

Direct and indirect speech

Keep this page nearby. Pages 2-4 contain the exercises; pages 5-7 contain suggested answers.

Choose the structure first. Check the speaker/listener, sentence type, reporting time/place and reporting verb before changing the tense.

Original type	Reporting pattern
Statement	said + (that) + clause; told + listener + (that) + clause
Yes/no question	asked + if/whether + subject + verb
Wh-question	asked + question word + subject + verb
Request / negative instruction	asked/told + listener + to / not to + verb

Conventional backshift after said / asked

Direct verb form	Backshifted form
Present simple / continuous	Past simple / continuous
Present perfect / perfect continuous	Past perfect / past perfect continuous
Past simple / continuous	Usually past perfect / past perfect continuous
Past perfect	No further backshift
Will / can / may	Would / could / might
Would / could / should / might	Usually unchanged

Reference words depend on context. When the original reference is no longer accurate: today -> that day; tomorrow -> the next/following day; yesterday -> the day before; here -> there. A name or date can be clearer.

Do not change automatically. A present reporting verb does not itself require backshift. Still-true facts can remain present. Past perfect stays past perfect. For must, distinguish obligation (often had to in a past report) from deduction (often must).

Example: On Monday, Lina said, "I will bring my notes tomorrow." A later report: Lina said that she would bring her notes the following day.

Use: original classroom and self-study practice; not an official exam paper. Grammar reference: [British Council LearnEnglish - Reported speech](#).

Statements and backshift

Report each sentence later, on a different day. Use said/told and conventional backshift. You are the original listener in item 9. Adjust pronouns and time words; do not add information.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Sara said, "I am preparing the lesson."

2. Daniyal said, "I have booked the room."

3. The teachers said, "We will check the answers."

4. Hina said, "I can read the small print."

5. Amir said, "I found the key yesterday."

6. Nida said, "I was checking the timetable."

7. Ali said, "I had saved a spare copy."

8. Ayesha said, "I will bring my folder tomorrow."

9. Rida told me, "I need your ruler."

10. The coaches said, "We have been practising for an hour."

Questions and requests

You are the original listener, or one of the listeners where *us* is used. For 11-16, use asked and conventional backshift. For 17-20, use object + *to* / *not to*. In 20, report later from another place.

Name: _____ Date: _____

11. Musa asked me, "Are you ready?"

12. Anum asked me, "Have you finished the worksheet?"

13. The teacher asked us, "Do you understand the example?"

14. Bilal asked me, "Where did you put the answer sheet?"

15. Safa asked me, "Why are you leaving early?"

16. The tutor asked me, "Who wrote the first paragraph?"

17. The teacher said to us, "Open your notebooks."

18. Usman said to me, "Please wait outside."

19. The guide said to us, "Do not cross the rope."

20. Naila said to me, "Could you carry this box, please?"

Editing and context

For 21-25, correct the reporting structure without changing the intended message. For 26-30, follow the stated context and verb instruction. A correct report may use more than one wording.

Name: _____ Date: _____

21. Correct: She said me that she was tired.

22. Correct: He asked where was the office.

23. Correct: The tutor told us don't open the envelope.

24. Correct: Rana suggested us to compare the answers.

25. Correct: He asked me whether did I need a pen.

26. Maria says, "I need some paper." Report with the present verb says.

27. The teacher said, "A rectangle has four right angles." Keep the general fact in the present.

28. It is still Monday. Ten minutes ago Nadia said, "I am busy today." Report with said; keep the current situation in the present.

29. Danish said, "I should check the spelling." Report with said.

30. I said to Hira, "You can use my notes." Report my own words later, using told and conventional backshift.

Answers 1-10

Suggested answers for the stated instructions. That is often optional in statements. Equivalent accurate wording and contractions are acceptable; do not change who did what.

1. Sara said that she was preparing the lesson.

Present continuous becomes past continuous in this backshift exercise.

2. Daniyal said that he had booked the room.

Present perfect becomes past perfect.

3. The teachers said that they would check the answers.

We refers to the teachers; will becomes would.

4. Hina said that she could read the small print.

Can becomes could when backshifted.

5. Amir said that he had found the key the day before.

Use past perfect for this task. The previous day is also acceptable.

6. Nida said that she had been checking the timetable.

Past continuous becomes past perfect continuous in this task.

7. Ali said that he had saved a spare copy.

Past perfect does not backshift further.

8. Ayesha said that she would bring her folder the following day.

The next day is also acceptable; my refers to Ayesha.

9. Rida told me that she needed my ruler.

You are the original listener, so your becomes my.

10. The coaches said that they had been practising for an hour.

Present perfect continuous becomes past perfect continuous.

Answers 11-20

Suggested answers for the stated instructions. That is often optional in statements. Equivalent accurate wording and contractions are acceptable; do not change who did what.

11. Musa asked me if I was ready.

Whether is also acceptable. Use subject + verb, not was I.

12. Anum asked me whether I had finished the worksheet.

If is also acceptable. Present perfect becomes past perfect.

13. The teacher asked us if we understood the example.

Whether is also acceptable. Remove question-forming do.

14. Bilal asked me where I had put the answer sheet.

Keep where; use statement order and the specified backshift.

15. Safa asked me why I was leaving early.

The reported clause is I was leaving, not was I leaving.

16. The tutor asked me who had written the first paragraph.

Who is the subject. Do not add another subject after it.

17. The teacher told us to open our notebooks.

Report the instruction using object + to-infinitive.

18. Usman asked me to wait outside.

Asked me to is appropriate for the polite request.

19. The guide told us not to cross the rope.

Use object + not to + verb for the negative instruction.

20. Naila asked me to carry that box.

Report the request as instructed. This becomes that in the stated distant context.

Answers 21-30

Suggested answers for the stated instructions. That is often optional in statements. Equivalent accurate wording and contractions are acceptable; do not change who did what.

21. She told me that she was tired.

Also acceptable: She said to me that she was tired.

22. He asked where the office was.

Use statement word order inside the reported question.

23. The tutor told us not to open the envelope.

Use not to for the reported negative instruction.

24. Rana suggested comparing the answers.

Also acceptable: Rana suggested that we compare the answers.

25. He asked me whether I needed a pen.

If can replace whether. Remove question-forming did.

26. Maria says that she needs some paper.

A present reporting verb does not itself require backshift.

27. The teacher said that a rectangle has four right angles.

The prompt asks you to preserve the continuing general fact.

28. Nadia said that she is busy today.

Today still names the same day. Was can work in another report, but this task asks for the present.

29. Danish said that he should check the spelling.

Should normally remains unchanged.

30. I told Hira that she could use my notes.

The reporter remains I; my still belongs to the reporter.

Marking tip: For 1-16 and 30, the task requests conventional backshift. Other contexts may allow an unchanged tense or past simple. For 27-28, the instructions deliberately practise a continuing fact or current situation.