

Narration

~ English Grammar · Competitive Exams ~



Narration = the way we **report** what someone said. Two ways: repeat the exact words (**Direct**) or report the sense in our own words (**Indirect**).

① Direct vs Indirect Speech

Direct Speech

Speaker's **exact words** kept inside inverted commas.

Ram said to me, "I shall go to Patna tomorrow."

Indirect Speech

The **sense** in the reporter's own words — no commas.

Ram told me that he would go to Patna the next day.

Three parts of a sentence

Reporter → the person who reports. He said to me...

Reporting Verb → the verb of saying. He said to me...

Reported Speech → the actual message. "I shall go to Patna tomorrow."

Rules of punctuation (Direct)

- ✓ The spoken words are put inside **inverted commas** (" ").
- ✓ A **comma** separates the reporting verb from the reported speech.
- ✓ The first word of the reported speech takes a **Capital letter**.



To go Direct → Indirect, master just 3 changes: **Pronouns**, **Tense/Verb**, and certain **Words of time & place**.

② Change of Pronoun ↪

Change pronouns of the reported speech by the **SON formula** —

S = Subject

First person (I, we) changes by the **subject** of the reporting verb.

O = Object

Second person (you) changes by the **object** of the reporting verb.

N = No change

Third person (he, she, they, it) — **no change**.

Pronoun chart – families that swap

Nominative	Possessive	Objective	Reflexive
I	my / mine	me	myself
We	our / ours	us	ourselves
You	your / yours	you	yourself / yourselves
He	his	him	himself
She	her / hers	her	herself
They	their / theirs	them	themselves

A member of one row may replace a member of the **same** row — never of another family.

See it work

D: Radha said to me, "I shall do **my** job." → I: Radha told me that **she** would do **her** job.

D: Sita told me, "**You** should do **your** work." → I: Sita told me that **I** should do **my** work.

D: Ram said to Sita, "**You** have become greedy." → I: Ram told Sita that **she** had become greedy.

D: Mohan said to me, "**He** will do **his** work." → I: Mohan told me that **he** would do **his** work.

(3rd = no change)



Remember → Subject pulls the **I/we**, Object pulls the **you**, and the third person just stays **No-change**.

③ Change of Tense (Back-shift) ⌚

Golden rule: If the reporting verb is in the **Present** or **Future**, the reported speech does **NOT** change. If it is in the **Past**, back-shift the tense one step into the past.

Tense back-shift table (Past reporting verb)

Direct (Reported)	Indirect – changes to
Present Indefinite – likes	Past Indefinite – liked
Present Continuous – is writing	Past Continuous – was writing
Present Perfect – has written	Past Perfect – had written
Present Perfect Cont. – has been working	Past Perfect Cont. – had been working
Past Indefinite – fought	Past Perfect – had fought
Past Continuous – was playing	Past Perfect Cont. – had been playing

Helping verbs also shift

Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
is / am	was	will / shall	would / should
are	were	can	could
has / have	had	may	might
do / does	did	must	had to / must

Worked pairs

D: He said, "I like fish very much." → I: He said that he **liked** fish very much.

D: He said to me, "I **have written** a letter." → I: He told me that he **had written** a letter.

D: He said, "I **can** walk in the evening." → I: He said that he **could** walk in the evening.

D: He said to me, "I **shall** work at night." → I: He told me that he **would** work at night.



Already at the deepest past? **Past Perfect** and **would / could / might / should / had** stay as they are – you cannot shift further back.

When NOT to back-shift ⚠

Even with a past reporting verb, keep the tense unchanged when the reported speech is a

Universal truth / scientific fact. Sunil said that the earth *is* round.

Habitual fact. My friend said that he *is* an early riser.

Proverb / saying. I said that practice *makes* a man perfect.

Historical fact. He said that Ashoka *renounced* war after Kalinga.

Imaginary / improbable condition. He said that if he *were* young, he would go.

Two actions at the **same time** (both Past Indefinite / Continuous) also stay unchanged. He said that Ravi *was playing* while Soni *was cooking*.

④ Change of Time & Place Words

Words showing **nearness** become words showing **distance**.

Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
now	then	today	that day
here	there	tomorrow	the next day
this	that	yesterday	the previous day
these	those	tonight	that night
thus	so	last night	the previous night
ago	before	last week	the previous week
hence	thence	next week	the following week
come	go	next day	the following day



Exception → if *this / here / now* point to something present with the speaker, they may stay.

Come → *go* only when a distance word follows.

⑤ Assertive Sentences

- ✓ Replace the commas & inverted commas with the conjunction **that**.
- ✓ With an object → **say** becomes **tell**, **said to** becomes **told**.
- ✓ No object → **say / said** stays as it is.

D: Ram said to Shyam, "I will help you." → I: Ram told Shyam that he would help him.

D: Ram said, "I shall play now." → I: Ram said that he would play then.

D: He said to me, "I saw Sohan yesterday." → I: He told me that he had seen Sohan the previous day.

D: Father said, "Ram, I am pleased with you." → I: Father told Ram that he was pleased with him.

By sense, **said to** may also become replied, added, remarked, complained, informed, assured, reminded...

⑥ Interrogative Sentences ?

- ✓ Reporting verb **said / said to** → **asked** (also enquired / demanded).
- ✓ Helping-verb question → join with **if / whether**.
- ✓ Wh-question (who, what, why...) → keep the **question word**, no if/that.
- ✓ Change to statement order (verb after subject); drop the **?**, add a full stop.

D: He said to me, "Do you like bananas?" → I: He asked me if I liked bananas.

D: Ram said to Shyam, "Are you going to Delhi?" → I: Ram asked Shyam if he was going to Delhi.

D: I said to the girl, "What is your name?" → I: I asked the girl what her name was.

D: The teacher said to Ram, "Why are you shouting?" → I: The teacher asked Ram why he was shouting.

D: Mohan said to Shyam, "Whose pen is this?" → I: Mohan asked Shyam whose pen that was.

✓ Yes/No question → use **if / whether**. Wh-question → the wh-word is the joiner.

⑦ Imperative Sentences

Orders, requests, advice, proposals — the reported verb becomes an **infinitive** with **to**.

- ✓ Pick the reporting verb by sense → **ordered, requested, advised, commanded, begged, urged**.
- ✓ Drop the inverted commas; use **to** before the verb.
- ✓ Negative → use **not to** (or change said to → **forbade**).
- ✓ **Let us** (proposal) → suggested / proposed that... **should**.

D: I said to him, "Go there." → I: I ordered him to go there.

D: The teacher said, "Work hard." → I: The teacher advised the students to work hard.

D: I said to Father, "Please give me two hundred rupees." → I: I requested my father to give me two hundred rupees.

D: He said to me, "Do not walk barefooted." → I: He warned me not to walk barefooted.

D: Mohan said to me, "Let us dance together." → I: Mohan proposed that we should dance together.

⑧ Exclamatory & Optative

- ✓ **Exclamatory**: reporting verb → **exclaimed with joy / sorrow / regret / surprise**. Join with **that**; drop the **!**.
- ✓ **What / How** → replaced by **very / great**.
- ✓ **Optative** (wish / prayer) → reporting verb → **wished / prayed**; join with **that**.
- ✓ Greetings: Good morning → **wished**; Good-bye / Farewell → **bade**.

D: The team said, "Hurrah! We have won the match." → I: The team exclaimed with joy that they had won the match.

D: He said, "Alas! I wasted my money." → I: He exclaimed with sorrow that he had wasted his money.

D: He said, "What a fine place it is!" → I: He exclaimed with joy that it was a very fine place.

D: She said to me, "May you live long!" → I: She prayed that I might live long.

D: The student said, "Good-bye, dear friends!" → I: The student bade his dear friends good-bye.

Change the Narration

Turn each Direct sentence into Indirect speech.

1. Rita said, "I am reading a novel now."
2. He said to me, "I bought this book yesterday."
3. The teacher said, "The sun rises in the east."
4. She said to him, "Are you coming with us tomorrow?"
5. Mohan said to Sita, "Where do you live?"
6. The captain said to the men, "March forward."
7. Mother said to me, "Do not waste your time."
8. He said, "Alas! I have failed in the exam."
9. The old man said, "May God bless you, child!"
10. Ravi said to me, "Let us play a game of chess."
11. She said, "What a beautiful garden this is!"
12. He said to her, "Please help me with my homework."

✓ Answer Key

1. Rita said that she was reading a novel then.
2. He told me that he had bought that book the previous day.
3. The teacher said that the sun rises in the east. (universal truth)
4. She asked him if he was coming with them the next day.
5. Mohan asked Sita where she lived.
6. The captain ordered the men to march forward.
7. Mother warned / told me not to waste my time.
8. He exclaimed with sorrow that he had failed in the exam.
9. The old man prayed that God might bless the child.
10. Ravi proposed that we should play a game of chess.
11. She exclaimed with joy that it was a very beautiful garden.
12. He requested her to help him with his homework.

Reporting-Verb Ready-Reckoner

Sentence type	Reporting verb →	Joiner
Assertive	said / told	that
Interrogative (yes/no)	asked / enquired	if / whether
Interrogative (wh-)	asked	wh-word
Imperative (order)	ordered / commanded	to...
Imperative (request)	requested / begged	to...
Imperative (advice)	advised	to...
Imperative (negative)	forbade / warned	not to...
Exclamatory	exclaimed with...	that
Optative	wished / prayed	that

Quick Tips 💡

- ✓ Present / Future reporting verb → **no** tense change.
- ✓ Past reporting verb → **back-shift** one step; near-words become far-words.
- ✓ Never back-shift a **universal truth**, **proverb** or **historical fact**.
- ✓ Pronouns by **SON** — Subject, Object, No-change.
- ✓ **Say**→**tell** only when an object follows; else keep **say**.

Exam order of work → (1) fix the reporting verb & joiner, (2) change the pronouns, (3) back-shift the tense, (4) swap the time & place words. Do them in that sequence and you won't miss a mark.

One full walk-through

Direct: He said to me, "I saw this film here yesterday."

object → **told** · I → **he** · saw → **had seen** · this → **that** · here → **there** · yesterday → **the previous day**

Indirect: He told me that he had seen that film there the previous day. ✓

☆ Report it right – shift tense, time & person! ☆