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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:

CAN → COULD
MAY → MIGHT
WILL → WOULD
MUST → HAD TO

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:

[PAST SIMPLE](#) → [PAST PERFECT](#)
[PAST CONTINUOUS](#) → [PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS](#)
PAST PERFECT - DOES NOT CHANGE

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 **her** CV.

4. Present Perfect Simple and Present Perfect Continuous

These tenses change like this:

[PRESENT PERFECT](#) → [PAST PERFECT](#)
[PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS](#) → [PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS](#)

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:

DIRECT SPEECH	REPORTED SPEECH
Present simple	Past simple
Present continuous	Past continuous
Past simple	Past perfect
Present perfect	Past perfect
Past continuous	Past perfect continuous
'Will' future	'would' conditional
Can	Could
May	Might
Must	Had to
REPORTING VERB IN <u>PRESENT / PRESENT PERFECT /SIMPLR FUTURE</u>	IT DOESN 'T CHANGE

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

Direct Speech → Reported Speech

today → that day / on Tuesday

yesterday → the previous day / the day before / on Monday

tomorrow → the next day / the following day / on Wednesday

now → then / at that time

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](#)