ENGLISH GRAMMAR · DEEP DIVE

Reported Speech and Backshift

Turning what someone said into what you say they said: the one-step-back rule for tenses, the pronouns and time words that move with it, and when nothing shifts at all.

B1 · reported speech · backshift · say / tell

one step back

present → past, past → past perfect, will → would.

"I'm tired" → he said he was tired

He said he would help us the next day.

say / tell / ask

tell + person; say without one; ask + if / wh-.

He told me… · He said…

She asked where I lived.

no shift

A present reporting verb, or something still true.

He says he is tired.

She said she lives in Bristol now.

DIRECT	REPORTED	NOTE
can / may / must	could / might / had to	modals shift too
tomorrow / yesterday	the next day / the day before	if the day has changed
"Where do you live?"	She asked where I lived.	statement order, no do
"Don't worry."	He told me not to worry.	not before to

1 Shift the tense

Report the words in brackets. Write the verb in the right form.

1 "I am tired." → He said he _____ tired.

2 "I work in a bank." → He said he _____ in a bank.

3 "I have finished the report." → She said she _____ the report.

4 "I saw her." → He said he _____ her.

5 "I will help you." → He said he _____ help us.

6 "I can come on Tuesday." → She said she _____ come on Tuesday.

7 "I must leave." → He said he _____ leave immediately.

8 "I had already eaten." → He said he _____ already eaten.

9 "My car has broken down." → He said _____ car had broken down.

10 "I'll come tomorrow." → She said she would come the _____ day.

2 Questions, commands, say and tell

Write one or two words in each gap.

1 He _____ me he was tired.

2 He _____ that he was tired.

3 "Where do you live?" → She asked where I _____ .

4 "Do you like the film?" → She asked _____ I liked the film.

5 "Sit down." → He told me _____ sit down.

6 "Don't worry." → He told me _____ worry.

7 "Let's go out for dinner." → She suggested _____ out for dinner.

8 "I'll help you move." → He promised _____ us with the move.

3 Spot the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake. Write the correct sentence on the line.

1 He said me that he was tired.

2 She asked me where did I live.

3 She asked me that I liked the film.

4 He suggested me to go to the cinema.

5 He told to me that he would help.

6 Last week he said he will help us tomorrow.

Remember He told me (no to). He said to me / He said that... Never He said me or He told to me.

4 A phone call

Report what Maria said. Write one or two words in each gap.

Maria said: "I'm in London. I arrived yesterday. I'll stay until Friday. Can you meet me? Don't be late!" → Maria phoned and [1] _____ me that she [2] _____ in London. She said she had arrived the day [3] _____ , and that she [4] _____ stay until Friday. She asked [5] _____ I [6] _____ meet her, and she told me [7] _____ be late. When I said I was busy, she [8] _____ that we meet for lunch instead.

5 Does it shift?

After a past reporting verb, which forms move back, and which stay the same?

am · will · can · have seen · had seen · would · could · might

shifts back	stays the same

Where are the answers?

The answers, with an explanation for each one, are in the LinguaBite app. Open this Deep Dive and scroll to Downloads at the bottom of the article: once you have downloaded this worksheet, its answers appear there after a couple of days, so you do the exercises first. You can choose 1, 2 or 3 days in the app's Settings.

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