

Reporting past tenses

In indirect speech, a speaker's present perfect and past tenses are often reported using past perfect tenses. This is because the events a person spoke about must have happened before he/she spoke.

Direct speech: Alice said, 'I have just spoken to James.'

Indirect: Alice said that she had just spoken to James.

Direct speech: Peter said, 'I saw Jane at the library a couple of days ago.'

Indirect speech: Peter said that he had seen Jane at the library a couple of days ago.

However, in some cases we do not use the past perfect tense to report past events. This usually happens when it is not necessary to show the time relationship between the events spoken about the original speech.

I told you John phoned this morning, didn't I? (More natural than 'I told you John had phoned this morning, didn't I?')

Modal verbs in indirect speech

The modal verbs would, should, could, might, ought and must are unchanged after past reporting verbs in indirect speech.

Direct speech: It would be nice if I could try one of those.

Indirect speech: He said it would be nice if he could try one of those.

Direct speech: He might get angry.

Indirect speech: I was afraid that he might get angry.

Direct speech: It must be late.

Indirect speech: She said that it must be late.