Reported Speech (Indirekte Rede)

When reporting what has been said or asked, in German as well as English, you need to pay attention to word order and to tense. Below are some examples of reported speech.

	ENGLISH		DEUTSCH	
STATEMENT	"I'm sick."	Helen <u>says</u> that she <u>is</u> sick. (present) (present)	»Ich bin krank.«	Helen <u>sagt</u>, dass sie krank <u>ist</u>. (present) (present)
	"I'm sick."	Helen <u>said</u> that she <u>was</u> sick. (past) (past)	»Ich bin krank.«	Helen <u>sagte</u>, dass sie krank <u>wäre</u>. (past) (subj II)
				OR: Helen <u>sagte</u>, dass sie krank <u>sei</u>. (past) (subj I)
YES/NO?	"Is it raining?"	Bob <u>is asking</u> if it <u>is</u> raining. (present) (present)	»Regnet es?«	Bob <u>fragt</u>, ob es <u>regnet</u>. (present) (present)
	"Is it raining?"	Bob <u>asked</u> if it <u>was</u> raining. (past) (past)	»Regnet es?«	Bob <u>fragte</u>, ob es <u>regnete</u>. (past) (subj II)
				OR: Bob <u>fragte</u>, ob es <u>regne</u>. (past) (subj I)
WHO/WHAT?	"Who is that man?"	Steve <u>is asking</u> who that man <u>is</u>. (present) (present)	»Wer ist dieser Mann?«	Steve <u>fragt</u>, wer dieser Mann <u>ist</u>. (present) (present)
	"Who is that man?"	Steve <u>asked</u> who that man <u>was</u>. (past) (past)	»Wer ist dieser Mann?«	Steve <u>fragte</u>, wer dieser Mann <u>wäre</u>. (past) (subj II)
				OR: Steve <u>fragte</u>, wer dieser Mann <u>sei</u>. (past) (subj I)

To summarize reported speech in German:

- for <u>present tense</u> reporting (he says or asks), you may use the <u>indicative</u> (or, very rarely, subjunctive).

- for <u>past tense</u> reporting (he said or asked), you should use the <u>subjunctive</u>. In speech, the subjunctive II is preferred; in formal writing, subjunctive I is more common. If the subjunctive I form looks the same as the indicative, you must use the subjunctive II instead (usually with plural subjects).

- when reporting <u>statements</u> (he said that ...), use the conjunction <u>dass</u>, which will move the conjugated verb to the end of the clause.

- when reporting <u>yes/no questions</u> (he asked if/whether ...), use the conjunction <u>ob</u>, which will move the conjugated verb to the end of the clause.

- when reporting <u>informational questions</u> (he asked who/what/where/when/why/how ...), use the <u>question word</u> as stated in the original quote; the verb still moves to the end of the clause.