more staff.
- 2) I've asked Tim to take care of the accounts.
- 3) The Chair reminded everybody to send their reports in by next Friday.
- 4) Witnesses reported hearing / that they has heard the alarm at 10 pm the previous night/the night before.

- 5) Joy suggested that I present the figures at the meeting the next/following day. (you cannot use *suggested presenting* in this example as there are 2 different persons/subjects involved)
- 6) He admitted that the engineers had not repaired the equipment yet. (you cannot use *admitted not repairing* in this example as there are 2 different persons/subjects involved)

Exercise 2

- 1 John offered me to draw up a list of potential clients. (OFFER SB TO DO ST)
- 2 John asked why the project hadn't been completed.
- 3 John refused to fund their/my travel expenses. (REFUSE + TO + inf)
- 4 John denied taking the documents out of the office. (DENY + -ing)
- 5 John agreed that it was too early to decide.