

Reported questions: word order and tense

CEFR B1 • 20 questions • A4 / US Letter

A reported question stops being a question. It takes statement word order, drops the auxiliary, and often moves one tense back.

The rule

Statement word order

- A reported question keeps subject before verb: "He asked where the station was."
- The auxiliary do, does or did disappears: "Where does she work?" becomes "He asked where she worked."
- There is no question mark at the end of a reported question.
- The reporting verb is usually ask, want to know, wonder or inquire.

Yes or no questions: if and whether

- A yes or no question becomes a statement with if or whether: "Are you ready?" becomes "She asked if I was ready."
- Whether sounds a little more formal, and it is required before to plus a verb: "whether to stay."
- Do not repeat the question word: "if that I was ready" is wrong.
- The order after if or whether is a normal statement order.

The tense backshift

- Present simple moves to past simple: "Do you like tea?" becomes "He asked if I liked tea."
- Present continuous moves to past continuous: "is working" becomes "was working".
- Past simple moves to past perfect: "did you see" becomes "if I had seen".
- Will moves to would, can to could, may to might, and must often to had to.

Time and place changes

- Now becomes then, today becomes that day, and tomorrow becomes the next day.
- Yesterday becomes the day before, and next week becomes the following week.
- Here becomes there, and this becomes that.
- These changes are optional when the situation has not moved: "She asked what time it is" is fine if it is still the same moment.

Reporting verb patterns

- Ask can take a person: ask me, ask the teacher. Want to know and wonder do not take a person in the same way.
- A reported wh-question keeps its question word: what, where, when, why, who, how.

- A reported yes or no question has no question word, so if or whether takes its place.
- In very formal writing, whether is preferred after prepositions: "about whether the plan would work."

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. Where do you live? — She asked where I ____ .

2. Are you ready? — He asked ____ I was ready.

3. What time does the shop open? — She asked what time the shop ____ .

4. Will you come? — They asked whether I ____ come.

5. Did she call? — He wanted to know if she ____ .

6. Can you drive? — She asked if I ____ drive.

7. Where are you going now? — He asked where I was going ____ .

8. Have you finished the report? — She asked whether I ____ the report.

9. What should we do? — We wondered what we ____ do.

10. Is this seat free? — I asked if ____ seat was free.

11. Where did you go? — He asked where I ____ .

12. Why are you laughing? — She asked why I ____.

13. Do you speak French? — They asked ____ I spoke French.

14. What is your name? — He asked what my name ____.

15. Must I wait here? — She asked if she ____ wait there.

16. May I leave early? — He asked if he ____ leave early.

17. How long have you worked here? — She asked how long I ____ there.

18. Who is that man? — She asked who that man ____.

19. Will they arrive tomorrow? — They asked if we would arrive ____.

20. She asked me where I lived. Choose the correct direct question.

Answer key

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1. **lived** — The reported question moves the present simple back to the past: where I lived.
2. **if** — A reported yes or no question takes if before the statement word order.
3. **opened** — The reported question drops the auxiliary and backshifts the verb to opened.
4. **would** — In reported questions, will shifts back to would.
5. **had called** — Past simple backshifts to past perfect in a reported question.
6. **could** — Can shifts to could when the question is reported in the past.
7. **then** — In reported questions, now changes to then.
8. **had finished** — Present perfect backshifts to past perfect: had finished.
9. **should** — Should stays the same in reported questions, so the form does not change.
10. **that** — The place change turns this into that in the reported question.
11. **had gone** — Past simple backshifts to past perfect in the reported question: had gone.
12. **was laughing** — Present continuous backshifts to past continuous in the report.
13. **whether** — Whether introduces a reported yes or no question in a formal style.
14. **was** — The present verb moves back to was after the past reporting verb asked.
15. **had to** — Must usually shifts to had to in reported questions.
16. **might** — May backshifts to might in the reported question.
17. **had worked** — Present perfect backshifts to past perfect had worked.
18. **was** — The reported question uses statement order and backshifts is to was.
19. **the next day** — Tomorrow changes to the next day in a reported question.
20. **Where do you live?** — Working back from the reported question, the direct form is a present simple question with the auxiliary do.