Direct and indirect speech

Direct and indirect speech can be a source of confusion for English learners. Let's first define the terms, then look at how to talk about what someone said, and how to convert speech from direct to indirect or vice-versa.

You can answer the question What did he say? in two ways:

by repeating the words spoken (direct speech)

by reporting the words spoken (indirect or reported speech).

Direct Speech

Direct speech repeats, or quotes, the exact words spoken. When we use direct speech in writing, we place the words spoken between quotation marks (" ") and there is no change in these words. We may be reporting something that's being said NOW (for example a telephone conversation), or telling someone later about a previous conversation.

Examples

She says, "What time will you be home?"

She said, "What time will you be home?" and I said, "I don't know! "

"There's a fly in my soup!" screamed Simone.

John said, "There's an elephant outside the window."