

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 had been/had gone 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

Direct speech		Reported speech
It is for me . It is my pen. It is mine .	→	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		
Direct speech		Reported speech	
It was Anne who ate the last biscuit!	→	She accused Anne of eating the last biscuit.	
Yes, it's true. I ate it!	→	Anne admitted eating it.	
		Anne admitted that she'd eaten it.	
		Anne didn't deny eating it.	

Direct speech		Reported speech
I'm sorry. I won't do it again.	→	She apologised (for doing it) and promised not to do it again.
That's OK; don't worry.	→	They forgave her (for eating the biscuit).
You should go to the doctor.	→	He advised me to go to the doctor.
OK. We'll have the meeting today.	→	They agreed to have the meeting that day.
It's your fault we missed the flight!	→	He blamed me for missing the flight.
First you attach these two parts and then you press this button.	→	He explained how to do it.
If you apply for this job, you'll earn more money and you'll be happier.	→	She persuaded me to apply for the job. [But – she dissuaded me from applying...]
I'm not working on Saturday!	→	He refused to work on Saturday.
Don't forget to make that phone call.	→	She reminded me to make the phone call.
Why don't you phone him? Shall we go to the cinema?	→	She suggested I phone him. She suggested (going to) the cinema.
If you don't move your car, I'll call the police!	→	He threatened to call the police if I didn't move my car.
Make sure you don't fall asleep in the meeting again!	→	She warned me not to fall asleep in the meeting again.

Examples



"I don't think you should buy that one – it's not a good colour for you."

My friend **advised me not to** buy the red dress that I liked.

	<p>“If your grades don’t improve in the next few weeks, I will have to speak to your parents.”</p>	<p>Her teacher threatened to talk to her parents if her grades didn’t improve in the following few weeks.</p>
	<p>“Let’s have lunch on Monday.”</p>	<p>Malcolm suggested having lunch on Monday.</p>
	<p>“We have to eat burgers because you burned the steak!” “It wasn’t me. It was Steve.”</p>	<p>James accused Dave of burning the steaks but Dave denied it and blamed Steve.</p>

Questions and requests

When reporting questions and requests, we use the verb ‘ask’. For yes/no questions, we need to add ‘if/whether’.

What do you want for lunch?	→	She asked me what I wanted for lunch.
Can I have a cheese sandwich, please?	→	He asked for a cheese sandwich.
Where are you going on holiday?	→	He asked us where we were going on holiday.
Do you like tea?	→	He asked me if I liked tea.
Will you marry me?	→	He asked her to marry him.

Please don't eat all the chocolate!	→	She asked me not to eat all the chocolate.
Are you going to the party?	→	He asked whether I was going to the party.

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