When we use our own words to report speech, there are several things that we change:

- pronouns, time and place may need to change to reflect a different perspective,
- tense usually has to go back one tense (present becomes past) – this is called backshift.

Tenses

1. Present Simple and Present Continuous

The general rule is that present tenses in direct speech change to **past tenses** in reported speech.

Consider the following example:

*Julia:*

‘I live in London.’

‘I’m taking a course in German this year.’

- *Julia said she **lived** in London.*
- *Julia said she **was** taking a course in German **that year**.*
2. ‘Can’ and ‘Will’

Modal verbs in present tense change according to the following pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAN → COULD</th>
<th>MAY → MIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WILL → WOULD</td>
<td>MUST → HAD TO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider the following example:

‘I can speak English and French.’
‘My German course will finish next year.’

- *Julia said she could speak English and French.*
- *Julia said her German course would finish the following year.*

3. Past Simple, Past Continuous and Past Perfect

These tenses change according to the following pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAST SIMPLE → PAST PERFECT</th>
<th>PAST CONTINUOUS → PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAST PERFECT - DOES NOT CHANGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider changes in the following example:

‘I finished my Master’s degree last year.’
‘I was reading your company’s website when I decided to send in my CV.’

- *Julia said she had finished her Master’s degree the previous year.*
- *Julia said she had been reading the company’s website when she decided to send in*
4. Present Perfect Simple and Present Perfect Continuous

These tenses change like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT PERFECT</th>
<th>➔</th>
<th>PAST PERFECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Present Perfect Simple changes to:

‘I have spent time in Japan.’
‘I have been working as a secretary for two years.’

- Julia said *she had spent* time in Japan.
- Julia said *she had been working* as a secretary for two years.

5. Past Modal Verbs

In general, past modal verbs don’t change.

*Interviewer:*
‘We should be in touch next week.’
‘We might have some more questions.’

- The interviewer said they *should be* in touch the following week.
- The interviewer said they *might have* some more questions.

Note: It is not always necessary to change the tense. If the situation is *still the same*, you can leave verb in the *original tense*:
- ‘I can speak English and French.’
- Julia said she *can / could speak* English and French.
- ‘I finished my Master’s degree last year.’
- Julia said she *finished / had finished* her Master’s degree the previous year.
Here’s a summary of tense changes in reported speech:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECT SPEECH</th>
<th>REPORTED SPEECH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present simple</td>
<td>Past simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present continuous</td>
<td>Past continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past simple</td>
<td>Past perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present perfect</td>
<td>Past perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past continuous</td>
<td>Past perfect continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Will’ future</td>
<td>‘would’ conditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can</td>
<td>Could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Might</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must</td>
<td>Had to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPORTING VERB IN PRESENT /</td>
<td>IT DOESN 'T CHANGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENT PERFECT / SIMPLR FUTURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

via http://alizperez.blogspot.com/

‘Here and now’ words

When we change direct speech to reported speech, we may need to make other natural, logical changes:

1. Pronouns / Possessive Adjectives

Consider changes in the following example:

‘I finished my Master’s degree last year.’

- Julia said she had finished her Master’s degree the previous year.
I → SHE
MY → HER

2. Time

LAST YEAR → THE LAST YEAR / THE PREVIOUS YEAR

‘I saw him last year.’

- Julia said that she had seen him the previous year.

THIS YEAR → THAT YEAR

‘I’m taking a course in German this year.’

- Julia said she was taking a course in German that year.

NEXT YEAR → THE NEXT YEAR / THE FOLLOWING YEAR

‘My German course will finish next year.’

- Julia said her German course would finish the following year.

3. Place

HERE → THERE

‘I’ve been living here for six months.’

- Julia said that she had been living there / in that place for six months.

I’ll meet you here tomorrow for a coffee.’
• Julia said she would meet us at the cafe the following day for a coffee.

Other common changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Speech</th>
<th>→</th>
<th>Reported Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>today</td>
<td>→</td>
<td>that day / on Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td>→</td>
<td>the previous day / the day before / on Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tomorrow</td>
<td>→</td>
<td>the next day / the following day / on Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now</td>
<td>→</td>
<td>then / at that time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this video from 7ESL, you’ll find the chart with many examples of typical tense changes in reported speech:

Read more on this topic:

Reported Speech: Overview

Reported Speech for Questions