

Reported Speech: Revision

Grammar Lesson, Examples & 30 Practice Questions

Reported Speech: Revision

When we tell someone what another person said, we use **reported speech** (also called **indirect speech**). Instead of repeating the exact words, we report the meaning — and this usually requires changes to tenses, pronouns, time expressions, and modal verbs.

This lesson is a comprehensive revision of reported speech at an advanced level. We will review how to report statements, questions, commands, and requests accurately, and explore the more subtle rules that distinguish good writers and speakers at the C1 level.

Direct speech: She said, *"I am working on a new project."*

Reported speech: She said that she *was working* on a new project.

Understanding reported speech fully allows you to narrate conversations, summarise arguments, report news, and write academically with precision and fluency.

The Backshift Rule: Tense Changes in Reported Speech

When the reporting verb (e.g. *said, told, asked*) is in the **past tense**, the verb in the reported clause typically shifts one tense further into the past. This is called **backshifting**.

Direct Speech Tense	Reported Speech Tense
Present Simple → <i>"I work here."</i>	Past Simple → He said he worked there.
Present Continuous → <i>"I am leaving."</i>	Past Continuous → She said she was leaving .
Present Perfect → <i>"I have finished."</i>	Past Perfect → He said he had finished .
Past Simple → <i>"I called you."</i>	Past Perfect → She said she had called me.
Past Continuous → <i>"I was waiting."</i>	Past Perfect Continuous → He said he had been waiting .
Future Simple (will) → <i>"I will help."</i>	Conditional (would) → She said she would help .
Future Continuous → <i>"I will be travelling."</i>	Conditional Continuous → He said he would be travelling .
Future Perfect → <i>"I will have finished."</i>	Conditional Perfect → She said she would have finished .

Examples in context

Direct: "We are conducting a survey," the researcher said.

Reported: The researcher said that they **were conducting** a survey.

Direct: "I haven't received your report yet," the manager told him.

Reported: The manager told him that he **hadn't received** his report yet.

Direct: "The committee will announce its decision tomorrow," she said.

Reported: She said that the committee **would announce** its decision the following day.

When Backshifting Is NOT Required

Backshifting is not always obligatory. There are several important situations where you can — or must — keep the original tense.

1. When the information is still true or current

If the statement describes a general truth, a fact that has not changed, or a situation still relevant at the time of reporting, you may choose not to backshift.

Direct: "The Earth orbits the Sun," the teacher said.

Reported (both acceptable):

The teacher said that the Earth **orbits** the Sun. ✓

The teacher said that the Earth **orbited** the Sun. ✓

Direct: "I live in Edinburgh," she told him.

Reported (if still true): She told him she **lives** in Edinburgh. ✓

2. When using a present-tense reporting verb

If the reporting verb is in the present tense (e.g. *says, tells, explains, claims*), there is no need to backshift.

Reported: He **says** he **is** running late.

Reported: She **claims** she **has never met** him.

3. After past perfect in direct speech

The past perfect does not change — it is already the furthest back in time.

Direct: "I had already submitted the application," she said.

Reported: She said she **had already submitted** the application.

Modal Verbs in Reported Speech

Some modal verbs change in reported speech; others stay the same. This is an area where many advanced learners make errors.

Direct Speech Modal	Reported Speech Modal
<i>will</i>	would
<i>can</i>	could

Direct Speech Modal	Reported Speech Modal
<i>may</i> (permission/possibility)	might
<i>shall</i> (offers/suggestions)	should / would
<i>must</i> (obligation)	had to or must
<i>would</i>	would (no change)
<i>could</i>	could (no change)
<i>might</i>	might (no change)
<i>should</i>	should (no change)
<i>ought to</i>	ought to (no change)
<i>needn't</i>	didn't need to / needn't

Examples in context

Direct: "You must submit the report by Friday," the director said.

Reported: The director said we **had to** submit the report by Friday.

Direct: "I might be wrong," he admitted.

Reported: He admitted that he **might** be wrong.

Direct: "Can you finish this today?" she asked.

Reported: She asked whether I **could** finish it that day.

Reported Questions

Reported questions differ significantly from direct questions. Understanding these differences is essential for C1 accuracy.

Key rules for reported questions:

- The word order changes to **subject + verb** (no inversion).
- Question marks are **not used**.
- Auxiliary verbs such as *do, does, did* are **not used**.
- Use **whether** or **if** for yes/no questions.
- Use the **question word** (who, what, where, when, why, how) for wh- questions.

Yes/No Questions

Direct: "Have you read the proposal?" she asked him.

Reported: She asked him **whether / if** he **had read** the proposal.

Direct: "Will you be attending the conference?" they asked.

Reported: They asked **whether** I **would be attending** the conference.

Wh- Questions

Direct: "Why did you resign?" the journalist asked her.

Reported: The journalist asked her **why** she **had resigned**.

Direct: "How long have you been working here?" he asked.

Reported: He asked how long she **had been working** there.

A note on embedded questions

Reported questions are a form of **embedded question**, where question word order does not apply:

"I don't know **where he lives**." (not: ~~where does he live~~)

"She wondered **whether the meeting had been cancelled**."

Reported Commands, Requests, and Advice

For **commands**, **requests**, **advice**, and **instructions**, we use a reporting verb followed by an object and a **to-infinitive**.

Pattern: Reporting verb + object + **to-infinitive**

Pattern (negative): Reporting verb + object + **not to-infinitive**

Type	Reporting Verb	Direct	Reported
Command	told, ordered, instructed	"Leave immediately!"	He told them to leave immediately.
Request	asked, requested, begged	"Please help me."	She asked him to help her.
Advice	advised, urged, warned	"You should rest."	The doctor advised her to rest .
Warning	warned, cautioned	"Don't touch that!"	He warned them not to touch it.
Offer	offered	"I'll carry that for you."	She offered to carry it for me.
Refusal	refused	"I won't sign that."	He refused to sign it.

Advanced Reporting Verbs

At the C1 level, using a range of precise reporting verbs greatly improves the quality of your writing and speech. Different verbs convey different nuances of meaning.

Reporting verbs followed by *that* + clause

- *admit, agree, argue, claim, complain, confirm, deny, explain, insist, promise, reveal, suggest, warn*

Example: She **insisted** that the decision **had been** made without consultation.

Example: He **denied** that he **had been** involved in the fraud.

Reporting verbs followed by *to-infinitive*

- *agree, offer, promise, refuse, threaten, claim, demand*

Example: She **threatened** to take legal action.

Example: He **agreed** to reconsider his position.

Reporting verbs followed by *-ing*

- *admit, deny, suggest, recommend, regret, propose, acknowledge*

Example: He **admitted** taking the documents without permission.

Example: She **suggested** postponing the meeting until next week.

Reporting verbs followed by *object + to-infinitive*

- *advise, ask, encourage, instruct, invite, order, remind, tell, urge, warn, persuade, beg*

Example: The consultant **urged** the board to consider all options carefully.

Example: She **reminded** him to submit the documents before the deadline.

Verbs with multiple patterns

Some verbs allow more than one pattern, sometimes with a change in meaning:

suggest: He suggested **that we leave** early. / He suggested **leaving** early.

recommend: She recommended **that he take** the advanced course. / She recommended **taking** the advanced course.

promise: She promised **to return** it. / She promised **that she would return** it.

Changes to Pronouns, Determiners, and Time Expressions

When converting direct speech to reported speech, several other words must also change to maintain logical meaning.

Pronoun and Determiner Changes

Direct Speech	Reported Speech (typical change)
I	he / she / I (depends on speaker)
you	I / he / she / they (depends on audience)
we	they / we
my	his / her / my
your	my / his / her / their
our	their / our
this	that

Direct Speech	Reported Speech (typical change)
these	those

Time Expression Changes

Direct Speech	Reported Speech
now	then / at that moment
today	that day
yesterday	the day before / the previous day
tomorrow	the next day / the following day
last week / month / year	the previous week / month / year
next week / month / year	the following week / month / year
ago	before / previously
here	there
this morning / evening / week	that morning / evening / week

Full example with multiple changes

Direct: "I will meet you here tomorrow morning," she said.

Reported: She said that she **would** meet **him there the following morning**.

Reporting with say vs. tell

These two very common reporting verbs are frequently confused. The rule is straightforward but important:

say — does *not* take a direct object (we do not say who was spoken to)

tell — *always* takes a direct object (we must say who was spoken to)

Correct	Incorrect
She said that she was busy.	✗ She said me that she was busy.
She told me that she was busy.	✗ She told that she was busy.
He said nothing.	✗ He told nothing.
He told us the news.	✗ He said us the news.

Reporting Suggestions and Recommendations

Suggestions and recommendations are commonly reported using specific structures. Pay careful attention to the following patterns:

Using *suggest* and *recommend*

Pattern 1: suggest/recommend + *that* + subject + **bare infinitive** (formal/subjunctive)

*"I suggest that the board **reconsider** its approach."*

She suggested that the board **reconsider** its approach.

Pattern 2: suggest/recommend + *-ing*

"Why don't we call the client first?"

She suggested **calling** the client first.

Pattern 3: suggest/recommend + *that* + subject + **should** + bare infinitive

He recommended that she **should apply** for the senior position.

Important Differences and Special Cases

Reporting speech that is still current

When you report something very recently said or something the speaker still believes, you may choose not to backshift. Both options are grammatically acceptable, but the no-backshift version implies the information is still valid.

Reported (backshifted): He said he *was* working on a solution.

Reported (not backshifted): He said he *is* working on a solution. (Perhaps he's still working on it now.)

Conditional sentences in reported speech

Real conditionals (first conditional) typically backshift; unreal conditionals (second and third) generally remain unchanged as they are already in past forms.

Direct (1st conditional): "If you revise, you will pass."

Reported: She said that if I revised, I **would pass**.

Direct (2nd conditional): "If I were you, I would resign."

Reported: He said that if he **were** me, he **would resign**. (no change)

Direct (3rd conditional): "If she had applied, she would have got the job."

Reported: He said that if she **had applied**, she **would have got** the job. (no change)

Reporting questions with question words as subjects

When the question word is the subject of the direct question, the word order in the reported question is identical to the direct question — with no inversion needed.

Direct: "Who wrote this report?"

Reported: She asked **who had written** the report.

Direct: "What caused the delay?"

Reported: He wanted to know **what had caused** the delay.

Reporting *must* (obligation vs. deduction)

Must has two distinct meanings, and each is reported differently:

Obligation: "You must attend the meeting."

Reported: She said we **had to** attend the meeting.

Deduction/certainty: "She must be exhausted."

Reported: He said she **must be** exhausted. (no change — deduction remains *must*)

Common Mistakes

- ✗ She said me that the project had been postponed.
- ✓ **She told me that the project had been postponed.** (Use *tell* + object, not *say* + object)
- ✗ He asked where did she work.
- ✓ **He asked where she worked.** (No inversion in reported questions; do not use question word order)
- ✗ The manager said that he will send the report.
- ✓ **The manager said that he would send the report.** (Backshift *will* to *would*)
- ✗ She told to them to be quiet.
- ✓ **She told them to be quiet.** (No *to* between *told* and the object)
- ✗ He asked me if I can help him tomorrow.
- ✓ **He asked me if I could help him the next day.** (Backshift modal and time expression)
- ✗ She suggested me to take the earlier flight.
- ✓ **She suggested that I take the earlier flight.** or **She suggested taking the earlier flight.** (*suggest* is not followed by object + infinitive)
- ✗ They admitted to make a mistake.
- ✓ **They admitted making a mistake.** (*admit* is followed by *-ing*, not *to-infinitive*)
- ✗ He denied that he took the files.
- ✓ **He denied that he had taken the files.** (Backshift: past simple → past perfect)
- ✗ She asked him where is the nearest station.
- ✓ **She asked him where the nearest station was.** (Subject-verb inversion is not used in reported questions)
- ✗ I told that the deadline was the following week.
- ✓ **I said that the deadline was the following week.** (*tell* requires an object; if there is none, use *say*)

Reported Speech: Quick Summary

- In reported speech, we typically **backshift** the verb tense when the reporting verb is in the past.
- Backshifting is **optional** when the information is still true or when using a present-tense reporting verb.
- Modal verbs change as follows: *will* → *would*, *can* → *could*, *may* → *might*; but *would*, *could*, *might*, *should*, *ought to do* **not** change.
- *Must* (obligation) → *had to*; *must* (deduction) → no change.

- Reported questions use **statement word order** (no inversion, no auxiliary do/does/did), and require *if/whether* for yes/no questions.
- Commands and requests use: reporting verb + object + **to-infinitive** (or *not to* for negatives).
- *Tell* always requires a direct object; *say* does not take one.
- *Suggest* and *recommend* are followed by *-ing* or *that* + subject + bare infinitive / *should* — never by object + infinitive.
- Pronouns, demonstratives (*this/that*), and time/place expressions must be adjusted logically.
- Second and third conditionals generally do **not** backshift in reported speech as they are already in past forms.

Now practise **reported speech** in the exercises below.

Reported Speech: Revision – Practice Test

C1 | 30 Questions: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap & Fill-in-the-Blank

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 He said that he ____ working on the project the following week.

- A** will be
- B** would be
- C** is
- D** has been

2 The manager told the team that she ____ the report by the end of that day.

- A** has finished
- B** had finished
- C** would have finished
- D** will finish

3 She asked me where I ____ the night before.

- A** had been
- B** was
- C** have been
- D** am

4 He warned us ____ open the package under any circumstances.

- A** to not
- B** not to
- C** don't
- D** that we not

5 The scientist explained that water ____ at 100 degrees Celsius.

- A** boiled
- B** had boiled
- C** boils
- D** would boil

6 They admitted that they ____ the deadline by over a week.

- A** have missed
- B** missed
- C** had missed
- D** were missing

7 She inquired whether I ____ interested in applying for the position.

- A** am
- B** was
- C** have been
- D** would

8 He insisted that the committee ____ his proposal before making a final decision.

- A** considers
- B** consider
- C** had considered
- D** would consider

9 She said she would call me as soon as she ____ the results.

- A** receives
- B** received
- C** had received
- D** would receive

10 The professor urged that all students ____ their assignments digitally from that semester onward.

- A** submitted
- B** submit
- C** would submit
- D** had submitted

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

11 She told me that she ____ working on the project for three months by then.

- A** had been
- B** has been
- C** was

12 He warned us that we ____ touch the equipment under any circumstances.

- A** must not
- B** cannot
- C** should not

13 They claimed that the new policy ____ approved by the board the previous week.

- A** had been
- B** was
- C** has been

14 The director suggested that the team ____ a different approach to the analysis.

- A** consider
- B** considered
- C** would consider

15 She asked him whether he ____ to attend the conference the following day.

- A** was planning
- B** is planning
- C** plans

16 He insisted that he ____ innocent of all the charges brought against him.

- A** was
- B** is
- C** had been

17 The professor reminded the students that they ____ submit their dissertations by midnight.

- A** were to
- B** will
- C** would have to

18 She confided in her colleague that she ____ of resigning ever since the restructuring.

- A** had been thinking
- B** was thinking
- C** has been thinking

- 19 The spokesperson denied that the company ____ aware of the environmental risks beforehand.
- A had been
 - B was
 - C has been

- 20 He told the interviewer that, if he ____ the job, he would relocate immediately.
- A were offered
 - B was offered
 - C had been offered

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

- 21 Direct speech: "We have already submitted the report." Reported speech: They said that they _____ the report.

- 22 Direct speech: "I will call you tomorrow." Reported speech: She told me she _____ me the following day.

- 23 Direct speech: "Don't touch anything in the lab." Reported speech: The supervisor warned us _____ anything in the lab.

- 24 Direct speech: "Can you explain the procedure?" Reported speech: She asked whether I _____ the procedure.

- 25 Direct speech: "I might have made a mistake." Reported speech: He admitted that he _____ a mistake.

- 26 Direct speech: "Why didn't you attend the meeting?" Reported speech: The manager asked me why I _____ the meeting.

- 27 Direct speech: "You must hand in your assignment by Friday." Reported speech: The professor insisted that we _____ our assignment by Friday.

- 28 Direct speech: "I've been working on this project for months." Reported speech: She explained that she _____ on that project for months.

29 Direct speech: "We should reconsider our strategy." Reported speech: The consultant suggested that they _____ their strategy.

30 Direct speech: "Where have you put my keys?" Reported speech: He demanded to know where I _____ his keys.

Answer Key & Explanations

Reported Speech: Revision | C1

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **B** Correct Answer: would be ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, will shifts back to would when the reporting verb is in the past. "I will be working" → He said he would be working.
2. **C** Correct Answer: would have finished ✓ Explanation: When reporting a future perfect statement in the past, will have finished becomes would have finished. This is a standard backshift rule in reported speech.
3. **A** Correct Answer: had been ✓ Explanation: In reported questions, the past simple shifts back to the past perfect. "Where were you?" → She asked where I had been. The time reference the night before also signals the need for the past perfect.
4. **B** Correct Answer: not to ✓ Explanation: Reported negative imperatives are formed with not to + infinitive. "Don't open it" → He warned us not to open it. The structure warn + object + not to + infinitive is standard at C1 level.
5. **C** Correct Answer: boils ✓ Explanation: When reporting universal truths or scientific facts, no backshift is required. "Water boils at 100°C" → The scientist explained that water boils at 100°C. The present simple is retained.
6. **C** Correct Answer: had missed ✓ Explanation: The present perfect have missed shifts back to the past perfect had missed in reported speech when the reporting verb is in the past tense. This is a standard backshift rule.
7. **B** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: In reported yes/no questions introduced by whether, the verb backshifts from present simple to past simple. "Are you interested?" → She inquired whether I was interested.
8. **B** Correct Answer: consider ✓ Explanation: After verbs like insist, demand, and suggest, a that-clause uses the subjunctive (base form of the verb without inflection). He insisted that the committee consider his proposal. This is the mandative subjunctive, common in formal C1+ contexts.
9. **B** Correct Answer: received ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, future time clauses introduced by as soon as use the past simple, not would. The original was "I will call you as soon as I receive the results." The adverbial clause verb backshifts to past simple.
10. **B** Correct Answer: submit ✓ Explanation: The verb urge can trigger the mandative subjunctive in a that-clause, requiring the base form of the verb regardless of person or number. She urged that all students submit their work. This structure is typical of formal written C1 English.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: had been ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, the past perfect continuous is used to backshift the present perfect continuous. The original statement was likely 'I have been working on the project for three months.' After backshifting, it becomes had been working.
12. **A** Correct Answer: must not ✓ Explanation: Must not retains its form in reported speech when expressing a prohibition. The original warning was 'You must not touch the equipment.' Unlike other modals, must does not backshift to had to when expressing prohibition.
13. **A** Correct Answer: had been ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, the passive past simple (was approved) backshifts to the passive past perfect (had been approved). The time expression the previous week also reflects the backshift of last week.
14. **A** Correct Answer: consider ✓ Explanation: After suggest, we use the subjunctive mood in formal English, which takes the base form of the verb regardless of subject. 'The director suggested that the team consider...' is correct formal usage at C1 level.
15. **A** Correct Answer: was planning ✓ Explanation: In reported questions introduced by whether, the verb backshifts. The present continuous 'Are you planning to attend?' becomes the past continuous (was planning) in reported speech. The time reference shifts to the following day.
16. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: After a reporting verb in the past simple (e.g., insisted), the present simple 'I am innocent' backshifts to the past simple (was). This is standard sequence of tenses in reported speech.
17. **A** Correct Answer: were to ✓ Explanation: Were to is used in reported speech to convey an obligation or arrangement set by an authority. The original instruction 'You are to submit your dissertations by midnight' backshifts to were to, reflecting a formal directive.
18. **A** Correct Answer: had been thinking ✓ Explanation: The present perfect continuous 'I have been thinking of resigning' backshifts to the past perfect continuous (had been thinking) in reported speech. This emphasizes a continuing action up to the moment of speaking.
19. **A** Correct Answer: had been ✓ Explanation: After the reporting verb denied (past simple), the verb backshifts. Since the environmental risks preceded the denial, the past perfect (had been) is most appropriate to show this anteriority in reported speech.
20. **A** Correct Answer: were offered ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, a second conditional retains the subjunctive form were in formal registers, even with a singular subject. The original 'If I were offered the job, I would relocate' maintains were offered to signal a hypothetical condition.

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **had already submitted** Correct Answer: had already submitted ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, the present perfect shifts back to the past perfect. "have submitted" → had already submitted.

22. **would call** Correct Answer: would call ✓ Explanation: The future simple (will) shifts to would in reported speech, and tomorrow changes to the following day.
23. **not to touch** Correct Answer: not to touch ✓ Explanation: Negative imperatives in reported speech are expressed with not + to-infinitive. "Don't touch" → warned us not to touch.
24. **could explain** Correct Answer: could explain ✓ Explanation: The modal can shifts to could in reported speech. Yes/no questions are introduced with whether or if.
25. **might have made** Correct Answer: might have made ✓ Explanation: The modal might does not change in reported speech. The perfect infinitive (have made) is retained to express past possibility.
26. **hadn't attended** Correct Answer: hadn't attended ✓ Explanation: In reported questions, the past simple negative (didn't attend) shifts to the past perfect negative (hadn't attended), and normal word order is used.
27. **had to hand in** Correct Answer: had to hand in ✓ Explanation: The modal must (expressing obligation) shifts to had to in reported speech when backshifting is applied.
28. **had been working** Correct Answer: had been working ✓ Explanation: The present perfect continuous (have been working) shifts to the past perfect continuous (had been working) in reported speech.
29. **should reconsider** Correct Answer: should reconsider ✓ Explanation: The modal should does not change in reported speech. It is used here with the reporting verb suggested to convey advice.
30. **had put** Correct Answer: had put ✓ Explanation: The present perfect (have put) shifts to the past perfect (had put) in reported speech, and normal word order is maintained in reported questions.

Score Guide

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|----------------------|--|
| 27–30 Correct | Excellent! You have mastered this topic. |
| 23–26 Correct | Very good! Review the rules you missed. |
| 18–22 Correct | Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples. |
| 0–17 Correct | Study the lesson again before retaking the test. |