Section 20  indirect speech

page 263
The little conversation is simply provided for students to read, to help familiarise them with
the use of tenses in indirect speech. No exercise is necessary.

tests and exercises may be unnecessary, as well as being unnatural – that isn’t how native speakers construct indirect
The explanations and exercises here are provided for students who really need them. However, for many learners indirect speech is unproblematic. In particular, tenses in indirect
speech have nothing special about them: they are nearly always the tenses that are natural
for the situation. Compare ‘She was tired because she had been working late’ and ‘She said
she was tired because she had been working late’. Both sentences use ‘was’ and ‘had been
working’ – adding ‘She said’ makes no difference. The main exception is when we report
present-tense statements and questions: here we may use past tenses to talk about things
that are still true:
‘How old are you?’ ‘What?’ ‘I asked how old you were.’
But in general, there is no need to teach complicated rules about tense changes to
most students, and exercises in which students change direct to indirect speech may be
unnecessary, as well as being unnatural – that isn’t how native speakers construct indirect
speech sentences.

However, in some languages indirect speech does have special grammar, so some students
may have problems:
*I told her that I don’t understand her problem.
*I thought that I would have been late, so I hurried.

And some languages do not have a separate indirect speech structure like those in
European languages, so speakers of these languages may mix direct and indirect structures:
*They told us you must come back tomorrow, but we couldn’t.

possible further activities
Memory test  Get each student to tell the class one true thing and one untrue thing about
him/herself using a present tense. (‘I’ve got three brothers.’ ‘I speak Arabic.’) In the next
lesson, see if students can remember what each one said.
‘Natalie said she had three brothers.’
‘Franz said he spoke Arabic, but it isn’t true.’

Old beliefs  Ask students if they can think of things that people used to believe. Help with
vocabulary as necessary.
‘People believed that the earth was flat.’

page 266

language notes
In casual speech, indirect questions may sometimes have the same structure as ordinary
questions.
They asked me what was my name.
Students may meet examples, but it’s better not to teach this at this level.

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.  ➔ Section 20 continues
**possible further activities**

**Personalisation**  Ask students to write one or two sentences about questions that they have been asked at interviews, or on forms. Tell them about some you have been asked:

‘They asked me if I had a place to live.’

‘They asked me where I went to school.’

**Memory test**  Ask each student a question:

‘How many languages can you speak?’

‘Do you play tennis?’

In the next lesson, ask students to remember what you asked:

‘You asked Maria how many languages she spoke.’

‘You asked Pablo if he played tennis.’

**Internet**  Ask students if they can find some interesting sentences on the internet beginning “The policeman asked me …”

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**page 267**

**possible further activities**

**Extending Exercise 3**  Ask students to write, say, five more sentences beginning ‘I don’t know’, ‘I don’t want to know’, ‘I don’t care’ and/or ‘I don’t remember.’

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**page 268**

**language notes**

Some students’ languages may use the equivalent of *this* in cases where English uses *that*:

*He told me he wasn't happy in this job, so he changed it.*

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**page 269**

**language notes**

Some students may tend to drop *to* from the infinitive after *how, where* etc.

*I didn't know how explain.*

**possible further activities**

**Personalisation**  Get students to write one or two sentences about advice or instructions they have been given, for example by teachers or parents, using ‘… told me/us (not) to …’. Alternatively, get younger students to say what advice they will give to their children, using ‘I’ll tell them (not) to …’.