

Language at work | Reported speech

Reported speech

Form

- 1 Use a reporting verb (*say, tell, etc.*) + your own words. If the reporting verb is in the present tense, the tense of the original statement does not change.

'How old is the company?' He **wants to know** how old the company is.

- 2 If the reporting verb is in the past tense, you can change the tense of the original statement. The following tenses often change in this way.

Original statement	Reported speech
present simple	past simple
present continuous	past continuous
past simple	past perfect
can	could
will	would

'How old is this company?' He **wanted to know** how old the company **was**.

'I can't work this weekend.' John **told me he couldn't** work this weekend.

Use

- 1 Use *say* and *tell* to report statements. Use *say something (to someone)* or *tell someone something*.

'I'll find out about the order.' He **said (to me)** he would find out about the order.
He **told me** he would find out about the order.

- 2 Use *ask* and *want to know* to report questions.

- 3 With *wh-* questions, do not use *do / does* in the reported question. Put the verb at the end of the sentence.

'Where does it come from?' He **wants to know** where it **comes from**.

'What is Hannah's second name?' She **asked** what Hannah's second name **was**.

Don't say: *She asked / wanted to know what was Hannah's second name.*

- 4 With *yes / no* questions, use *if / whether* after *ask / want to know*.

'Do you know my old boss?' She **wanted to know** if I **knew** her old boss.

- 5 Use *ask someone to*, to report a request.

'Can you chase this up, please?' She **asked me to** chase it up.

- 6 Use *tell someone to*, to report an order or instruction.

'Go and see if it has arrived.' He **told me to** go and see if it **had arrived**.

- 1 Read these extracts from conversations and complete Sylvie's explanation below.

Monday

Sylvie Hi, Sandra, this is Sylvie from Stockwell's. Can we have our usual order as soon as possible, please?

Sandra Yes of course, Sylvie. I'll deal with it straight away.

Thursday

Sylvie I'm calling about an order I placed with Sandra. I'd like to know what has happened to it.

Assistant Oh, I'm sorry. Sandra is off sick. I'll look into it.

Friday

Sylvie Hi, Sandra. It's Sylvie. Are you better now?

Sandra Actually, I wasn't off sick. My assistant said that because he didn't want anyone to know that it was his mistake. He's sent the order now. You should get it today.

Sandra Oh, I see. Better late than never, I suppose. Thanks.

Friday lunchtime

Boss Sylvie, where's that order I asked for on Monday?

Why has it taken so long?

Sylvie Yes, sorry about that. I called Sandra on Monday and asked if we ¹ could have our usual order as soon as possible.

She said she ² _____.

Then, when nothing had arrived, I called back on

Thursday and asked what ³ _____.

The assistant said that Sandra ⁴ _____

and that he ⁵ _____. Then this

morning, Sandra called me. I asked ⁶ _____

_____ and she said that she ⁷ _____

_____. Her assistant ⁸ _____

_____ that, so no one would know it was his

mistake. She told ⁹ _____ and we

should get it this afternoon.

- 2 Rewrite these sentences in reported speech starting with the words given.

1 **Phil** 'I'm going to the bank for ten minutes.'

Phil told me he was going to the bank for ten minutes.

2 **Bella** 'Do you want anything from the canteen, Alan?'

Bella asked _____.

3 **Nabila** 'What is the time of next flight to Boston?'

Nabila wants _____.

4 **Richard** 'Sally, do you want to borrow *The Economist*?'

Richard asked _____.

5 **Keith** 'I'm tired of dealing with unreliable suppliers.'

Keith says _____.

6 **Jackie** 'If you can't go to the meeting, I'll go instead.'

Jackie told _____.

