13

Reported Speech

Reported (indirect) speech relays what someone said without quoting the exact words: *"I'm tired," she said → She said (that) she was tired.*

13.1 The backshift of tenses

When the reporting verb is past (*said, told, asked*), tenses usually move one step back:

Direct	Reported
present simple: *"I work here."*	past simple: *he worked there*
present progressive: *"She is waiting."*	past progressive: *she was waiting*
past simple: *"We won."*	past perfect: *they had won*
present perfect: *"I've finished."*	past perfect: *she had finished*
will: *"I'll call."*	*would*: *he would call*
can: *"I can swim."*	*could*: *she could swim*
may: *"It may rain."*	*might*: *it might rain*
must (obligation): *"You must sign."*	*had to*: *we had to sign*

Past perfect, *would, could, might, should, ought to* do not change further.

Usage Note

No backshift is needed when the statement is still true or the reporting verb is present: *She says she **is** tired. He said the Earth **orbits** the Sun. Anna told me she **still works** there.* Backshifting in such cases (*Anna told me she still worked there*) is also correct and slightly more detached.

13.2 Changes of person, time, and place

Pronouns and pointers shift with the new perspective:

today → that day	*tomorrow → the next day*
yesterday → the day before	*now → then*
this → that	*here → there*
ago → before	*next week → the following week*

"I'll see you here tomorrow," he said → He said he would see me there the next day.

13.3 Reported questions

Key Point

Reported questions use *statement* word order, with no *do*-support and no question mark: *"Where do you live?"* → *She asked me* ***where I lived***. Yes/no questions use *if* or *whether*: *"Are you ready?"* → *He asked* ***whether I was ready***.

Common Error

✗ *She asked me where did I live.* → ✓ *She asked me where I lived.*
✗ *He asked me that I was ready.* → ✓ *He asked me if I was ready.*

The same order applies to **indirect questions** in polite requests: *Could you tell me* ***where the station is****?* (✗ *where is the station*)

13.4 Reported commands and requests

Use *tell/ask/order/warn/advise* + *object* + *to*-infinitive: *"Wait outside."* → *She* ***told us to wait*** *outside.* *"Please don't smoke."* → *He* ***asked them not to smoke***. Note the position of *not*: *not to* + verb.

13.5 Reporting verbs and their patterns

Move beyond *say* and *tell* — richer verbs summarize the speech act:

Pattern	Verbs and examples
verb + *to*-infinitive	*offer, promise, refuse, threaten, agree*: *She* ***promised to write***.
verb + object + *to*-inf.	*advise, invite, remind, warn, urge*: *He* ***warned us not to invest***.
verb + gerund	*admit, deny, suggest, recommend*: *They* ***denied taking*** *it.*
verb + preposition + gerund	*apologize for, insist on, accuse (sb) of, blame (sb) for, congratulate (sb) on*: *She* ***apologized for being*** *late.*
verb + *that*-clause	*explain, complain, admit, claim, point out*: *He* ***explained that*** *the office was closed.*

Common Error

say vs. *tell*: *tell* needs a person object; *say* does not. ✗ *She said me the truth.* → ✓ *She told me the truth.* ✗ *He told that he was busy.* → ✓ *He said (that) he was busy. / He told* ***me*** *that he was busy.*
explain: ✗ *Explain me the rule.* → ✓ *Explain the rule* ***to me***.

Exercises

Exercise 13.1 Report the statements

Put into reported speech with a past reporting verb.

1. “I’m leaving tomorrow,” Marta said.
2. “We haven’t seen this film,” they said.
3. “I can’t find my glasses,” Grandpa said.
4. “The results will be published next week,” the professor said.
5. “I didn’t touch your phone,” my brother said.

Exercise 13.2 Report the questions and commands

1. “Where is the nearest bank?” (She asked. . .)
2. “Did you enjoy the concert?” (He wanted to know. . .)
3. “Don’t open the window,” the guard said to us.
4. “How long have you been waiting?” (They asked me. . .)
5. “Please check your booking details again.” (The airline advised. . .)

Exercise 13.3 Choose the reporting verb

Rewrite each quotation using the verb given.

1. “Yes, it was me — I broke the vase.” (admit)
2. “I’ll definitely pay you back on Monday.” (promise)
3. “Why don’t we take the coastal road?” (suggest)
4. “I’m so sorry I shouted at you.” (apologize)
5. “You copied my design!” (accuse)