Will
Hello, and welcome to today’s Grammar Gameshow! I’m your host, Will! And if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it! You know, I can’t stand bad grammar. And of course, let’s not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie
Hello, everyone!

Will
Tonight, we’re going to ask you three questions about…

Leslie
Reported speech! That he-said, she-said grammar that’s useful for gossip, rumour, hearsay and conjecture!

Will
OK! Now, let’s meet our contestants!

Bill
Hello, all. My name is Bill!

Will
And contestant number two?

Nana Will
Hello, schnookums! I’m Nana Will!

Will
Nana Will! What are you doing here? I haven’t seen you since… but that was such a long t…

Nana Will
I came to see how you’re getting on, poppet. Your mum tells me you’re doing so well. Are you wearing clean underwear?
Will
Nana! Not cool!

Nana Will
Willikins! Answer your nana right now!

Will
Yes, Nana! Clean-ish underwear, Nana.

Nana Will
Very good. Aren’t you going to introduce me to your little friend?

Will
Nana Will this is Bill. Bill this is Nana Will. Leslie, Nana Will. Nana Will, Leslie.

Bill
Hello, Nana Will.

Leslie
Hello, Nana Will.

Will
Can I get on now?

Nana Will
Yes, of course dear. Who’s stopping you?

Will
OK. Let’s get going and don’t forget you can play along at home too. Our first round is a straight-up questions round. What are the three most commonly used verbs in reported speech grammar?

Bill
Say, tell and ask.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Tell me one verb pattern for say, tell and ask.
Bill
Say something to someone. Tell someone something. Ask someone if or whether or question word.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Final question in this round. Give me an example of say and tell.

Nana Will
No. I’ll take this one, if you don’t mind, dearie. I remember when you were just a little sprite, and we went to the zoo, and we saw an ostrich for the first time. And do you know what he said? He said it was a big chicken! He told me it was a big chicken!

Will
Nana! Really?

Nana Will
Just answering the question, pumpkin.

Will
Leslie?

Leslie
Well done! Reported speech is used to inform the listener what was said by someone on a different occasion. The three most common reported speech verbs are say, tell and ask. Say is commonly used without a personal pronoun - Will said it was a big chicken - while tell must be followed by one. Will told Nana Will it was a big chicken. Finally, ask is used in reported questions. Ask can be followed by a pronoun and then if or whether for a yes/no question, or a question word for a question word question.

Will
Good work, Bill. Have Fifteen points for you. And, er, twenty points for Nana Will. On to round two. Answer this. What usually happens when to the tense of a sentence when it changes from direct speech to reported speech?

Bill
It usually gets rolled back one tense!

Leslie
Correct!
Will
Well done. Let’s have a practice, shall we? I’ll tell you the sentence, and you give me the reported speech version. Ready? I love my Nana.

Nana Will
He said he loved his Nana.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Who’s been playing with my question cards?

Nana Will
It’s a mystery dear. Keep reading.

Will
I wanted to be an elephant when I was a child.

Nana Will
He told me he had wanted to be an elephant when he was a child.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
I will always listen to Nana Will.

Nana Will
He said he would always listen to Nana Will.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Well, answer this one then! One of those sentences does not need to have its tense changed in reported speech. Which one is it, and why?

Nana Will
It’s the first one. He said he loves his Nana. This is because the situation hasn’t changed from when it was said. It is still true.

Leslie
Correct!
Nana Will
Now, don’t test me young man, or I’ll give you a smack on the botty bot-bot.

Will
Leslie!

Leslie
That’s absolutely right. When changing speech from direct to reported, remember that the tense of the direct speech should be rolled back one step towards the past. For example, present becomes past, and past becomes past perfect. However, there are one or two exceptions. Firstly, some tenses and verb types don’t change, such as the past perfect, and verbs like would and could. Secondly, if something which was said is still true at the time of reporting, no tense change is necessary. This is also true if the reporting verb say or tell is in the present tense.

Will
Well done, you get 11.2 poi…

Nana Will
Oh, Will! Before I forget, I brought you some milk.

Will
Nana Will! You’re not supposed to come ou…

Nana Will
Drink up, dear! Nana knows best! Well done!

Will
Let’s move on to our final round. Along with these tense changes… Oh, she’s gone to sleep! OK, everyone let’s…right. Along with these tense changes, certain subjective words must also change when converted to reported speech. Have a look at these sentences, and tell me which words need to change. He said “I’m here now.” Yes, Bill?

Bill
He said he was there then.

Leslie
Cor… Correct!

Will
I said “I got this last Tuesday.” Yes, Bill?

Bill
You said you had got that the Tuesday before.
Leslie
Cor... Correct!

Will
They said “We’ll be there next year.” Yes, Bill?

Bill
They said they would be there the year after.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Leslie?

Leslie
Great stuff! In speech, certain words such as pronouns, place and time words will be relative to that context. Later, when these are transferred into reported speech, they may need to change, so be careful!

Will
And that brings us to the end of today’s Grammar Gameshow. Let’s count out the points… And the winner is… Bill! Yay! Woo! Well done! Here’s what you won!

Nana Will
Young man. Blood is thicker than water. I’ve combed your hair. I’ve taken you to school. I’ve even changed your nappy. So, don’t tell me I lost.

Will
Nana! You’re awake. How wonderful. And the winner is Nana! Well done! Here’s what she’s won!

Leslie
It’s a nice cup of tea!

Will
We’ll see you again next week, where you can play for another prize. And Bill... sorry old pal. I can’t play anymore. Nana’s orders. Whoops! I must have pushed the wrong button! Unleash the ravages of time.

Bill
Will! Did you just... to your Nana!
Will
Oh, don’t worry. She’s tough as old boots, that one. She’ll be fine. It’s the animals that I feel sorry for. It looks like we’ll need another contestant. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye, Leslie.

Leslie
Nagaatti, Leslie

Will
See you next time.