

# Reported Speech

## What is reported speech?

Reported speech, which is also known as indirect speech, conveys the meaning of what was said earlier without a word-for-word quote. For example:

quoted speech: Frank said, "I want to take a vacation around the world."

reported speech: Frank said that he wanted to take a vacation around the world.

The second example reports the content of an earlier conversation in which Frank talked about his travel dreams. The first example tells exactly what Frank said.

## What is the sentence structure?

Reported speech statements all follow the same structure:

introductory statement | conjunction (that) | subject | verb | object/complement

Frank said | (that) | he | wanted to take | a vacation around the world.

The scientist said | (that) | he | tested | new cancer drugs five years ago.

Because the information may be reported in a different place, a different time, and by a different person, several parts of the sentence must also change.

**pronouns:** A change of speaker requires a change of pronouns.

Frank said, "I want to take a vacation around the world."

Frank said that *he* wanted to take a vacation around the world.

**verb tense:** With the shift from quoted speech to reported speech, the present tense generally changes to the past tense. If the original sentence was in the past tense, then the reported speech may use either the past perfect or the simple past. Most verb tenses will experience this "backshift."

The scientist said, "I *tested* new cancer drugs five years ago."

The scientist said that he *tested* new cancer drugs five years ago.

The scientist said that he *had tested* new cancer drugs five years ago.

**place and time:** Place and time may similarly result in a shift of point of view. Some common words are this > that and here > there.

The candidate said, "I will *come* back *here* in the spring."

The candidate said that he would *go* back *there* in the spring.

## How is reported speech used?

Reported speech most often appears in conversation rather than in written English.

Tom thinks that banking stocks will do well this year.

The Australian Prime Minister said that he would improve relations with China.

## Is there additional information on reported speech?

Yes, there are a few points. In reported speech, the conjunction *that* may be dropped. For example: The scientist said that he tested cancer drugs five years ago. If a situation is current, in the future, or permanent, then the present tense may be used.

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