Reporting Questions

When you report a question you need to change the interrogative form into an affirmative sentence, putting the verb tense one step back, as with normal reported speech.

There are two types of questions that we can report – questions that have a yes/no response, and questions that begin with a question word like ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘who’ etc. When we report a yes/no question, we use ‘if’. For example:

Direct speech: “Do they live here?”

Indirect speech: You asked me if they lived here.

As you can see, in the reported version of the question, ‘do’ is eliminated because it is no longer a question, and the verb ‘live’ becomes ‘lived’.

For questions starting with question words like ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘who’, etc., we report the question using the question word but change the interrogative form to the affirmative form. For example:

Direct speech: “Where do they live?”

Indirect speech: You asked me where they lived.

Direct speech: “When are you leaving?”

Indirect speech: He asked us when we were leaving.

Direct speech: “How will they get here?”

Indirect speech: She asked me how they would get here.

When we report a question we normally use the verb ‘ask’. As with the verb ‘to tell’, the verb ‘to ask’ is normally followed by an object pronoun, though it is possible to omit it.

Reporting Orders and Requests

When you give someone an order, you use the imperative form, which means using just the verb without a subject. For example:

“Call me back later.”

“Have a seat.”

“Don’t do that!”

To report an order we use ‘tell’ and the infinitive of the verb. For example:

You told me to call you back later.

He told me to have a seat.

She told us not to do that.

When you make a request, you normally use words like ‘can’, ‘could’, or ‘will’. For example:

“Could you call me back later?”

“Will you have a seat?”

“Can you not do that please?”

To report a request, we use the verb ‘to ask’ and the infinitive form of the verb. For example:

You asked me to call you back later.

He asked me to have a seat.

She asked us not to do that.