

4. Indirect question clauses

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An indirect question (or *indirect interrogative*) is a question inside a main sentence. For instance:

- Direct question: **ποῦ ἔστιν** ὁ Σωκράτης; WHERE IS SOCRATES?
- ✧ Indirect question: βούλεται εἰδέναι **ποῦ ἔστιν** ὁ Σωκράτης HE WANTS TO KNOW WHERE SOCRATES IS.

a) What happens to the original verb?

The same tense must be kept, and also the indicative mood (unless it is a deliberative question in subjunctive, in which case subjunctive tense must be kept). If, for instance, the original question is formulated in future tense,

- **τί ποιήσεις** αὔριον; WHAT WILL YOU DO TOMORROW?

the verb of the indirect question will be in the future tense, regardless of the tense of the main sentence:

- εἰδέναι ἐβούλετο **τί ποιήσω** αὔριον HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO TOMORROW
✧ Observe that, as the introductory verb is past, the English WILL has become WOULD, but in Greek the sentence reads literally as HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WILL DO TOMORROW.
- αὐτήν δὲ ἔχων τὴν ἡλικίαν οὔτε **τί ἔστιν** ὀλιγαρχία ἠπιστάμην AT THAT AGE, I DID NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT OLIGARCHY IS / WAS (*Lysias, In Theomnestum*).

BUT: As in the cases of reported speech, the *oblique optative* can be used if the introductory verb is in a secondary tense, creating the so called *secondary sequence*:

- **πῶς μαχήσονται** οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι; HOW WILL THE ATHENIANS FIGHT?
- ἤρετο **πῶς μαχήσονται** οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι HE ASKED HOW THE ATHENIANS WOULD FIGHT.

✧ Remember that this is optional; **μαχήσονται** would also have been correct.

b) What happens to the interrogative word?

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1/ In the examples above, the interrogative word has not changed; nevertheless, it is very common to add the prefix **ὄ-**, but this is optional (note that some accent alteration will occur if used):

- ἤρετο **ὄπως** μαχήσονται οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι HE ASKED HOW THE ATHENIANS WOULD FIGHT.
- βούλεται εἰδέναι **ὅπου** ἔστιν ὁ Σωκράτης HE WANTS TO KNOW WHERE SOCRATES IS.
- εἰδέναι ἐβούλετο **ὅ τι** ποιήσω αὔριον HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO TOMORROW.
✧ Usually we write **ὅ τι** in two words to avoid confusing it with the other **ὄτι**.
- ἐρωτᾷ **ὅποτε** ὁ Σωκράτης πρὸς τὴν Λακεδαιμονίαν εἰσιν THEY ASK WHEN SOCRATES WILL GO TO LACEDAEMONIA.
- θαυμάζω **ὅπως** ἠθέλησέ σοι ὁ τοῦ δεσμοτηρίου φύλαξ ὑπακοῦσαι I WONDER HOW THE PRISON GUARD WANTED TO AGREE TO YOUR REQUEST (*Plato, Crito*).
- οὐκ οἶδ' **ὅποι** ἀφανῆς ᾤχετο HE LEFT UNNOTICED, I DO NOT KNOW WHERE TO (*Lucian, Philopseudeis*).

2/ The use of **τίς**, **τί** or any of its forms is a separate issue:

- **τίς ἔστιν** ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ; WHO IS IN THE HOUSE?
- ✧ ἐρωτᾷ **τίς ἔστιν** ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ HE ASKS WHO IS IN THE HOUSE.