Reported Speech

Reported Statements

When do we use reported speech? Sometimes someone says a sentence, for example "I'm going to the cinema tonight". Later, maybe we want to tell someone else what the first person said. Here's how it works:

We use a reporting verb like 'say' or 'tell'. If this verb is in the present tense, it's easy. We just put 'she says' and then the sentence.

Direct speech: I **like** ice cream.

Reported speech: She says she **likes** ice cream.

We don't need to change the tense, though probably we do need to change the 'person' from 'I' to 'she', for example. We also may need to change words like 'my' and 'your'.

On the other hand, if the reporting verb is in the past tense, then usually we change the tenses in the reported speech:

Direct speech: I **like** ice cream.

Reported speech: She said she **liked** ice cream.

Tense	Direct Speech	Reported Speech
present simple	"I like ice cream."	She said (that) she liked ice cream.
present continuous	"I am living in London."	She said she was living in London.
past simple	"I bought a car."	She said she had bought a car OR She said she bought a car.
past continuous	"I was walking along the street."	She said she had been walking along the street.
present perfect	"I haven't seen Julie."	She said she hadn't seen Julie.
past perfect*	"I had taken English lessons before."	She said she had taken English lessons before.
will	"I'll see you later."	She said she would see me later.
would*	"I would help, but…"	She said she would help but...
can	"I can speak perfect English."	She said she could speak perfect English.
could*	"I could swim when I was four."	She said she could swim when she was four.
shall	"I shall come later."	She said she would come later.
should*	"I should call my mother."	She said she should call her mother.
might*	"I might be late."	She said she might be late.
must	"I must study at the weekend."	She said she must study at the weekend. OR She said she had to study at the weekend.

* doesn't change.

Occasionally, we don't need to change the present tense into the past if the information in direct speech is still true (but this is only for things which are general facts, and even then usually we like to change the tense):

Direct speech:	The sky **is** blue.
Reported speech:	She said that the sky **is/was** blue.

Reported Questions

So now you have no problem with making reported speech from positive and negative sentences. But how about questions?

Direct speech: Where do you **live**?
Reported speech: She asked me where **I lived.**

How can we make the reported speech here? In fact, it's not so different from reported statements. The tense changes are the same, and we keep the question word. The very important thing though is that, once we tell the question to someone else, it isn't a question any more. So we need to change the grammar to a normal positive sentence.:

Do you see how I made it? The direct question is in the present simple tense. We make a present simple question with 'do' or 'does' so I need to take that away. Then I need to change the verb to the past simple. Another example:

Direct speech: Where **is** Julie?
Reported speech: She asked me where Julie **was.**

The direct question is the present simple of 'be'. We make the question form of the present simple of be by inverting (changing the position of) the subject and verb. So, we need to change them back before putting the verb into the past simple. Here are some more examples:

Direct Question	Reported Question
"Where is the Post Office, please?"	She asked me where the Post Office was.
"What are you doing?"	She asked me what I was doing.
"Who was that fantastic man?"	She asked me who that fantastic man had been.

So much for 'wh' questions. But, what if you need to report a 'yes / no' question? We don't have any question words to help us. Instead, we use 'if':

Direct speech: Do you like chocolate?

Reported speech: She asked me if I liked chocolate.

No problem? Here are a few more examples:

Direct Question	Reported Question
"Do you love me?"	He asked me if I loved him.
"Have you ever been to Mexico?"	She asked me if I had ever been to Mexico.
"Are you living here?"	She asked me if I was living here.

Reported Requests

There's more! What if someone asks you to do something (in a polite way)?
For example:

Direct speech:	Close the window, please.
Or:	Could you close the window please?
Or:	Would you mind closing the window please?

All of these requests mean the same thing, so we don't need to report every word when we tell another person about it. We simply use **'ask me + to + infinitive':**

Reported speech:	She **asked me to close** the window.

Here are a few more examples:

Direct Request	Reported Request
"Please help me".	She asked me to help her.
"Please don't smoke".	She asked me not to smoke.
"Could you bring my book tonight?"	She asked me to bring her book that night.
"Could you pass the milk, please?"	She asked me to pass the milk.
"Would you mind coming early tomorrow?"	She asked me to come early the next day.

To report a negative request, use 'not':

Direct speech:	Please **don't** be late.
Reported speech:	She **asked us not** to be late.

Reported Orders

And finally, how about if someone doesn't ask so politely? We can call this an 'order' in English, when someone tells you very directly to do something. For example:

Direct speech**: Sit down!**

In fact, we make this into reported speech in the same way as a request. We just use 'tell' instead of 'ask.'

Reported speech: She told me to **sit down.**

Direct Order	Reported Order
"Go to bed!"	He told the child to go to bed.
"Don't worry!"	He told her not to worry.
"Be on time!"	He told me to be on time.
"Don't smoke!"	He told us not to smoke.

Time Expressions with Reported Speech

Sometimes when we change direct speech into reported speech we have to change time expressions too. We don't always have to do this, however. It depends on when we heard the direct speech and when we say the reported speech. For example:

It's Monday. Julie says "I'm leaving **today**".

If I tell someone *on Monday,* I say "Julie said she was leaving **today**".

If I tell someone *on Tuesday*, I say "Julie said she was leaving **yesterday**".

If I tell someone *on Wednesday,* I say "Julie said she was leaving **on Monday**".

If I tell someone *a month later*, I say "Julie said she was leaving **that day**".

So, there's no easy conversion. You really have to think about when the direct speech was said.

Here's a table of some possible conversions.

now	then / at that time
today	yesterday / that day / Tuesday / the 27th of June
yesterday	The day before yesterday / the day before / Wednesday / the 5th of December
last night	the night before, Thursday night
last week	the week before / the previous week
tomorrow	today / the next day / the following day / Friday