

Classroom Discourse

The bell rings, and students slowly settle into their seats. Some whisper quietly to each other, others shuffle notebooks, but the room is still somewhat lively. The teacher enters briskly, giving the students a stern look before reaching the desk.

Teacher: Everyone sit down immediately. We are starting. I expect silence from now on. We have wasted too much time this week already, and I will not tolerate any delays today.

The students quickly take their seats. A few still whisper “good morning,” but the teacher does not acknowledge them.

Teacher: Today we will study *reported speech*. This is a very important grammar structure, and you must understand the rule exactly as I explain it. Do not interrupt me until I finish. If you have questions, you can write them down, but you must not speak out of turn.

Student A: Good morning, teacher.

Teacher: Yes, good morning. Now pay attention.

The teacher writes “Direct Speech → Reported Speech” on the board in large letters.

Teacher: If I say, “I am tired,” you report it as “He said he was tired.” Everyone repeat after me.

Class: He said he was tired.

Teacher: Louder. Again.

Class: He said he was tired.

Teacher: Good. Now listen carefully. When changing direct to reported speech, present tense becomes past tense. That is the rule. There are no exceptions you need to know now.

Student B: Teacher, what about—?

Teacher: (interrupts) Student B, I said no questions during explanation. This is why some of you get confused: you cannot stay quiet long enough to listen. Please respect the lesson.

Student B lowers his head and closes his notebook.

Teacher: As I was saying: present changes to past. “I am tired” becomes “He said he was tired.” “They are coming” becomes “They said they were coming.” Clear? Good. Now I will choose one student to answer. Student C, change this: “They are coming.”

Student C: Umm... They said... they were coming?

Teacher: (frowns) Speak clearly. And you forgot the subject at first. You must not hesitate. Again.

Student C: They said they were coming.

Teacher: Better. See? If you pay attention, it is very simple.

A few students exchange glances but say nothing. The teacher moves on without inviting more responses.

Teacher: Now write five sentences using reported speech. You have five minutes. No talking. If you finish early, correct your mistakes quietly.

The class becomes silent. Only the sound of pencils scratching on paper fills the room. After five minutes, the teacher claps hands sharply.

Teacher: Time is up. Student D, read your first sentence.

Student D: She told me she likes English.

Teacher: Wrong. “Likes” is present. You must change it to past. If you do not follow the rule, the sentence is incorrect.

Student D: She told me she liked English.

Teacher: Yes. Now it is correct. Remember: grammar rules are not optional. If you break a rule, you speak wrong. That is why you need discipline.

Some students shift uncomfortably at the word “discipline.”

Teacher: Student E, read your first sentence.

Student E: He said he was happy.

Teacher: That is correct. See the difference? Simple and accurate. This is how it should be.

Student A: Teacher, in some videos, native speakers sometimes use the present tense even in reported speech. Why is it different?

A few students nervously look at the teacher, anticipating a negative reaction.

Teacher: (stern voice) Student A, we are not discussing what *videos* say. You are beginners. When you are at a higher level, we can talk about exceptions or informal usage. But right now you must not question the rule. You need to master the basic forms before thinking about alternatives.

Student A: Yes, teacher.

Teacher: Good. Now, all of you, close your notebooks. I want everyone’s full attention. I will check if you truly understand the rule. I will give you sentences, and you will transform them *immediately*. No hesitation. If you hesitate, I will ask another student, and you will lose points.

The class stiffens. Some students straighten up in their seats.

Teacher: “I don’t like the food,” she said. Student F.

Student F: She said she didn’t like the food.

Teacher: Correct. Next: “We will go tomorrow,” they said. Student G.

Student G: They said... they would go tomorrow.

Teacher: Good. At least some of you are paying attention today.

The teacher pauses, scanning the classroom.

Teacher: Now a more difficult one. “I have finished my homework,” he said. Student H.

Student H: He said... he had finished his homework?

Teacher: Yes. That is the correct form. Past perfect. This is why listening carefully is important.

Student B: Teacher, can I ask now?

Teacher: Not yet. I will tell you when it is time. You should wait for instructions. This is an English class, not a discussion club.

The class becomes tense again.

Teacher: Now, everyone open your textbooks to page 84. We will do Exercise 3 together. But before that, I want to remind you: English has rules, and if you don’t follow them, your sentences will be incorrect. I expect all of you to memorize the transformation rules for tomorrow’s test. If you fail, you will spend your break time practicing with me.

A few students sigh quietly, but the teacher continues without acknowledging them.

Teacher: For homework, complete Exercises 4 and 5 on page 85. Do not skip any questions. I will check them one by one. If you have problems, write them in your notebook; do not rely on me to repeat everything. You must learn to take responsibility for your own learning.

Student A: Teacher, will we have time to review the exercises before the test?

Teacher: That depends on whether you behave well tomorrow. If we waste time, we will move straight to the test. So it is up to you.

The bell rings.

Teacher: Do not leave yet. Before you go, repeat after me: “He said he was tired.”

Class: He said he was tired.

Teacher: Tomorrow I expect perfection. You may leave now.

Students pack their bags silently and walk out, exchanging tired looks as the teacher remains at the desk, organizing papers with a firm expression.