

French Direct and Indirect speech

Discours direct et indirect

In French, there are two different ways to express the words of another person: **direct speech** (or direct style) and **indirect speech** (indirect style).

Direct speech is very simple: the exact words of the original speaker are reported in quotes.

Paul dit : « J'aime les fraises ».
Paul says, "I like strawberries."

Lise répond : « Jean les déteste ».
Lisa replies, "Jean hates them."

« Jean est stupide » déclare Paul.*
"Jean is stupid" Paul declares.

*[Inversion with direct speech](#)

Incidental clauses - Inversion is required when using a short clause to offset speech or thought.

A. Direct speech - Verbs like *to say*, *to ask*, and *to think* that set off direct speech.

« Je vois, dit-il, que c'était une bonne idée ».*
"I see," he says, "that it was a good idea."

« Avez-vous un stylo ? » a-t-elle demandé.
"Do you have a pen?" she asked.

B. **Remarks, thoughts** - Verbs like *to appear* and *to seem* used to set off remarks or thoughts.

Ils ont, paraît-il, d'autres choses à faire.
They have, it appears, other things to do.

Anne était, me semble-t-il, assez nerveuse.
Anne was, it seems to me, rather nervous.

In **indirect speech**, the original speaker's words are reported without quotes in a subordinate clause (introduced by [que](#)).

Paul dit qu'il aime les fraises. Paul says that he loves strawberries.

Lise répond que Jean les déteste. Lisa replies that Jean hates them.

Paul déclare que Jean est stupide. Paul declares that Jean is stupid.

There are many verbs (called reporting verbs) that can be used to introduce **indirect speech**:

affirmer to assert

ajouter to add

annoncer to announce

crier to shout

déclarer to declare

dire to say

expliquer to explain

insister to insist

prétendre to claim

proclamer to proclaim

répondre to answer

soutenir to maintain

Indirect speech tends to be more complicated than direct speech, because it requires certain changes (in both English and French).

French Indirect Speech

Discours indirect

Indirect speech is more complicated than [direct speech](#), because it requires certain grammatical changes (in both English and French).

1. [Personal pronouns](#) and [possessives](#) may need to be changed:

DS David déclare : « **Je** veux voir **ma** mère ».
David declares, "**I** want to see **my** mother."

IS David déclare qu'**il** veut voir **sa** mère.
David declares that **he** wants to see **his** mother.

2. [Verb conjugations](#) need to change to agree with the new subject:

DS David déclare : « Je **veux** voir ma mère ».
David declares, "I **want** to see my mother."

IS David déclare qu'**il** **veut** voir sa mère.
David declares that he **wants** to see his mother.

3. In the above examples, there is no change in tenses because the statements are in the present. However, if the main clause is in the past tense, the [verb tense](#) of the subordinate clause may also need to change:

DS David a déclaré : « Je **veux** voir ma mère ».
David declared, "I **want** to see my mother."

IS David a déclaré qu'**il** **voulait** voir sa mère.
David declared that he **wanted** to see his mother.

The following chart shows the correlation between verb tenses in **direct** and **indirect speech**; use it to determine how to rewrite direct speech as indirect speech or vice versa. *Présent/Imparfait* to *Imparfait* is by far the most common - you don't need to worry too much about the rest.

Main verb	Subordinate verb may change...	
A U	Direct speech <-> Indirect speech	
	<u>Présent</u> or <u>Imparfait</u>	<u>Imparfait</u>
P A	<u>Passé composé</u> or <u>Plus-que-parfait</u>	<u>Plus-que-parfait</u>
	<u>Futur</u> or <u>Conditionnel</u>	<u>Conditionnel</u>
S S	<u>Futur antérieur</u> or <u>Conditionnel passé</u>	<u>Conditionnel passé</u>
	<u>Subjonctif</u>	<u>Subjonctif</u>
Au présent	no change	