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Direct and reported speech

Part 2 · Questions, requests and claims





Grammar at a glance

When you want to...	Form to use	Worked example
Report a question	asked if / asked where + subject + verb	He asked where the key was.
Report a request	asked + person + (not) to + verb	She asked us not to move the box.
Preserve certainty	may / might in a past report	Ravi said it might rain.
Attribute a claim	speaker + said + reported claim	Noor said the gate was open. Did anyone check?

SELECT A ROW TO OPEN ITS LESSON

DIRECT AND REPORTED SPEECH

Yes/no and wh-questions with statement word order



Lily asks Sam, “Are you ready?” She also asks, “Where is the box?” Noor reports these questions immediately. The readiness answer and box location are still unknown.

In an indirect question, use statement order. Say “She asked where Noor was”. Use if or whether for a yes/no question.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Yes/no question	Lily asks Sam whether he is ready.	Whether introduces the yes/no question. He is uses statement word order inside the report.
Wh-question	Lily asks where the box is.	Keep where, but change is the box to the box is inside the reported question.
Subject question	Lily asks who carries the box.	In “Who carries the box?” who is already the subject. Do not invent do or a second subject.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Yes/no introduction	Embedded statement order	Wh-report
asks Sam whether / if	he is ready	asks where the box is

Should a reported question keep the direct question’s inverted order?

Normally no. Where is the box? becomes asks where the box is. But subject questions such as who carries it already have the relevant subject order; do not mechanically rearrange them.

YOUR TURN

Choose the reported wh-order.

where Noor is / where is Noor

> **Answer • where Noor is**
> Use statement order inside the report.

DIRECT AND REPORTED SPEECH

Object plus to-infinitive and negative instructions



Sam politely says to Lily, “Please carry the box.” The supervisor tells Sam, “Do not enter the repair lane.” The record contains requests and instructions, but does not yet say whether either person complied.

Report a request with asked plus the person and a to-infinitive. For a negative instruction, use not to.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Report a request	Sam asks Lily to carry the box.	Asks Lily to carry reports the request. It does not say she actually carried it.
Report a negative instruction	The supervisor tells Sam not to enter the repair lane.	Not to enter preserves the prohibition. Tells Sam to enter would reverse it.
Recognise a polite form	Sam asks Lily to help him.	With “Could you help me, please?” in this request context, report the requested action rather than treating it only as a past ability question.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Request	Negative instruction	Unknown outcome
asks Lily to carry	tells Sam not to enter	whether they comply

Does a question-shaped sentence always request information?

No. Could you help me, please? can request an action. Use the supplied context to identify its function rather than treating every could question as a past-ability inquiry.

YOUR TURN

Choose the request pattern.

asked to Sam wait / asked Sam to wait

> Answer • asked Sam to wait
> Ask takes person + to-infinitive here.

DIRECT AND REPORTED SPEECH

Modal backshift and evidence for reporting verbs



Yesterday Lily said, “I can carry the box,” describing ability. She then explicitly promised Sam, “I will help you.” A visitor said, “It may rain.” The supervisor imposed a requirement that applied yesterday: “You must wear a helmet.”

A modal may shift when speech is reported later. Preserve the speaker’s degree of certainty and choose a reporting verb the evidence supports.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Report ability	Lily said that she could carry the box.	Can becomes could in the requested conventional backshift. This reports an ability claim, not a completed carry.
Report an explicit promise	Lily promised Sam that she would help him.	Would reports will from the past viewpoint; promised is justified because the record explicitly identifies a promise.
Keep uncertainty	The visitor said that it might rain.	May becomes might in the requested backshift. It remains a possibility, not a certain forecast.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Ability	Explicit promise	Possibility / past obligation
can to could	will to would; promised	may to might; must to had to here

Can a reporting verb be chosen just by spotting will, must or please?

No. These forms can serve different functions. Use the supplied conversation to justify promised, warned or advised, and use neutral said when stronger intent is not established.

YOUR TURN

Requested conventional backshift of can:

could / had definitely done

> Answer • could
>
> Keep ability or other contextual meaning.

DIRECT AND REPORTED SPEECH

Attribution, uncertainty and limits of reconstruction

Yesterday Noor said, “The gate is open.” Nobody checked it then. Today it is closed. Lily asked whether the tools were ready, but nobody recorded an answer.

Keep a claim attached to its speaker. A report can preserve the meaning without establishing the exact original words.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Attribute a claim	Noor said that the gate was open.	This reports Noor’s statement. It does not prove yesterday’s openness, today’s gate state or that a change occurred.
Preserve an unanswered question	Lily asked whether the tools were ready.	This reports an information request, not a finding that the tools were ready.
Reject a reconstructed quote	Only the meaning “Lily was tired” is known.	We cannot recover whether her exact words were “I am tired,” “I feel tired” or something else. Report the meaning without fabricating a quotation.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Attributed content	Current observation	Missing evidence
Noor said the gate was open	the gate is closed today	change time, replies, exact tiredness words

Can reported speech be reversed into the one exact sentence originally spoken?

Not reliably from meaning alone. Different words, tenses and reference choices can produce similar reports. Exact reconstruction needs an actual transcript; otherwise label it hypothetical.

YOUR TURN

Does an attributed claim automatically prove its content?

Yes. / No.

Answer • No.

Reporting and verifying truth are different.

ONE LAST CHALLENGE

Can the question travel?

Lily asked Sam, “Where did you put the key?” Report her question later, keeping the speaker and listener clear.



A POSSIBLE ANSWER

Lily asked Sam where he had put the key.

The reported question uses statement order. He refers to Sam.

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