

The use of the Sequence of Tenses.

General rule

In narrations.

When the reporting verb is in the past tense the verb in the subordinate clause is usually in a corresponding past tense.

But the sequence of tenses is not absolute.

In dialogues.

The rule of the sequence of tenses is not observed when:

1) you are reporting something which is still true.

//He said New York is a cosmopolitan city.//

2) when you are reporting a universal truth.

//He said that the Sun rises in the East.//

The rule of the sequence of tenses holds good if :

1) what you are reporting is not true actually.

//You said Tom enjoyed eating cakes. He doesn't actually seem to like them.
He hasn't touched any.//

2) If the speaker isn't alive.

//Sam said, "I like jazz."//

//Sam said he liked jazz.//

(Sam is dead)

3) If the action in the reported verb is no longer true.

//Jill said, " I'm thinking of taking up dancing professionally.//

//Jill said she was thinking of taking up dancing professionally. (she no longer wants to.)//

Compare

//Jill said she is thinking of taking up music.//

(she is still planning it)

4) If you don't want to hold responsibility for the truth of the words of the speaker.

//Nick said, " London is no less cosmopolitan than New York. "//

//Nick said London was no less cosmopolitan than New York.// (you don't agree and refer the responsibility to Nick.

If you trust the speaker and share his opinion you will report his words:

//Nick said London is no less cosmopolitan...//

The sequence of tenses is observed.

//You told me you've received a letter. I'd like to see it. I'm sure there's some news in it.//

In situation of immediate reporting the sequence of tenses is not observed.

//I have a headache.
- What did you say?
I said I have a headache.//

In most cases following the rule of the sequence of tenses depends on the context.

1) Tom said, “ I live in Moscow.

//If nothing has changed between the time of the actual saying and the time of reporting, you report the words: Tom said he lives in Moscow.//

2) Pete said, “ I stayed at the office till 9 p.m. last night.

If his words are reported on the same day, “last night” is still “last night”

//Pete said he stayed at the office last night.//

Likewise

//I told you there is a traffic jam on the road.//

(there is still a traffic jam at the moment of reporting)

(in dialogue) – They told me Sally will come at noon tomorrow.

(tomorrow is still tomorrow)

(in narration) – They told her Sally would come at noon the next day.

It is important to take into account the interval between the direct speech and the reported speech.

Direct speech.

Susan: “The train arrived 2 hours ago”

Reported speech.

Pete reports Susan’s words 3 hours later.

She said the train arrived 5 hours ago.

1) the train actually arrived at 4 p.m.

2) Susan informed Pete about it at 6 p.m.

3) Pete reported her words at 9 p.m.

When a future action is expressed in Direct speech without defining time, the rule of the sequence of tenses is observed.

Susan said, “It’ll be late soon”

Susan said it would be late soon.

But

//He said, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”//

(**narration**) – //He said he would see her the next day.//

(**dialogue**) –// He said he will see you tomorrow.//