

REPORTED SPEECH - RULES

no time change ~ no tense change

There is normally **no tense change**, Marina, if the **reporting verb** is in the **present tense**. This is because there is no important change of time or circumstances. Consider these police interviews:

- A: **I've got** no idea where Mack the Knife **is**.
- B: He says **he's got** no idea where Mack the Knife **is**.
- A: **I haven't seen** him since he came out of prison.
- B: He claims **he hasn't seen** him since he came out of prison.
- A: **I am innocent** of any offence you might like to charge me with.
- B: He maintains **he is innocent** of any offence we might like to charge him with.

Similarly, after **reporting verbs** which are in the **future** or the **present perfect**, tenses normally remain the same in the **reported clause** as in what the speaker originally said. Again there is no important **change of time** or circumstances. Consider the following:

- A: Jill, **I've got** a ticket for the concert, so **I'll be joining** you.
- B: I'll tell Tim **you've got** a ticket and **will be joining** us. He'll be so pleased.
- There **will be** a 10p in the pound increase in income tax from next April to help fund the National Health Service.
- The Government has announced that there **will be** a 10p in the pound increase in income tax from next April to help fund the National Health Service.

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However, what is said by somebody is often **reported** subsequently at a different time and in a different place. This **change of time** nearly always results in a **change of tense**.

When a **past-tense reporting verb** is used, the tense of what was said originally usually moves **one tense back** into the past.

Consider the following examples which all relate to Tom and Julia's engagement party and observe how the tenses change:

- A: **Are you going** to Tom and Julia's engagement party?
- B: I asked him if **he was going** to Tom and Julia's engagement party.
- A: **Can you** pick me up from the station?
- B: I wondered whether **they might be able** to pick me up from the station.
- C: **Who's that girl** in the red dress, Tom?
- C: I asked Tom **who that girl** in the red dress **was**.
- A: How **did you make** that salad, Julie?
- A: I asked Julie how **she had made** the salad.
- B: How much wine **have you brought**, Mike?
- B: I wanted to know how much wine **Mike had brought**.
- D: **We're getting married** on 4 July and **have bought** a house in Manchester.
- A: They explained that **they were getting married** on 4 July and **had bought** a house in Manchester.

The final example relates to a point in time which is **still in the future** even when the original speech is reported. No tense change is also possible:

- They explained that **they're getting married** on 4 July and **have bought** a house in Manchester.

With reference to the future, consider the way **I love you** is reported in these examples and the way in which the meaning changes depending on how it is reported:

- He **told me** that **he loved me**.... But I **now** know that he was lying.

He **has told me** that he **loves me**.... And I think that may be true.

time change ~ no tense change

Note that some verb forms cannot go further back into the past, even when they are reported at a later date. This applies to **used to**, **the past perfect** and **past modal** and **third conditional** structures. Consider the following:

- A: **We used to go** out dancing every night of the week.
- B: They admitted that **they used to go** out dancing every night of the week.
- A: **We could have saved** ourselves a lot of money, if **we'd taken** your advice.
- B: They conceded that **they could have saved** themselves a lot of money, if **they'd taken** my advice.
- A: I **had** never **eaten** oysters before **I met** Nelson.
- B: She mentioned that **she had** never **eaten** oysters before **she met** Nelson.
- A: I **might be back** late tonight as I'm going out with Max.

B: She told me that **she might be back** late as she was going out with Max.