



Direct and indirect discourse

When one reports what others have said word for word, this is called "direct discourse." It is generally signalled by the presence of quotation marks:

- Philippe said, "I'll come if I have the time."
- My roommate said, "Clean the place up, or get out of here!"

When one paraphrases the words of others, writing them so as to avoid direct quotation, this is called "indirect discourse."

Indirect discourse entails certain changes:

A. Quotation marks are not used:

direct discourse: He told me, "You're stupid"
indirect discourse: He told me that I was stupid.

B. When the verb in the reported discourse is conjugated, it is generally preceded by "that"; however, the inclusion of "that" is optional

- She said that she would be late.
- OR: She said she would be late.
- They informed us that the plane was delayed.
- OR: They informed us the plane was delayed.

C. Imperative forms, when recounted in indirect discourse, generally become infinitive constructions:

direct discourse: He told me, "Write to me."
indirect discourse: He told me to write him.

direct discourse: I told them, "Get out of here!"
indirect discourse: I told them to get out of here.

D. When a quotation is put in indirect discourse, care must be taken to verify that verb tenses reflect the change in temporal context:

direct discourse: She said, "I will be on time."
indirect discourse: She said she would be on time.

direct discourse: When he called he said, "I am at the airport"
indirect discourse: When he called he said he was at the airport.



TEST

>> indirect discourse

1. Sarah said, "I am ill."
2. Paul told me, "Go to the cinema and buy two tickets".
3. Thierry explained to us, "I went to Spain during my holidays".
4. John said, "I will buy a new computer soon".
5. My father told me, "Do your homework!"

ANSWERS

1. Sarah said (that) she was ill. 2. Paul told me to go to the cinema and buy two tickets. 3. Thierry explained to us (that) he had gone to Spain during his holidays. 4. John said (that) he would buy a new computer soon. 5. My father told me to do my homework.