

Relative clauses

Defining relatives give information that is essential to identify the antecedent:

The man **that** phoned yesterday was angry

Non-defining relatives give additional information that is not essential to identify the antecedent. They are placed between commas:

Mr. Brown, **who** phoned yesterday, was angry

The relative pronouns *that* and \emptyset can only be used in defining relative clauses.

In defining relative clauses in which the preposition that governs the relative pronoun precedes the pronoun we cannot use *that* or \emptyset :

The speed (**that**) human beings work **at** is limited

The speed **at which** human beings work is limited

If the personal relative pronoun is preceded by its preposition, we must use *whom*:

The man (**that**) I was talking **to** was French

The man **to whom** I was talking was French

The relative pronoun *that* cannot be omitted if it is the subject of the relative clause:

The man (**that**) I phoned was angry

The man **that** phoned me was angry

After the words *the way*, *the reason* and expressions of time we can omit the relative pronoun and the preposition:

I don't like the way (in which) he explains things

I'll never forget the day (on which) we met

I'll phone you the minute (at which) I arrive

1. In the following exercise you must use omission if possible, if not, use **that**, in other cases use a pronoun from the **wh**-series:

1. This is the person I was talking about.
2. This is the person about ..**whom**. I was talking.
3. I like the way she prepares everything so carefully.
4. July Churches, **who**..... is a terrible singer, is also a multimillionaire.
5. That's the person ...**that**..... phoned you yesterday.
6. That's the person you phoned yesterday.

7. The reason I'm telling you this is that I trust you.
8. I'll have a drink the minute I get home.
9. This isn't the kind of work I am accustomed to.
10. This isn't the kind of work to ..**wich**..... I am accustomed.

The relative pronoun *which* is used to make reference to the whole of the preceding sentence:

He closed the door, **which** was a good idea because it was cold

compare

He closed the door **which/that** was open

The relative pronoun *what* is used to mean *the thing(s)* *which*, it has no antecedent, but contains its own antecedent:

What I don't understand is why he did it

I don't understand **what** is happening

The relative pronoun *whose* expresses the idea of possession:

This is the person **whose** cat scratched me

2. In the following exercise you must use omission if possible, if not, use **that**, in other cases use a pronoun from the **wh**-series:

1. *Tristram Shandy* is a novel **that**..... was written in the XVIIIth century by Sterne.
2. *Tristram Shandy* is a novel **whose**..... plot can be illustrated like this.



3. Tristram, **whose**..... conception was interrupted by a clock, is the hero of the novel.
4. The novel was immensely popular, **which**..... isn't surprising as it is a master piece.
5. **What**..... is especially interesting about the novel is its treatment of time.
6. Measuring time accurately was a question**that**... was extremely important in Sterne's day.
7. It was a problem the Government wanted to solve in order to assure that captains of the navy could accurately work out their position at sea.

8. The novel also deals with many themes, like meaning, sympathy and sublimation**that**..... are still of great importance to humanity.

3. Rewrite the sentences with the new beginnings.

1. I saw Ann's photo at the police station.

Ann's the person**whose photo I saw**

2. I don't understand why he is always so angry.

What**I don't understand is why he is always so angry**

3. Mr Brown is my boss. He lives in a big house.

Mr Brown,**who lives in a big house, is my boss**

4. So you are the person I sent the letter to.

So you are the person to**whom I sent the letter**

5. I think she sings very well.

I like the**way she sings**.....

6. I told John the secret. That wasn't a very good idea.

I told John the secret,**which wasn't a very good idea**

7. They are thinking about the problem of the ozone hole.

The ozone hole is the problem**they are thinking about**

8. He was singing a song about penguins in bondage.

The song**he was singing is about penguins...**

9. It travels very quickly.

The speed at**which it travels is very high**

10. She said something, but I didn't hear it.

I didn't hear**what she said**.....