

44 Tenses in reported speech

In reported speech, the reported verb usually “goes back” a tense. Time and place references and pronouns sometimes also change.

See also:

Present continuous 4 Past continuous 10

Past perfect simple 13 Modal verbs 56

44.1 REPORTED SPEECH IN DIFFERENT TENSES

The tense used in reported speech is usually one tense back in time from the tense in direct speech.

I'm working in New York.



She said she was working in New York.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS



PAST CONTINUOUS

I've been to China twice.



He said that he'd been to China twice.

PRESENT PERFECT



PAST PERFECT

I will call you soon.



He said he would call them soon.

FUTURE WITH "WILL"



MODAL VERB "WOULD"

We can speak Japanese.



They said that they could speak Japanese.

MODAL VERB "CAN"



MODAL VERB "COULD"

44.2 REPORTED SPEECH AND THE PAST SIMPLE

The past simple in direct speech can either stay as the past simple or change to the past perfect in reported speech. The meaning is the same.

I **arrived** in Delhi on Saturday.

DIRECT SPEECH
WITH PAST SIMPLE

He said { he **arrived**
he'd **arrived** } in Delhi on Saturday.

REPORTED SPEECH WITH
PAST SIMPLE OR PAST PERFECT

44.3 REPORTED SPEECH WITHOUT CHANGE OF TENSE

If the situation described is ongoing, the verb does not have to change tense in reported speech.



I **like** eating cake.

Amelia said that she **likes** eating cake.

Amelia still likes eating cake.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



Your hat **looks** great.

He said that my hat **looks** great.



I **love** your tie.

He said that he **loves** my tie.



44.4 TIME AND PLACE REFERENCES

If speech is reported some time after it was said, words used to talk about times and places may need to change.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



I'll call you **tomorrow**.



He said he'd call me **the following day**.



The weather is nice **here**.



She told me the weather was nice **there**.



We'll have a party **this weekend**.



They said they'd have a party **that weekend**.



I saw you **last week**.



She said she'd seen me **the week before**.



I'm starting a new job **today**.



You told her you were starting a new job **that day**.

44.5 OTHER CHANGES IN REPORTED SPEECH

In reported speech, pronouns may also need to be changed to ensure they refer to the correct person or thing.



I don't believe **these** ghost stories.

He said that he didn't believe **those** ghost stories.

"These" is replaced by the more distant "those."



This house gives me the creeps.

He said that **that** house gave him the creeps.

"This" is replaced by the more distant "that."



FURTHER EXAMPLES



I don't like **my** new haircut.

He said that he didn't like **his** new haircut.



I can't wait to move into **our** new house.

He said that he couldn't wait to move into **their** new house.



Are you going to come with **us**?

He asked if I was going to go with **them**.



These are the best pastries I've ever tasted.

She said **they** were the best pastries she'd ever tasted.

