Reporting people's words and thoughts

A

Quoting and reporting in our own words

When we report what people think or what they have said, we often give the information using our own words. We do this with sentences that have a *reporting clause* and a *reported clause* (see also Units 33–39):

reporting clause	reported clause
She explained He didn't tell me	(that) she couldn't take the job until January. where to put the boxes.

B

If the exact words are important, we might report the actual words someone said. In writing this is done in a *quotation*:
- ○ 'I suppose you've heard the latest news,' she said to me.
- ○ 'Of course,' Carter replied, 'you'll have to pay him to do the job.'

The *reporting clause* can come before, within, or at the end of the quotation.

In the English used in stories and novels, the *reporting verb* (e.g. **ask, continue**) is often placed before the subject when the *reporting clause* comes after the quotation except when the subject is a pronoun:
- ○ 'When will you be back?' asked Jimin. (*or* … Jimin asked.)
- ○ 'And after that I moved to Italy,' she continued. (*not* … continued she.)

C

Negatives in reporting

To report what somebody **didn't** say or think, we make the reporting verb negative:
- ○ He **didn't tell me** how he would get to London.

If we want to report a negative sentence, then we usually report this in the *reported clause*:
- ○ 'You're right, it isn't a good idea.' → He **agreed** that it **wasn't** a good idea.

although it may be reported in the *reporting clause*, depending on meaning:
- ○ 'I disagree. It's not a good idea at all.' → He **didn't agree** that it was a good idea.

However, with some verbs, to report a negative sentence we usually make the verb in the *reporting clause* negative:
- ○ 'I expect he won't come.'/ 'I don't expect he will come.' → She **didn't expect** him to come.

Also: **believe, feel, intend, plan, propose, suppose, think, want**

D

Reporting questions

To report a **wh-question** we use a *reporting clause* and a clause with a **wh-word**:
- ○ She asked me **what** the problem was.
- ○ I asked him **where** to go next.

When we report a **yes / no question** we use a *reporting clause* followed by a clause beginning with either **if** or **whether** (but note that we can't use **if + to-infinitive**; see Unit 34):
- ○ Liz wanted to know **if / whether** we had any photos of our holiday.

The usual word order in a **wh-, if-,** or **whether-clause** is the one we would use in a statement:
- ○ 'Have you seen Paul recently?' → She wanted to know if *I had seen* Paul recently.

However, if the original question begins **what, which,** or **who** followed by **be + complement**, we can put the complement before or after **be** in the report:
- ○ 'Who was the winner?' → I asked who *the winner was*. (*or* … who *was the winner*.)

Note that we don't use a form of **do** in the **wh-, if-,** or **whether-clause**:
- ○ She asked me where I found it. (*not* … where did I find it. /… where I did find it.)

However, if we are reporting a negative question, we can use a negative form of **do**:
- ○ He asked (me) why I **didn't** want anything to eat.

Exercises

32.1 Report what was said, quoting the speaker's exact words using one of the reporting verbs from the box. Put the reporting clause after the quotation and give alternative word orders where possible. B & G8–G11

| boast | chorus | ~~command~~ | confess | explain | grumble | suggest | wonder |

1 Come in out of the rain now. (*her mother*)
   'Come in out of the rain now,' commanded her mother / her mother commanded.
2 Why don't we stop for a coffee? (*she*)
3 All right, Georgia, it was me. (*he*)
4 My novel is more exciting than a Dan Brown thriller. (*she*)
5 I always carry two umbrellas with me because I'm always losing them. (*Lena*)
6 Oh, no, it's raining again. (*Matt*)
7 Good morning, Miss Novak. (*the children*)
8 Have I done the right thing? (*I*)

32.2 Complete each sentence using a pair of verbs from the box. Make one of the verbs negative. C

| announce – go | expect – be | feel – could | ~~intend – hurt~~ |
| insist – be | promise – would | think – would | threaten – repay |

1 'I didn't mean to upset Astrid.' → He ...didn't intend to hurt... her feelings.
2 'I won't give you the money back if you keep on at me.' → He .... the money if she kept on at him.
3 'I can't ask my parents to help me again.' → He .... that he .... ask his parents to help him again.
4 'I wasn't anywhere near the school at the time of the break-in.' → He .... that he .... anywhere near the school at the time of the break-in.
5 'I'm not going back to college.' → She .... that she .... back to college.
6 'I was surprised that Mum was angry.' → He .... his mother .... angry.
7 'Adam won't mind waiting.' → She .... Adam .... mind waiting.
8 'I won't be late again.' → She .... that she .... be late again.

32.3 Complete the email by reporting these questions using a wh-, if- or whether-clause. D

1 ~~'How did you hear about the job?'~~
2 'What are your long-term career plans?'
3 'How many languages do you speak?'
4 'Where did you learn Chinese?'
5 'Can you use a spreadsheet?'
6 'Have you organised international conferences before?'
7 'Would you be willing to live overseas for periods of time?'
8 'When can you start work?'

Hi Karim,

The interview went well, although it was long and they asked lots of questions. First, they wondered
(1) ...how I'd heard about the job..., and then they asked me (2) ....
They were very interested in the travelling I'd done. They asked me (3) .... ,
and they wondered (4) .... There were questions about my previous
experience. They wanted to know (5) .... , and they asked me
(6) .... At the end they asked (7) ....
.... When I said 'Yes', they asked me (8) .... !

I'll phone later and tell you more about it.

Emily