

Reported speech

— DIE INDIREKTE REDE (KONJUNKTIV I)

Indirekte Rede is German reported speech: you pass on what someone else said, usually with Konjunktiv I, to show that the words are theirs.

When you pass on what someone said, German uses Konjunktiv I to show the words belong to the speaker, not to you.

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01 00:15

Right now: the language of newsreaders

SHORTCUT Konjunktiv I signals that you are passing on someone else's words (and not vouching for them). Newspapers and news broadcasts use it constantly.

✓ Er sagt, er **sei** krank.

He says he is ill.

✓ Sie berichtet, der Präsident **habe** keine Zeit.

She reports that the president has no time.

In everyday speech, **Er sagt, er ist krank.** is perfectly correct. But in formal language or in writing, when you want to make clear that it is a report, you use **sei**.

02 01:30

English reports speech too — just differently

In English you signal a report by **shifting the tense back**: “I **am** ill” becomes “He said he **was** ill”. Or you hedge: “He **claims** he’s ill.” German does this job with a special mood, Konjunktiv I: same verb stem, a different ending, and no tense shift needed.

DIRECT SPEECH	ENGLISH REPORT	GERMAN REPORT (KONJUNKTIV I)
"Ich bin krank . "	...says he is ill / said he was ill	Er sagt , er sei krank .
"Ich habe keine Zeit . "	...says she has no time	Sie sagt , sie habe keine Zeit .
"Ich komme später . "	...says he will come later	Er sagt , er komme später .

Just like English “says *that*”, German can add **dass**: **Er sagt, dass er krank sei.**

03 02:45

Table: learn three verbs, the rest is easy

You don’t have to memorise every verb for Konjunktiv I. About 90 percent of the time you only need three: **sein**, **haben** and **werden**.

VERB	KONJUNKTIV I (ER/SIE/ES)	EXAMPLE
sein	sei	Er sagt , er sei müde .
haben	habe	Sie sagt , sie habe Hunger .
werden	werde	Er sagt , es werde regnen .
gehen	gehe	Er sagt , er gehe nach Hause .

Konjunktiv I of sein: **ich sei, du seiest (seist), er sei, wir seien, ihr seiet, sie seien.**

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The trap when you report the past



TRAP

Looking for a Präteritum form in the past

When you report something someone did in the past (even if the original was Präteritum or Perfekt), you always use **habe / sei + Partizip II**. English backshifts to “had read”; German just uses this fixed pair.

✗ Er sagt, er ~~las~~ das Buch.

You don't say it this way in a report.

✓ Er sagt, er **habe** das Buch **gelesen**.

The correct report.

One warning: in most cases **habe** or **sei** is enough, but **if the Konjunktiv I form is identical to the present-tense form (e.g. wir/sie haben), you have to use Konjunktiv II (hätten) instead.**

The part nobody tells you: what to do when the forms collide

If the Konjunktiv I form of a verb is exactly the same as the normal present (Präsens) form, the listener can't tell it is a report. This clash usually happens with **ich**, **wir** and plural **sie**. The fix is simple: when there is a clash, use **Konjunktiv II** (and if Konjunktiv II is also identical to Präteritum, use **würde + infinitive**).

✗ Sie sagen, sie ~~haben~~ keine Zeit.

It isn't clear this is a report.

✓ Sie sagen, sie **hätten** keine Zeit.

Because the forms clash, Konjunktiv II is preferred.

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TIPS

Know this before the test

The core of the topic in three lines, then the mistakes people make most often.

01

sein -> sei, haben -> habe

Memorise the most frequent Konjunktiv I forms.

Er sagt, sie sei nett.

✗ ~~Er sagt, dass er sei müde.~~

✓ Er sagt, dass er müde sei.

When you use dass, the verb has to go to the very end.

06 05 : 00

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Finish the topic: take the full test

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