

Reported speech

English B1

What this topic teaches

Retelling what someone said. Direct speech quotes the exact words: *She said, "I am tired."* **Reported speech** rebuilds the sentence: *She said (that) she **was** tired.*

- The main verb steps **one tense back**: *am* → *was*, *will* → *would*, *can* → *could*.
- Pronouns and time words follow the new speaker: *I* → *she*, *my* → *her*, *today* → *that day*, *here* → *there*, *tomorrow* → *the next day*.
- Memory hook: reported speech is a retelling, not a recording. The words move house, and everything steps back to fit the new address.
- Chinese retells without changing anything: – the verb stays put. English moves the verb back because English verbs always carry time.

The step-back table

Direct	Reported
"I am tired."	She said she was tired.
"I am watching TV."	He said he was watching TV.
"I have finished ."	She said she had finished .
"I ate noodles."	He said he had eaten noodles.
"I will call you."	She said she would call me.
"I can swim."	He said he could swim.

- Everything steps one tense back. The past simple steps into the past perfect – the flashback from topic 3 earns its keep here.
- △ If the reporting is immediate or still true, the step-back is optional: "*The teacher says the test **is** on Monday*" (it still is). News travels in the present; history steps back.

say, tell, ask

- **say** something (to someone): *She said she was tired. She said **to me** that she was tired.*
- **tell** someone something: *She **told me** she was tired.* – *tell* needs a person attached.
- △ "*She told that she was tired*" × – *tell* cannot travel without its person. "*She said me*" × – *say* takes *to* before a person.
- **ask** for questions: *He asked (me) if I was OK.*

Reported questions: the flip stays home

The question machinery switches off inside a reported question. The word order becomes a statement’s order.

Direct question	Reported
“Are you tired?”	She asked if I was tired.
“Where do you live?”	He asked me where I lived .
“What have you eaten?”	They asked what I had eaten .

- Yes/no questions use *if* or *whether*; question-word questions keep the *wh*-word.
- △ The flip stays home: “*He asked where did I live*” × → *where I lived*. Inside a reported question, the sentence is a statement wearing a question’s hat.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Chinese never back-shifts.** *Tā shuō tā hěn kùn* keeps everything in place. English moves the verb: *She said she **was** tired*. The step-back is not optional decoration; it is how English marks “this is a retelling”.
- △ **The reported question is not a question.** No flip, no *do*: *He asked where I lived*, never “*where did I live*”.
- △ **Move the time words.** *today* → *that day*, *tomorrow* → *the next day*, *here* → *there*, *this* → *that*. “*She said she would call me today*” (reported yesterday) confuses the calendar.
- △ **tell needs its person.** *told me*, *told us*, *told the class* – never bare “*told that...*”.

Say it aloud

Play the rumour game: report what your partner said, step by step.

- “I am hungry.” → She said she was hungry.
- “I have never eaten durian.” → He said he had never eaten durian. (We believed him.)
- “I will finish the homework tonight.” → They said they would finish it that night. (Nobody believed them.)
- “Can you swim?” → She asked me if I could swim. I said I could. The pool disagreed.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *"I am tired," she said.* → **She said she was tired.** *am* steps back to *was*.
2. *"I will call you," he said.* → **He said he would call me.** *will* → *would*, *you* → *me*.
3. *"Where do you live?"* → **He asked me where I lived.** The flip stays home.
4. *She _____ me she was tired.* – **told.** *tell* needs its person; *said* would need *to* *me*.
5. *"I have finished," they said.* → **They said they had finished.** The perfect steps back to the past perfect.