

Unit 48

Reported speech (2)

a It is not always necessary to change the verb when you use reported speech. If you are reporting something and you feel that it is still true, you do not need to change the tense of the verb:

direct Tom said 'New York **is** bigger than London'.
reported Tom said (that) New York **is** (or **was**) bigger than London.
direct Ann said 'I **want** to go to New York next year'.
reported Ann said (that) she **wants** (or **wanted**) to go to New York next year.

Notice that it is also correct to change the verb into the *past*. But you *must* use a past tense when there is a difference between what was said and what is really true. Study this example situation:

You met Ann. She said 'Jim **is** ill'. (*direct speech*)
Later that day you see Jim playing tennis and looking well. You say:
'I'm surprised to see you playing tennis, Jim. Ann said that you **were** ill'.
(*not* 'that you are ill', because he isn't ill)

Must, might, could, would, should and **ought** stay the same in reported speech. **May** in direct speech normally changes to **might** in reported speech.

b Say and tell

If you say *who* you are talking to, use **tell**:

- Tom **told me** (that) he didn't like Brian. (*not* 'Tom said me...')

Otherwise use **say**:

- Tom **said** (that) he didn't like Brian. (*not* 'Tom told (that) he...')

Also: you can't say 'Tom told about his trip to America'. You have to say:

- Tom **told us** (or **me/them/Ann** etc.) **about** his trip to America.

If you don't say who he told, you have to say:

- Tom **talked** (or **spoke**) **about** his trip to America. (*but not* 'said about')

c We also use the *infinitive* (**to do/to stay** etc.) in reported speech, especially with **tell** and **ask** (for orders and requests):

direct 'Stay in bed for a few days', the doctor said to me.
reported The doctor **told me to stay** in bed for a few days.
direct 'Don't shout', I said to Jim.
reported I **told Jim not to shout**.
direct 'Please don't tell anyone what happened', Ann said to me.
reported Ann **asked me not to tell** anyone what (had) happened.
direct 'Can you open the door for me, Tom?' Ann asked.
reported Ann **asked Tom to open** the door for her.

Said is also possible with the infinitive:

- The doctor **said to stay** in bed for a few days. (*but not* 'said me')

If you say *who* you are talking to, use **tell**:

- Tom **told me** (that) he didn't like Brian. (*not* 'Tom said me...')