

Direct and Indirect Speech

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When using indirect or reported speech, the form changes. Usually, indirect speech is introduced by the verb 'say' as in I said, Bill said or they said. Using the verb say in this tense indicates that something was said in the past. In these cases, the main verb in the reported sentence is put in the past. If the main verb is already in past tense, then the tense changes to another past tense; it can almost be seen as moving even further into the past.

Changes in verb tense also characterise other situations using indirect speech. With indirect speech, the use of that is optional.

"Note that when a Yes/No question is being asked in direct speech, then a construction with 'if or whether' is used. If a whether/ If question is being asked, then use the whether/ it' to introduce the clause. Also note that with indirect speech, these are examples of embedded questions.

The situation changes if instead of the common 'said' another part 'to say is used. In that case, the verb tenses usually remain the same. Some examples of this situation are given below.

Another situation is the one in which modal constructions are used. If the verb 'said' used, then the form of the modal, or another modal that has a past meaning is used. While not all of the possibilities have been listed here, there are enough to provide samples of the main rules governing the use of indirect or reported speech. For other "situations, try to extrapolate from the examples here or better still, refer to a good grammar text or reference book.

Some other verbs that can be used to introduce direct speech are: ask, report, tell, announce, suggest and enquire. They are not used interchangeably; check a grammar or usage book for further information.

Direct Speech

When the actual or exact words of a speaker are presented, it is called direct speech (sometimes called quoted speech).

Here what a person says appears within quotation marks ("..." and should be word to word.

For example: She said, 'Today's lesson is on presentations.'

or

"Today's lesson is on presentations," she said.

Indirect Speech

Indirect speech (sometimes called reported speech) doesn't use quotation marks to enclose what the person said and it doesn't have to be word to word.

When reporting speech the tense usually changes. This is because when we use reported speech, we are usually talking about a time in the past (because obviously the person who spoke originally spoke in the past). The verbs therefore usually have to be in the past too. For example:

Direct speech —> Indirect speech

I'm going to the cinema", he said. —> He said he was going to the cinema.

Tense Change

As a rule when you report something someone has said, you go back a tense (the tense on the left changes to the tense on the right).

Time Change

If the reported sentence contains an expression of time, you must change it to fit in with the time of reporting.

For example, we need to change words like 'here and yesterday' if they have different meanings at the time and place of reporting.

Pronoun Change

In reported speech, the pronoun often changes.

Reporting Verbs

'Said, told and asked' are the most common verbs used in indirect speech.

We use 'asked' to report questions:

For example: I asked Lynne what time the lesson started