

Reported speech

English Grammar · B1

Reporting Statements

Reported speech

Direct	Reported
the words	tense back
"I am tired"	<i>He said he was tired</i>

Reported speech: reference card grid

Reported speech is used to **report** what someone said, without quotation marks. Common reporting verbs are **said** or **told**:

- **say** is followed **without** the listener: He said (that) ...
- **tell** is followed **with** the listener: He told **me** (that) ...

He said that he was tired.

He said he was tired. (Original quote: "I am tired.")

Note that can be omitted: He said he was tired. The meaning remains the same.

Backshifting Tenses

When reporting, if the reporting verb is in the past tense (said / told), the tense in the reported clause usually **shifts back one step**:

- am / is → **was**; are → **were**; do / does → **did**.
- will → **would**; can → **could**; present perfect / past simple → **past perfect**.

Direct Speech: *"I will help you,"* she said.

Indirect Speech:

She said she would help me.

She said she would help me. (will → would, I → she, you → me)

Pronouns and time expressions also change: I → he / she, now → then, today → that day, tomorrow → the next day.

Note If reporting a **general truth**, tenses need not shift: *He said the sun rises in the east.*

Common Errors

- × ~~He said me the truth.~~ / ~~He told that he was busy.~~ → ✓ He **told me**... / He **said (that)**... — say does not take a listener, tell must take a listener; this is the opposite of common mistakes.
- × ~~He asked me where did I live.~~ → ✓ He asked me where **I lived**. — Reported questions must change to **statement word order**, removing did.
- × ~~She asked me that I was hungry.~~ → ✓ She asked me **if / whether** I was hungry. — Report yes/no questions using if / whether, not that.
- × ~~He said he will come tomorrow.~~ → ✓ He said he **would** come **the next day**. — Tenses and time expressions must shift together.