

Reported Speech



She said (that) she lived in London.

Definition and use

When we tell someone what another person said earlier, we don't usually repeat the direct speech that we heard.

- She said, "I live in London." ❌
- She said (that) she lived in London. ✅





Construction

In reported speech, we use one tense back in time from the tense in the direct speech.

Direct speech		Reported [indirect] speech
Present simple I prefer coffee.	→	Past simple She said she preferred coffee.
Present continuous I'm reading a great book.	→	Past continuous He told me he was reading a great book.
Past simple I went to Japan.	→	Past perfect simple She said she'd been to Japan.
Past continuous We were watching TV.	→	Past perfect continuous She said they'd been watching TV.
Present perfect simple I've finished the report.	→	Past perfect simple He told me he'd finished the report.
Present perfect continuous I've been writing a report.	→	Past perfect continuous He said he'd been writing a report.
Past perfect simple I'd always wanted to go to Italy.	→	Past perfect simple (no change) She said she'd always wanted to go to Italy.
Past perfect continuous I'd been discussing it with my boss.	→	Past perfect continuous (no change) He said he'd been discussing it with his boss.
Future simple I'll email you.	→	Would + bare infinitive He told me he'd email me.
Future continuous We'll be visiting the new plant.	→	Would be + present participle She said they'd be visiting the new plant.

Direct speech		Reported [indirect] speech
Going to I'm going to buy a new car.	→	Was going to + bare infinitive He said he was going to buy a new car.
Present continuous for future I'm having lunch with friends.	→	Past continuous She said she was having lunch with friends.
Future perfect simple I'll have finished it by 4 o'clock.	→	Would have + past participle She said she'd have finished it by 4 o'clock.
Future perfect continuous By May, I'll have been working here for two years.	→	Would have been + present participle He said that by May, he'd have been working here for two years.

Examples

	"I'm bored today."	Jenny said she was bored yesterday.
	"Sales figures are increasing."	She told us that sales figures were increasing.
	"Oh no! I forgot about the meeting!"	He told me he'd forgotten about the meeting.
	"I was discussing this with Bob yesterday and we were thinking about making some changes."	She told us she'd been discussing it with Bob the day before and they'd been thinking about making some changes.

Note that

1) It isn't necessary to change the tense if something is still true or relevant.



- We're having lunch early today because Philippe said he's hungry. [still true]
- But
- We went to lunch early yesterday because Philippe said he was hungry. [no longer true]



- They visited Paris and said it is a beautiful city.



- She said the next meeting will be on Thursday. [Before Thursday, this is still true.]
- She said the next meeting would be on Thursday. [After Thursday]



- Thierry phoned and told me that he'll be at the meeting this afternoon. He said he's just landed and he's getting a taxi straight here.

But you should always change the tense if you are taking an English test or exam.

2) In most cases, we can omit 'that'. *He told me (that) he was going to Korea.*

However, with some verbs, it is better to use 'that'. For example: *announce | doubt | imply | add | estimate | argue | point out | complain | mention.*

- "The meeting will start at 10:00, and I expect everyone to be there."
- He announced that the meeting would start at 10 and added that he expected everyone to be there.
- "Let's wait until December. That's always the best time to launch this kind of product."

- “No. This time, we should do it in the summer.”
- He pointed out that December was always the best time to launch that kind of product, but she argued that it would be better to do it in the summer.
- “I don’t think it will work.”
- He doubted that it would work.
- “There were about 200 people at the conference.”
- She estimated that there had been about 200 people at the conference.
- “The coffee is terrible here!”
- She complained that the coffee was terrible there.

Other changes

Sometimes we need to make other changes. For example:

“We have to do it now.” -> They said they had to do it immediately.

But not always:

- 28th September: “We’ll meet again next month.”
- 29th September: Louise said that we’ll/we’d meet again next month.
- 1st October: Louise said we’ll/we’d meet again this month.
- November: Louise said we’d meet again last month.
- Later than October: Louise said that we’d meet again the following month.

Direct speech		Reported speech
now	→	immediately
today	→	that day
yesterday	→	the day before/the previous day
the day before yesterday	→	two days before
last week/month/year	→	the week/month/year before or the previous week/month/year
tomorrow	→	the next/following day
the day after tomorrow	→	in two days’ time/two days later
next week/month/year	→	the following week/month/year
ago	→	before
this week/month/year	→	that week/month/year
this/these (adjective)	→	the/a/this/these/that/those - depending on the situation
here	→	here/there - depending on the situation

From: https://tools.e-exercices.com/ressources-pour-les-apprenants	Direct speech	Reported speech
It is for me. It is my pen. It is mine. Last update: 2023/02/14 14:21	→	He/she said it was for him/her. He/she said it was his/her pen. He/she said it was his/hers.
It is for you. It is your pen. It is yours.		He/she said it was for me. He/she said it was my pen. He/she said it was mine.
It is for us. It is our car. It is ours	→	They said it was for them. They said it was their car. They said it was theirs.



Modals

We also need to change some modal verbs.

Direct speech	Reported speech
I can swim.	He said he could swim.
All visitors must go to reception.	They told us that all visitors had to go to reception.
You mustn't smoke in here.	We were told that we couldn't/weren't allowed to smoke in there
What shall we do tonight?	She asked what we should do last night.

But some modals do not need to be changed - could, might, would, should, ought to, had better.

“I might go to the party.”
She said she might go to the party.

Other reporting verbs

Usually we use 'said' or 'told' to report speech but lots of other reporting verbs are possible. It is often better to use these, especially if you are reporting a long conversation, because it becomes boring if you continue to repeat 'said' or 'told' together with all the words spoken.

Note that we need to use the correct form of the verb that follows the reporting verb. There are several possibilities. Here are some examples:

accuse someone	...of doing something
admit, deny	...doing something
admit, agree, explain, imply, mention	...that someone had done something
apologise, blame someone, forgive someone	...for doing something
agree, decide, pretend, promise, refuse, threaten	...(not) to do something
decide, explain, remember, wonder	...how/when/where/what/which to do (it)
advise, ask, allow, expect, forbid, persuade, remind, tell	...someone to do something
suggest	...I/we etc. do it