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Direct and indirect speech can be a source of confusion for English learners. Let's first define the terms, then look at how to talk about what someone said, and how to convert speech from direct to indirect or vice-versa. You can answer the question What did he say? in two ways: by repeating the words spoken (direct speech) by reporting the words spoken (indirect or reported speech). Direct Speech Direct speech repeats, or quotes, the exact words spoken. When we use direct speech in writing, we place the words spoken between quotation marks (" ") and there is no change in these words. We may be reporting something that's being said NOW (for example a telephone conversation), or telling someone later about a previous conversation. Indirect speech Reported or indirect speech is usually used to talk about the past, so we normally change the tense of the words spoken. We use reporting verbs like 'say', 'tell', 'ask', and we may use the word 'that' to introduce the reported words. Inverted commas are not used. She said, "I saw him." (direct speech) = She said that she had seen him. (indirect speech) "That" may be omitted:She told him that she was happy. = She told him she was happy. "Say" and "tell" Use 'say' when there is no indirect object:He said that he was tired. Always use 'tell' when you say who was being spoken to (i.e. with an indirect object):He told me that he was tired. "Talk" and "speak" Use these verbs to describe the action of communicating:He talked to us.She was speaking on the telephone. Use these verbs with 'about' to refer to what was said:He talked (to us) about his parents. Writing Argumentative Essays Articles Letters and Emails More Links English News Articles Privacy Policy Indices Adjectives and adverbs Adjectives Adverbs Adverb phrases Adverbs and adverb phrases: position Adverbs and adverb phrases: typical errors Adverbs: forms Adverbs: functions Adverbs: types Comparison: adverbs (worse, more easily) Degree adverbs Time adverbs Adverbs as discourse markers (anyway, finally) Adverbs as short responses (definitely, certainly) Using adjectives and adverbs Easily confused words Above or over? Across, over or through? Advice or advise? Affect or effect? All or every? All or whole? Allow, permit or let? Almost or nearly? Alone, lonely, or lonesome? Along or alongside? Already, still or yet? Also, as well or too? Alternate(ly), alternative(ly) Although or though? Altogether or all together? Amount of, number of or quantity of? Any more or anymore? Anyone, anybody or anything? Apart from or except for? Arise or rise? Around or round? Arouse or rouse? As or like? As, because or since? As, when or while? Been or gone? Begin or start? Beside or besides? Between or among? Born or borne? Bring, take and fetch Can, could or may? Classic or classical? Come or go? Consider or regard? Consist, comprise or compose? Content or contents? Different from, different to or different than? Do or make? Down, downwards or downward? During or for? Each or every? East or eastern, north or northern? Economic or economical? Efficient or effective? Elder, eldest or older, oldest? End or finish? Especially or specially? Except or except for? Expect, hope or wait? Experience or experiment? Fall or fall down? Far or a long way? Farther, farthest or further, furthest? Fast, quick or quickly? Fell or felt? Female or feminine; male or masculine? Finally, at last, lastly or in the end? First, firstly or at first? Fit or suit? Following or the following? For or since? Forget or leave? Full or filled? Fun or funny? Get or go? Grateful or thankful? Hear or listen (to)? High or tall? Historic or historical? House or home? How is ...? or What is ... like? If or when? If or whether? Ill or sick? Imply or infer? In the way or on the way? It's or its? Late or lately? Lay or lie? Lend or borrow? Less or fewer? Look at, see or watch? Low or short? Man, mankind or people? Maybe or may be? Maybe or perhaps? Nearest or next? Never or not ... ever? Nice or sympathetic? No doubt or without doubt? No or not? Nowadays, these days or today? Open or opened? Opportunity or possibility? Opposite or in front of? Other, others, the other or another? Out or out of? Permit or permission? Person, persons or people? Pick or pick up? Play or game? Politics, political, politician or policy? Price or prize? Principal or principle? Quiet or quite? Raise or rise? Remember or remind? Right or rightly? Rob or steal? Say or tell? So that or in order that? Sometimes or sometime? Sound or noise? Speak or talk? Such or so? There, their or they're? Towards or toward? Wait or wait for? Wake, wake up or awaken? Worth or worthwhile? Nouns, pronouns and determiners Determiners Nouns Noun phrases Pronouns Pronouns Each other, one another Everyone, everybody, everything, everywhere It Gender No one, nobody, nothing, nowhere One One and one's Pronouns: personal (I, me, you, him, it, they, etc.) Pronouns: possessive (my, mine, your, yours, etc.) Pronouns: reflexive (myself, themselves, etc.) Pronouns: indefinite (-body, -one, -thing, -where) Pronouns: one, you, we, they Relative pronouns Questions: interrogative pronouns (what, who) Someone, somebody, something, somewhere That Quantifiers A bit All Any Both Either Enough Least, the least, at least Less Little, a little, few, a few Lots, a lot, plenty Many More Most, the most, mostly Much, many, a lot of, lots of: quantifiers No, none and none of Plenty Some Some and any Question words How What When Where Which Who, whom Whose Why Using nouns Prepositions and particles Using English Collocation Functions Numbers Dates Measurements Number Time People and places Place and movement Abroad Away and away from Back Inside Nearby Outside Up Politeness Reported speech Sexist language Spoken English Types of English Useful phrases Writing Verbs Tenses and time Verb forms Verb patterns Phrasal verbs and multi-word verbs Passive voice Modal verbs and modality Conditionals and wishes Using verbs Table of irregular verbs Words, sentences and clauses Word classes and phrase classes Word formation Word order and focus Conjunctions and linking words Clauses and sentences Relative clauses Negation Negation Neither, neither ... nor and not ... either Not Neither, neither ... nor and not ... either Not Forming negative statements, questions and imperatives Negation: two negatives Negative clauses with any, anybody, anyone, anything, anywhere Negation in non-finite clauses Negative prefixes and suffixes Negative adverbs: hardly, seldom, etc. Negation: emphasising Negation of think, believe, suppose, hope Questions Note:Reported speech is also referred to as indirect speech or indirect discourse.Before explaining how to report a discourse, let us first distinguish between direct speech and reported speech.Direct speech vs reported speech1. We use direct speech to quote a speaker's exact words. We put their words within quotation marks. We add a reporting verb such as "he said" or "she asked" before or after the quote.Example:2. Reported speech is a way of reporting what someone said without using quotation marks. We do not necessarily report the speaker's exact words. Some changes are necessary: the time expressions, the tense of the verbs, and the demonstratives.Example:He said that he was happy.More examples:Direct speechReported speechShe says: "I like tuna fish."She says that she likes tuna fish.She said: "I'm visiting Paris next weekend."She said that she was visiting Paris the following weekend.He asked Betty: "Do you like cheese?"He wanted to know if Betty liked cheese.Different types of reported speechWhen you use reported speech, you either report:StatementsQuestionsRequests / commandsOther typesA. Reporting statementsWhen transforming statements, check whether you have to change:pronounstenseplace and time expression1. PronounsIn reported speech, you often have to change the pronoun depending on who says what.Example:She says, "My dad likes roast chicken." – She says that her dad likes roast chicken.2. TensesIf the sentence starts in the present, there is no backshift of tenses in reported speech.If the sentence starts in the past, there is often a backshift of tenses in reported speech.Shifting back tenseDirect speechReported speech(no backshift)"I write poems."He says that he writes poems.(backshift)"I write poems"He said that he wrote poems.No backshiftDo not change the tense if the introductory clause (i.e., the reporting verb) is in the present tense (e. g. He says). Note, however, that you might have to change the form of the present tense verb (3rd person singular).Example:He says, "I write poems." – He says that he writes English.BackshiftYou must change the tense if the introductory clause (i.e., the reporting verb) is in the past tense (e. g. He said).Example:He said, "I am happy." – He said that he was happy.Examples of the main changes in verb tenseDirect SpeechReported SpeechSimple PresentHe said: "I am happy"Simple PastHe said that he was happyPresent ProgressiveHe said: "I'm looking for my keys"Past ProgressiveHe said that he was looking for his keysSimple PastHe said: "I visited New York last year"Past Perfect SimpleHe said that he had visited New York the previous year.Present PerfectHe said: "I've lived here for a long time "Past PerfectHe said that he had lived there for a long timePast PerfectHe said: "They had finished the work when I arrived"Past PerfectHe said that they had finished the work when he had arrived"Past ProgressiveHe said: "I was playing football when the accident occurred"Past Perfect ProgressiveHe said that he had been playing football when the accident had occurredPresent Perfect ProgressiveHe said: "I have been playing football for two hours."Past Perfect ProgressiveHe said that he had been playing football for two hoursPast Perfect ProgressiveHe said: "I had been reading a newspaper when the light went off"Past Perfect ProgressiveHe said that he had been reading a newspaper when the light had gone offFuture Simple (will+verb)He said: "I will open the door."Conditional (would+verb)He said that he would open the door.Conditional (would+verb)He said: "I would buy Mercedes if I were rich"Conditional (would+verb)He said that he would buy Mercedes if he had been rich"The modal verbs could, should, would, might, needn't, ought to, and used to do not normally change.Example:He said: "She might be right." – He said that she might be right.He told her: "You needn't see a doctor." – He told her that she needn't see a doctor.Other modal verbs such as can, shall, will, must, and may change:ModalDirect speechReported speechcan" I can do it."He said that he could do it.may"May I go out?"He wanted to know if he might go out.must"She must apply for the job."He said that she must/had to apply for the job.will"They will call you."He told her that they would call her.4. Place, demonstratives, and time expressionsPlace, demonstratives, and time expressions change if the context of the reported statement (i.e. the location and/or the period of time) is different from that of the direct speech.In the following table, you will find the different changes of place; demonstratives, and time expressions.Direct SpeechReported SpeechTime Expressionstodaythat daynowthenyesterdaythe day before... days ago... days beforelast weekthe week before/the previous weeknext yearthe following year/the next year / the year aftertomorrowthe next day / the following dayPlaceherethereDemonstrativesthis/thathesethoseB. Reporting QuestionsWhen transforming questions, check whether you have to change:The pronounsThe place and time expressionsThe tenses (backshift)Also, note that you have to:transform the question into an indirect questionuse the question word (where, when, what, how) or if/whetherTypes of questionsDirect speechReported speechWith question words (what, why, where, how...)Why" don't you speak English?"He asked me why I didn't speak English.Without question words (yes or no questions)"Do you speak English?"He asked me whether/if I spoke English.>>>EXERCISE ON REPORTING QUESTIONS



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