

Reported speech

Explanations

Problems

This unit assumes that the basic rules for forming reported speech are already known.

- The most important rule is to use verb forms that are natural in the situation.

'I'm happy to help you' she said.

*She told me she **is** happy to help us.*

In the above example, the verb has not been put one stage back in the past.

In the following example, the same is true.

'I wanted to go to the cinema, but John wasn't so keen,' said Sue.

*Sue said that she **wanted** to go to the cinema, but John **wasn't** so keen.*

- Reported speech with modal auxiliaries

If the reporting verb is in a past verb form, modals change where there is a 'past' equivalent.

Will – would can – could may – might

Could, would, and might do not change.

*I might be late. She said (that) she **might** be late.*

Should changes to *would* if it is used as a first person form of *would*.

*I should love to come. She said (that) she **would** love to come.*

Otherwise *should* remains unchanged.

*You should rest. They said (that) I **should** rest.*

Must can be reported as either *had to* or remain as *must*.

- Reported speech with conditional sentences

After a past tense reporting verb, real situations include verb form changes.

If we leave now, we'll catch the train.

*I **told** him that if we **left** then we'd **catch** the train.*

In reported hypothetical situations, verb form changes are not made if the event has reference to a possible future.

If you came back tomorrow, I'd be able to help you.

*She said that **if I came back the next day, she'd be able to help me.***

If the event is clearly hypothetical and impossible, time changes are made.

If I had a spanner, I could fix it.

*He said that if he **had had a spanner he could have fixed it.***

Hypothetical past conditional sentences do not change.

- *Don't think*

Statements reported with verbs of thinking such as *think*, *expect*, *suppose* can transfer the negative from the statement to the verb.

I suppose she won't come. (This means I don't suppose she'll come.)

Reporting verbs

There are numerous reporting verbs, which report the words of others, or our own words and thoughts. Only a selection is given here. Other examples are included in the activities. Only the most useful categories are given here. It is advisable to use a dictionary to check on how reporting verbs are used. See Grammar 19, 21 and 22 for prepositions or -ing forms following verbs.

- Verbs followed by *that* + clause (with * can be followed by a person)

<i>add</i>	<i>confirm</i>	<i>feel</i>	<i>predict</i>	<i>say</i>
<i>admit</i>	<i>consider</i>	<i>hope</i>	<i>promise*</i>	<i>state</i>
<i>agree</i>	<i>decide</i>	<i>imply</i>	<i>reassure*</i>	<i>suggest</i>
<i>announce</i>	<i>deny</i>	<i>insist</i>	<i>reckon</i>	<i>suppose</i>
<i>argue</i>	<i>doubt</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>remark</i>	<i>tell*</i>
<i>believe</i>	<i>estimate</i>	<i>mention</i>	<i>repeat</i>	<i>think</i>
<i>claim</i>	<i>expect*</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>reply</i>	<i>threaten*</i>
<i>complain</i>	<i>explain</i>	<i>persuade</i>	<i>report*</i>	<i>warn*</i>

- Verbs followed by person + *to*

advise forbid invite persuade tell ask instruct order
remind warn

- Verbs followed by subjunctive or *should*

Most of these verbs can also be used in the other ways given.

As these verbs contain the sense that someone 'should do' something, *should* can follow them.

They suggested that she should apply again.

More formally, the subjunctive can be used instead of *should*. This is formed from the base of the verb (without third person 's').

They suggested that she apply again.

Some other verbs of this type are:

advise (also: someone to do/against something)

agree (also: to do something, *that* + clause)

demand (also: to do something)

insist (also: on someone doing something)

prefer (also: someone to do something)

propose (also: doing something)

recommend (also: doing something)

request (also: someone to do something)

suggest (also: *that* + clause)

urge (also: someone to do something)

- Verbs which can be followed by *that* + clause containing *would*
All these verbs report statements containing *will*. These verbs can also be followed by 'to do something'.

I'll leave at 8.00.

She decided to leave at 8.00.

She decided (that) she would leave at 8.00.

Others are: *expect, hope, promise, threaten.*

Functions

- Many verbs describe a function, rather than report words.

Look, if I were you I'd leave early.

She advised me to leave early.

Examples are:

admit complain request suggest

advise invite remind warn

agree persuade threaten

- Some verbs describe actions.

Hi, Dave, how are you?

He greeted me.

Examples are:

accept, congratulate, decide, greet, interrupt, introduce

Changes of viewpoint

Changes of time, place and person reference are assumed known at this level. In reported speech, there is no longer a clear reference which can be understood by two people in the same place.

*I left the parcel on **this chair**.*

In reported speech one would have to specify which chair:

*He said he had left the parcel on **the chair by the window**.*

Or the reference may be replaced by a more general one:

*I love **this town**.*

*She said that she loved **the town**.*

Practice

1 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- The government spokesperson denied/refused that there was a crisis.
- Jane said me/told me there was nothing the matter.
- Peter persuaded me/insisted me to stay to dinner.
- The director of studies advised me/suggested me to spend more time in the library.
- Sheila explained me/warned me not to leave the heater on all night.
- The chairperson mentioned us/reminded us that time was extremely short.
- Bill answered them/replied them with a detailed description of his plans.
- Michael and Sarah announced/reported that they were going to get married.
- Paul accepted/expected that he had made a mistake, and apologised.
- The manager confirmed/reassured that our room had been reserved.

2 Rewrite each sentence in reported speech, using the verbs given in the appropriate verb form. Some may be negative.

- 'I think I'll take the brown pair,' said the customer.
The customer decided to take the brown pair. (decide)
 (decide) + (will)
 (say) + (will)
- 'Me? No, I didn't take Sue's calculator,' said Bob.
 (deny)
 (deny)
- 'Don't forget to buy some milk, Andy,' said Clare.
 (remind)
 (say) + (should)
 (remind) + (need)
- 'I'm sorry I couldn't come on Saturday,' said David.
 (say) + (could)
 (say) + (be able to)
 (apologise for)
- 'Why don't you go back to Singapore, Brian?' I said.
 (ask) + (do)
 (suggest) + (should)
 (suggest)
- 'Make sure you don't take the A20, Tim,' said Jack.
 (say) + (should)
 (warn)
 (warn)

3 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- a) 'Helen, would you like to come to lunch on Sunday?' asked Mary.
if
 Mary *asked Helen if she would like* to come to lunch on Sunday.
- b) 'You are not allowed to smoke in your room, Dick,' said his mother.
forbade
 Dick's mother in his room.
- c) Sue thought it would be a good idea for me to see a doctor.
advised
 Sue see a doctor.
- d) The minister proposed regular meetings for the committee.
suggested
 The minister should meet regularly.
- e) Jack demanded urgent action from the police.
do
 Jack demanded something urgently.
- f) My bank manager invited me to visit him at home.
could
 My bank manager visit him at home.
- g) 'No, I really don't want to stay the night, Sophia,' Ann said.
staying
 Ann insisted the night at Sophia's house.
- h) 'I'll call off the football match if you don't behave,' the teacher said.
threatened
 The teacher the children's behaviour improved.
- i) 'Ok mum, I'll do my homework, I promise,' said Laura.
that
 Laura do her homework.
- j) 'Congratulations on getting engaged, Sue,' said Harry.
congratulated
 Harry engagement.

4 Underline the most suitable word to complete each sentence.

- a) I thought Jim would say something about his new job. But he didn't mention/state/declare it.
- b) Sorry, I wasn't being insulting. I simply offered/reassured/remarked that you seem to have put on rather a lot of weight recently.
- c) The police requested/estimated/advised that the crowd was under 50,000, although the organisers of the march put it at nearer 100,000.
- d) The children complained/threatened/persuaded that their parents were always checking up on them.
- e) It has been objected/hoped/predicted that by the year 2050 some capital cities will be almost uninhabitable because of the effects of air pollution.
- f) During the months before Smith's transfer from City, it had been rumoured/doubted/threatened that he and the manager had come to blows in the dressing-room, though this was denied by the club.
- g) Brown forbade/recommended/claimed that the arresting officers had treated him roughly, and that one of them had punched him in the eye.
- h) An army spokesman stressed that all troops patrolling the streets had been denied/ordered/announced to issue clear warnings before firing any shots.
- i) Although he didn't say so directly, the Prime Minister told/ordered/suggested that an agreement between the two sides was within reach.
- j) The witness suggested/insisted/gave her name and address to the court before the cross-examination began.

5 Complete the text with one word in each space.

The case of the break-in at a Cambridge home entered its third day today. The accused's defence was based on the fact that he (1) could not have entered the house at 6.30. He claimed (2) have been playing football at the time, and stated that several witnesses could confirm this. At this point, the prosecution (3) him of changing his story, as he had previously stated that he had been at home at the (4) of the break-in. The defendant agreed that his memory (5) not in the best of shape, as he had been (6) from bouts of depression. The judge stepped in, reminding the defendant that he (7) taken an oath to tell the truth, and warning (8) of the severe consequences of lying in court. The defendant said that he had simply forgotten (9) the football match, and insisted (10) he was not changing his story.

6 Using the information in the e-mail as a guide, complete each space in the letter with a verb. The first letters of the verbs have been given.

TO: Roberts.hifi.co.uk

FROM: Dave@electricalsupplies.com

We are sorry that our computer ordering system went on the blink last week. Don't worry, the system is now up and running again, but we think goods will arrive 2 or 3 days late. I'd guess the goods you've just ordered should arrive round about Thursday. Thanks a lot for telling us about the problem with the ZP200. You'll be pleased to know the problem's been put right now. Re the exhibition you're organising, it seems you want to return any goods you don't sell. We're certainly interested, yes, but could I ask for more details before I let you know. Finally, just to tell you, as of 1st May our warehouse is now open 24 hours a day!

Dear Mrs Henderson,

We would like to (1) a..... *pologise* for the failure of our computer ordering system last week. Please (2) b..... reassured that the system is now fully functional again. It is (3) a..... that the goods ordered will be delayed by two or three working days. The (4) e..... arrival time for your latest order is Thursday.

We are grateful to you for (5) r..... the defect in the ZP200 model. We are happy to (6) a..... that the defect has now been remedied.

You (7) m..... the possibility of taking goods from us 'on sale or return' at an exhibition you are organising. We can certainly (8) c..... our interest, but we would like to (9) r..... further information before we commit ourselves to a decision.

Please be (10) a..... that as of 1 May our warehouse is now open 24 hours a day.

Yours sincerely,

David Smith

→ SEE ALSO

Grammar 19: Verbs + infinitive or -ing

Grammar 21: Verbs + prepositions

Grammar 22: Prepositions