Reported speech tells someone what another person said, without using their exact words. Tom said, 'I am tired.' In reported speech this becomes: Tom said that he was tired. Three things usually change: the tense steps one step back, the pronouns change to fit the new speaker, and words about time and place may change too.

The backshift table

Direct speech	Reported speech	Watch out for
present simple	past simple	I work - he worked
present continuous	past continuous	I am working - he was working
present perfect	past perfect	I have finished - he had finished
past simple	past perfect	I finished - he had finished
will	would	I will come - he would come
can	could	I can swim - he could swim
must	had to	I must go - he had to go

Time words move too: now becomes then, today becomes that day, yesterday becomes the day before, tomorrow becomes the next day, here becomes there, and this becomes that. If the fact is still true now, many speakers keep the present tense: He said that the shop opens at nine - and it still does.

Say or tell?

- Say is followed by words, with no person needed: She said that she was busy. She said to me that she was busy.

- Tell r

Reported questions

Questions become statements, so the word order becomes normal and there is no question mark at the end. Yes or no questions use if or whether. Question-word questions keep their question word.

- *'Where do you live?' - He asked me where I lived.*
- *'Are you ready?' - She asked if I was ready.*
- *'When will you visit?' - They asked when we would visit.*

Reported commands and requests

Use tell or ask plus a person plus to and the base verb. For negatives, use not to.

- *'Sit down, please.' - The teacher told us to sit down.*
- *'Do not be late.' - She asked me not to be late.*
- *'Please help me.' - He asked her to help him.*

Quick practice - report these sentences

1. 'I am hungry,' said Bilal.

2. 'We have finished the work,' they said.
3. 'Can you drive?' she asked me.
4. 'Open your books,' the teacher said to the class.
5. 'I will phone you tomorrow,' he said.

Answers

1. Bilal said that he was hungry.
2. They said that they had finished the work.
3. She asked me if I could drive.
4. The teacher told the class to open their books.
5. He said that he would phone me the next day.