

Reported speech 1

A Reported speech

- 1 We often tell people what other people have said. This is called reported or indirect speech. We very rarely try to report the exact words that someone says. Usually we give the general meaning with a summary.
'Look, I've been phoning all day and he's always in a meeting. Can you tell him that I'll give him a call sometime next week, please?' (actual words)
→ *Sandra phoned. She said she'd call you next week.* (report)
'From what I can see, the advertising campaign is a great success.' (actual words)
→ *He said the campaign was a success.* (report)
- 2 Note the change of tense in the above examples: *will* to *would* and *is* to *was*. It is not always necessary to change tenses. If the statement is still true we can keep the same tense as the original.
He said the campaign was a great success. (the campaign is finished)
He said the campaign is/was a great success. (the campaign is still happening)
See sections B and C below for more details.
- 3 In writing we can repeat the exact words using speech marks ('...').
'I have no further comment to make at this stage,' said the company press officer when he spoke to our reporter yesterday.
This unit uses *said* as the reporting verb. See unit 22 for other reporting verbs.

B Tense changes

- 1 When the verb tense changes it 'moves back' in time.
Actual words Report (Indirect speech)
'I work for IBM' She said she **worked** for IBM.
'I'm working for IBM' She said she **was working** for IBM.
'I've worked for IBM' She said she **had worked** for IBM.
'I've been working for IBM' She said she **had been working** for IBM.
'I worked for IBM' She said she **had worked** for IBM.
OR She said she **worked** for IBM.
'I had worked for IBM' She said she **had worked** for IBM.
'I'm going to work for IBM.' She said she **was going to work** for IBM.
'I can/will/may work for IBM.' She said she **could/would/might work** for IBM.
Kiunvi, a Vienna-based telecoms company, said on Friday it was entering the Czech market by offering cheaper voice services through the Internet. (czechtoday website)
Earlier in the week, a labor union report said that 751 deaths had occurred 'on the job' in Italy during the first six months of this year, up from 621 for the same period last year. (International Herald Tribune website)
The Shading Aluminum Industry Co. said last week it would issue 160 million shares for listing on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. (Shanghai Daily website)
- 2 There is no change for *must*, *might*, *could*, *should*, *would*.
- 3 Note that if the actual words were in the past simple (*worked*), the report can change or stay the same.
- 4 Note that there is no change for the past perfect (*had worked*).

C No tense change

- 1 We do not need to change tense if the information is still true.
'The sales team are doing very well at the moment.'
He **says/said** the team **are** doing very well.
- 2 We do not need to change tense if we report something which is always true.
'There is always a period of uncertainty after a merger.'
He **says/said** there **is** always a period of uncertainty after a merger.

D People, places, times and things

- 1 In reported speech references to people, places, times and things often change, because the point of view changes.

'I'll see you here tomorrow,' said Sue. 'I've read your report about this project,' he said.
Sue said **she'd** see **me** **there** **the next day**. He said **he'd** read **my** report about **the** project.

The examples in the previous paragraph show some of these typical changes:

People:	<i>I</i>	→	<i>he/she</i>
	<i>you</i>	→	<i>me</i>
	<i>my</i>	→	<i>his/her</i>
	<i>your</i>	→	<i>my</i>
Place:	<i>here</i>	→	<i>there, at the office</i>
Times:	<i>now</i>	→	<i>then, at that time</i>
	<i>today</i>	→	<i>that day, on Monday</i>
	<i>yesterday</i>	→	<i>the day before, the previous day</i>
	<i>tomorrow</i>	→	<i>the next day, the following day, on Monday</i>
	<i>this afternoon</i>	→	<i>that afternoon</i>
	<i>last week</i>	→	<i>the week before, the previous week</i>
	<i>next week</i>	→	<i>the week after, the following week</i>
	<i>a few days ago</i>	→	<i>a few days before, a few days earlier</i>
Things:	<i>this project</i>	→	<i>the project</i>



"Remember when I said I was going to be honest with you, Jeff? That was a big, fat lie."

21 Practice

Exercise 1 B

Write the actual words that each person says. Use contractions where possible.

- Anna said that she had already finished.
(Anna's actual words) ' I've already finished
- She said he would be back after lunch.
(Her actual words) '
- He said she was going to contact the printers.
(His actual words) '
- Paul said that he wanted to make a phone call.
(Paul's actual words) '
- She said she was meeting the bank manager at eleven.
(Her actual words) '
- Pierre said he had found out about the problem a long time ago.
(Pierre's actual words) '
- David said he had to be back in the office by three thirty.
(David's actual words) '
- Jan said she would let me know.
(Jan's actual words) '

Exercise 2 D

Look at the actual words spoken. Underline the correct words in the reported version.

- (Helen's words) 'I won't do it until tomorrow.'
Helen said if she wouldn't do it until the previous/following day.
- (Peter's words) 'It's very busy in here. I'll call you later.'
Peter said it was very busy here/there, and he'd call me/him later.
- (The sales manager's words) 'We received your order last week.'
He said they'd/we'd received our/their order the week after/before.
- (Mel Bowen's words) 'I'm sorry about the delay, I'll deal with this now.'
She said she/I was sorry about the delay, and she'd deal with it right then/later.

Exercise 3 B D

Rewrite the sentences in reported speech. Use contractions where possible.

- 'I won't put it in the sales because it's selling very well,' she said.
She said she wouldn't put it in the sales because it was selling very well
- 'I've read the report and I don't understand section 4,' he said.
He said
- 'When I finish my presentation, I'm going to have a drink,' he said.
He said that when
- 'I'm preparing the figures but I won't be long,' she said.
She said
- 'I like playing tennis, but I don't do it very often,' she said.
She said
- 'I'm going to visit our Polish subsidiary, but I'm not sure when,' she said.
She said

Exercise 4 B C

Read the words spoken in a conference presentation about the role of the Chief Executive Officer.

'Jack Welch, one of the most famous CEOs of all time, was head of General Electric for twenty years. But he was an exception. In fact, two-thirds of all major companies worldwide have replaced their CEO over the last five years. What's the reason? The reason is that expectations of CEO performance are far too high. Boards of companies look at their CEO as a kind of superhero who can solve all the company's problems. This process started in the 1980s, and the prototype was Lee Iaccoca, "the man who saved Chrysler Corp". Then in the 1990s, we had CEOs from the technology sector, like Microsoft's Bill Gates, or Cisco's John Chambers, who managed to produce constantly rising share prices. But the situation is very different now and economic growth is slowing down.'

Now look at ways to report the words to a colleague. By each sentence write P/TC (if the sentence is Possible because of Tense Change rules), P/ST (if the sentence is Possible because it is Still True) or I (if the sentence is Incorrect).

The speaker said that ...

- Jack Welch was CEO of General Electric for twenty years. ...P/TC..
- Jack Welch had been CEO of General Electric for twenty years.
- Boards of companies look at their CEOs as superheroes.
- Boards of companies looked at their CEOs as superheroes.
- Boards of companies had looked at their CEOs as superheroes.
- Lee Iaccoca started it all in the 1980s.
- Lee Iaccoca had started it all in the 1980s.
- Lee Iaccoca had been started it all in the 1980s.
- The situation is different now.
- The situation was different now.

Exercise 5 B D

On Friday morning you had a meeting with someone from your advertising agency at his offices. The words he spoke are on the left. The next week you tell a colleague about the discussion. Underline the correct words on the right.

The advertising person's words:

'Did you get my email I sent yesterday about this campaign we've been working on? I hope so. I'm sorry to ask you to come here at such short notice, but it's quite urgent. The situation is this: we use an outside printing company, and a few days ago the workers there went on strike. I'm having a meeting with a union representative this afternoon, but I thought I should talk to you first.'

What you say to your colleague:

'He said he (1) hopes/hoped I'd got (2) his/my email that (3) he'd send/he'd sent (4) yesterday/the day before about (5) the/this advertising campaign (6) they've/we've been working on. And he apologised for asking (7) me/you to go (8) here/there at such short notice – he said it (9) is/was urgent. Well, apparently a few days (10) ago/before the printers they use (11) have gone/had gone on strike, and he (12) is/was meeting them (13) this/that afternoon. He said he thought he should talk to (14) me/you about it first.'

Reported speech 2

A 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.

B Other reporting verbs

- There are many verbs to report what people say. Each verb has one or more possible patterns.

Common reporting verbs include:

Verb + -ing form (unit 19)

admit, deny, mention, propose, suggest

Verb + *to* infinitive (unit 19)

agree, ask, demand, decide, offer, promise, refuse, threaten

Verb + object + *to* infinitive (unit 19)

advise, ask, convince, encourage, invite, order, persuade, remind, tell, warn

Verb + *that* clause

admit, agree, announce, answer, claim, complain, confirm, deny, explain, mention, promise, propose, reply, say, suggest

Verb + object + *that* clause

advise, assure, convince, inform, notify, persuade, promise, reassure, remind, tell

They **denied doing** anything wrong.

I **suggested changing** our export agency.

She **promised to call me** tomorrow.

They **refused to lower** their price.

He **advised us to wait** until next year.

They **invited me to come** for lunch.

They **agreed (that)** they'd wait.

She **promised (that)** she'd call me tomorrow.

I **reminded them (that)** they had to pay a 25% deposit.

I **told him (that)** I couldn't make the meeting next week.

- We use the same tense change rules as in unit 21.

Greek telecom giant OTE won the privatisation contract with RomTelecom. OTE **promised that** 70 per cent of the telephone system **would** be digital within three years. (Bucharest Business Week website)

- We can also report what people think or know. Verbs include: *know, notice, think, realise*, etc. Sorry, I **didn't realise** you were busy. I **thought** you had finished.

C It + passive of a reporting verb

- We use *It* + passive of a reporting verb + *that* to report what people in general feel or believe. This is a formal use, for example in a newspaper story, a scientific report or a written summary of a meeting.

It was announced at the conference **that** Argentina was losing Pesos \$3,000 million per annum on grain prices compared with the average in the last ten years. **It was pointed out that** international prices had not improved in two years, but this stability had allowed an increase in production. (LatinTrade website)

Verbs that are often used in this way are:

be agreed, be announced, be believed, be claimed, be confirmed, be considered, be decided, be estimated, be expected, be feared, be felt, be found, be pointed out, be proposed, be reported, be rumoured, be said, be shown, be suggested, be thought.

D Reporting questions

- The word order in reported questions is like a normal statement (this is the same rule as for indirect questions in unit 16). Tense changes follow those given in unit 21.
'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.

E 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**.

22 Practice

Exercise 1 A

Underline the correct words.

- Sally told/told me that she had lost the catalogue.
- This is confidential, please don't say/tell anything about it.
- This is confidential, please don't say/tell anyone about it.
- Chris said/said me he must leave early.
- I said/told them about the meal, and they said/told they would come.
- 'You see,' told/said Steve, 'I always told/said you'd get a promotion.'
- 'You see,' told/said Steve, 'I always told/said you you'd get a promotion.'
- 'Look,' I told to/said to her, 'why don't you tell/say me what you mean?'

Exercise 2 B

Match the actual words in sentences 1–12 with the reported statements a)–l).

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 'Well done! You've done it!' | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a) He advised me to do it. |
| 2 'Who me? No, I never did it.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | b) He apologised for not doing it. |
| 3 'I'm really sorry I didn't do it – I just forgot.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | c) He congratulated me on doing it. |
| 4 'If I were you, I'd do it.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | d) He invited me to do it. |
| 5 'Would you like to do it?' | <input type="checkbox"/> | e) He denied doing it. |
| 6 'Don't forget to do it!' | <input type="checkbox"/> | f) He mentioned that he'd done it. |
| 7 'Oh, I see that you've done it.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | g) He didn't realise I'd done it. |
| 8 'Oh, by the way, I've done it.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | h) He promised that he'd do it. |
| 9 'Oh! I thought you hadn't done it!' | <input type="checkbox"/> | i) He noticed that I'd done it. |
| 10 'I really wouldn't do it. It could be a disaster.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | j) He refused to do it. |
| 11 'I'll do it, you can count on me.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | k) He reminded me to do it. |
| 12 'No, I won't do it. It's out of the question.' | <input type="checkbox"/> | l) He warned me not to do it. |

Exercise 3 D unit 21

Rewrite each sentence in reported speech.

- '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.
- 'What do the letters 'URL' mean?' I asked him.
I asked him
- 'Have you prepared the figures?' my boss asked me.
My boss asked me
- 'When is your birthday?' I asked Francesca.
I asked Francesca
- 'Did you remember to back up the file?' she asked him.
She asked him
- 'Why have you turned off the air conditioning?' Ellen asked me.
Ellen asked me
- 'Do you speak Italian?' they asked me at the interview.
They asked me at the interview
- 'How much did you pay for your car?' I asked Pablo.
I asked Pablo

Exercise 4 C

Read the extract from a meeting, chaired by Claudia. Then underline the most appropriate reporting verbs in the written summary below.

- CLAUDIA: Oh, hi. Take a seat ... Um, I'd like to hear your views on the talks we're having with BCP about the possible merger. Do you think we should go ahead with the discussions?
- NIGEL: Well, no actually. I don't think we should. Our company cultures are totally different, and I can't see many opportunities to cut costs in a combined operation. I'm sorry, but I'm against it.
- TONY: But, Nigel, can't you see that we're too small to stand alone in the global economy. There's going to be rationalisation in our market and now is the right time to act.
- CLAUDIA: Um, right. How long do you think it would take to integrate the two companies?
- TONY: Probably about six months, maybe more.
- NIGEL: That's six months of complete chaos and falling investor confidence. It's just too risky.
- CLAUDIA: Well, I don't think we have enough information at the moment. Perhaps we could set up a task force to look into the whole issue in more detail?
- TONY: Hmm.
- CLAUDIA: Tony – would you be willing to chair it?
- TONY: OK, I'll chair a task force, but I'll need representatives from the other departments as well.
- CLAUDIA: That shouldn't be a problem. When do you think you'll be able to get the report done?
- TONY: Um, in about six weeks.
- NIGEL: Six weeks! That's ridiculous.
- TONY: OK, we'll try to get all the information together in four weeks.
- CLAUDIA: Right, that's settled. We'll meet again a month from today, same time same place.

- It was estimated/announced that it would take about six months to integrate the two companies in the event of a merger.
- It was rumoured/suggested that we could set up a task force to produce a report on the implications of the merger.
- It was proposed/claimed that the task force would be chaired by Tony, with representatives from other departments.
- It was shown/agreed that the task force should produce its report in four weeks.
- It was claimed/decided that the next meeting would be on July 28th at 9 am in the main conference room.

Exercise 5 A B D

Nigel (from Exercise 4) is talking to a colleague about the same meeting later in the week. Underline the correct words in his report.

'Claudia asked us (1) that we give/to give our opinions about the merger talks. I (2) told them/told to them that I thought the whole thing was a bad idea, but they refused (3) to listen/listening. Of course Tony disagreed, as usual. He (4) told/said that we were too small for the global market. Then Claudia asked how long (5) would it/it would take to integrate the two companies, and Tony claimed it would (6) take/to take six months. Claudia suggested (7) setting up/to set up a task force to look into the whole thing. I decided (8) not saying/not to say anything. Tony offered (9) to chair/that he would chair the task force. He proposed that the task force (10) reporting/should report back in six weeks, but I (11) reminded them that/reminded that we'd need the report much sooner. Anyway, we decided (12) to meet/meeting again in a month.'