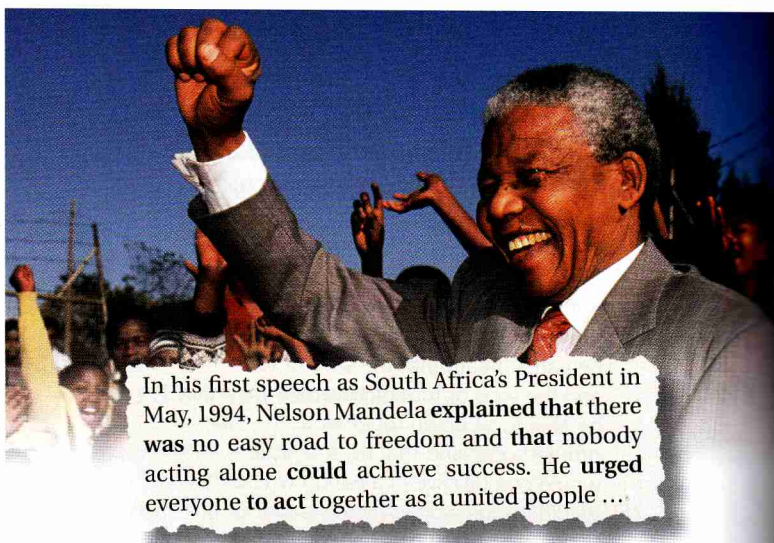


50 Patterns in reported speech

'We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom. We know it well that none of us acting alone can achieve success. We must therefore act together as a united people ...'



In his first speech as South Africa's President in May, 1994, Nelson Mandela **explained** that there was no easy road to freedom and that nobody acting alone **could** achieve success. He **urged** everyone **to act** together as a united people ...

1 Direct and reported speech

It is possible, though rare, to quote words directly in speech. We may do this if we want to focus on the exact words spoken: *But did he actually say 'I miss you'?*

We usually report words using indirect speech in conversations as we do not have punctuation to clearly signal what is the reported speech:

But did he actually tell you that he missed you?

2 Common reporting verbs

There are a number of common verbs (reporting verbs) used to report statements. They are often followed by *that*, e.g. *say, tell, add, answer, reply, mention, remark, shout*:

*For the third time that day, the minister **replied** that it was out of the question.*

We can omit *that* after most reporting verbs, especially in conversation, but we prefer not to after *reply, respond* and *answer*, and we rarely omit it after *shout*:

~~✗ I shouted they were barred from the club.~~

✓ I **shouted** that they were barred from the club. ✓ I **said** they were barred from the club.

! There are differences in use between *say* and *tell*:

~~✗ He said us that his phone wasn't working.~~

✓ He **said** that his phone wasn't working. ✓ He **said** to us that his phone wasn't working.

~~✗ He told that his phone wasn't working. ✗ He told to us that his phone wasn't working.~~

✓ He **told** us that his phone wasn't working.

When we are reporting more than one sentence, it is not necessary to repeat the reporting verb:

*Tom **insisted** that he hadn't been there. He had worked late, and had then gone straight home.*

We can also report our thoughts using verbs such as *think, decide, dream* or *imagine*:

*She never **imagined** that it would be so difficult to run for the Senate.*

When we report a negative statement we usually make the verbs within the statement negative: 'He hasn't arrived yet.' → *She said that he **hadn't arrived** yet.*

But with some verbs, e.g. *think, expect, plan, intend*, the reporting verb itself is usually negative: 'She won't be on time.' → *I **didn't expect** that she'd be on time.*

3 Using different reporting verbs

A large number of reporting verbs are 'functional'; they indicate the purpose of the original speech:

'You should stop smoking.' → He **advised** her to stop smoking. (advice)

'If you do that again, I'll call the police.' → He **threatened** to call the police. (warning)

FORMALITY CHECK In informal conversation we usually report speech with the verbs *say* and *tell*. In more formal speech and in writing, we use a greater variety of reporting verbs:

'I think you should inform the judge.' → *Dad **told** me he thought I should inform the judge.*
*The lawyer **advised** me to inform the judge.*