

What is Complex Reported Speech?

Worksheet

Complex reported speech reports embedded questions, conditionals, and nested statements using backshift rules (shifts tenses back one level) and pronoun shifts while preserving logical meaning.

Questions

1. "What will you do if it rains?" he asked.
A) He asked what I will do if it rains.
B) He asked what I would do if it rained.
C) He asked what would I do if it rains.
D) He asked what I did if it rained.
2. She said: "If you had studied, could you have passed?"
A) She said if I studied, could I have passed.
B) She said if I had studied, I could have passed.
C) She said if I had studied, could I pass.
D) She said if I study, could I pass.
3. "Where are they, and have they finished?" he wondered.
A) He wondered where they are and if they have finished.
B) He wondered where they were and if they had finished.
C) He wondered where they were and have they finished.
D) He wondered where are they and if they finished.
4. Can reported speech preserve the exact same tenses?
A) Always.
B) Only with present reporting verbs or universal truths.
C) Never.
D) Only in written English.
5. Direct: "If I pass the exam, will they celebrate?" she asked.
6. Direct: "Where have you been, and why didn't you call?" her mother demanded.
7. Direct: "If you had told me, could I have helped?" he asked.
8. Define: What is tense backshift in reported speech?
9. Define: Do embedded questions need backshift?
10. Define: Mixed conditionals in reported speech?

Answer Key

1. B) He asked what I would do if it rained. — Backshift: will → would, rains → rained. Embedded conditional follows the shift rule.
2. B) She said if I had studied, I could have passed. — Mixed conditional (past perfect + past modal): structure preserved with tense shifts.
3. B) He wondered where they were and if they had finished. — Backshift: are → were, have finished → had finished. Embedded question word order is normal.
4. B) Only with present reporting verbs or universal truths. — Present tense verbs or timeless facts may not backshift: 'He said the sun rises in the east.'
5. Reported tense: ask (past) → shift indirect claim Pronoun: she → she (narrator), I → she Conditional: will → would (backshift) Result: She asked if they would celebrate if she passed the exam.
6. Reported: demand (past) → embed question + reason Pronoun: you → she, I → she Tense: have been → had been (backshift), didn't → hadn't Result: Her mother demanded where she had been and why she hadn't called.
7. Reported: mixed conditional (hypothetical past + past result) Pronoun: you → I, I → he Tense: had told → had told (no shift, already past perfect), could → could have Result: He asked if he could have helped if I had told him.
8. Moving tenses one step back in time: present → past, past → past perfect, will → would.
9. Yes, if the reporting clause is past: 'She asked what he had done' (not 'has done').
10. Preserve the conditional structure: 'If I had known, I would have gone' → 'She said if she had known, she would have gone.'

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