



When those who want to get in [the subway car] don't let those out who want to get out, then those who want to get out can't let those who want to get in get in. (Long live Berlin) [A subway ad].

Relative Clauses in English:

Relative clauses contain at least a subject and a verb and are used to modify nouns, pronouns, or sometimes whole phrases. A relative pronoun establishes the link to what is being modified (which is called the "antecedent"). In English, "who," "that," and "which" are the most common relative pronouns:

- "I know an old lady who swallowed a fly."
- "He who lives in a glass house should change his clothes in the basement."
- "The man with whom you were speaking is my husband."
- "The collector bought the socks that Babe Ruth was wearing when he hit his 59th homer."
- "He told a joke that we had already heard 100 times."
- "Someone whose nose runs and feet smell is built upside-down."
- "Bertelsmann, which is a privately-owned German company, is the world's largest publisher."
- "He wears his baseball cap backwards, which makes him look particularly stupid."

In English — but not in German — the relative pronoun can often be omitted:

- "Who was the lady [that] I saw you with last night?"
- "The car [that] I bought was on sale."

Note that the antecedent and the relative pronoun may be in different cases:

- "The car that you wrecked belongs to my mother."
- "The man she lives with (with whom she lives) never puts the toilet seat down."
- "I know someone who would disagree with you."
- "She never saw the man to whom she gave the money."

Sometimes the relative clause is set off by commas.

Relative Clauses in German:

German relative clauses perform the same function as in English, but there are differences in form:

The relative pronouns reflect gender, number, and case. The relative pronoun's antecedent determines gender and number, while the pronoun's function within the dependent clause determines the case (see the examples below).

In relative clauses, just as in [dependent clauses](#), the finite verb goes to the end.

In German, as opposed to English, the relative pronoun cannot be omitted.

In contrast to English ("Is he the man that you talked with?"), a German relative pronoun that is part of a prepositional phrase must stay with the preposition: "Ist das der Mann, mit dem du gesprochen hast?" — see below.

Relative clauses are always set off by commas.

The Relative Pronouns

	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>	<u>Neuter</u>	<u>Plural</u>
<u>Nominative</u>	der	die	das	die
<u>Accusative</u>	den	die	das	die
<u>Dative</u>	dem	der	dem	denen
<u>Genitive</u>	dessen	deren	dessen	deren

Except in the genitive case, "**welch-**" can sometimes also be employed as the relative pronoun: "**welcher**", "**welchen**", etc.

Examples of relative pronouns in various cases. Again: a German relative pronoun that is part of a prepositional phrase must stay with the preposition: "Ist das der Mann, mit dem du gesprochen hast?"

With the relative pronoun in the nominative case:

Ein Unterhosenbügler ist ein Mann, **der** seine Unterhosen bügelt.

Ist das die Ärztin, **die** dich operiert hat?

Ich suche ein Buch, **das** die Berliner U-Bahn beschreibt.

Hunde, **die** bellen, beißen nicht.

An underpants-ironer is a man who irons his underpants.

Is that the (woman) doctor who operated on you?

I'm looking for a book that describes the Berlin subway system.

Dogs that bark don't bite.



**Für alle, die etwas mehr Platz brauchen.
Der neue Golf Plus.**

For all who need more room. The new VW Rabbit.

With the relative pronoun in the accusative case:

Ich brauche einen Wagen, **den** ich mir leisten kann.

Wo ist das Buch, **das** Sie mir geschenkt haben?

Ist das die Suppe, **die** du bestellt hast?

Das sind Gäste, **die** ich besonders gern sehe.

Die Frau, **an die** du denkst, war meine Lehrerin.

I need a car that I can afford.

Where is the book that you gave me as a present?

Is that the soup [that] you ordered?

Those are guests that I particularly like to see.

The woman you're thinking of was my teacher.

Das Haus, **in das** Sie jetzt gehen, gehört meiner Mutter. *The house you are now entering belongs to my mother.*
 Er ist ein Mensch, **auf den** man bauen kann. *He's a person on whom you can rely.*
 Der Freund, **auf den** ich warte, ist neu in der Stadt. *The friend I am waiting for is new to the city.*



Do you dream of a car into which you can fit your whole life?

With the relative pronoun in the dative case:

Er ist ein Mensch, **dem** man nicht helfen kann.

He's someone you can't do anything for.

Es gibt keine Politiker, **denen** ich noch traue.

There are no politicians that I still trust.

Weißt du, wie die Frau heißt, **der** ich das Geld geben soll?

Do you know the name of the woman I'm supposed to give the money to?

Das Kind, **dem** ich danken wollte, ist schon weg.

The child I wanted to thank is already gone.

Das ist ein Hund, **vor dem** man Angst haben soll.

That's a dog you should be afraid of.

Die Maschine, **von der** Sie sprechen, gehört uns nicht mehr.

The machine you're talking about doesn't belong to us any more.

Das Holz, **aus dem** der Tisch gemacht ist, ist wahrscheinlich Eiche.

The wood that the desk is made of is probably oak.

Die Leute, **bei denen** ich wohne, sind wirklich nett.

The people I live with are really nice.



My garden. A place in which there's room for
breakfast in bed.

With a relative possessive pronoun:

Ein Student, **dessen** Wecker nicht klingelt, soll einen neuen kaufen.

Das ist der Mann, **mit dessen** Wagen wir gefahren sind.

Ich kenne keine einzige Frau, **deren** Mann bereit ist, die Hausarbeit mit ihr zu teilen.

Das ist dieselbe Professorin, **in deren** Vorlesung du eingeschlafen bist.

Die Fotografin, **deren** Kamera du benutzt hast, will sie jetzt zurück haben.

Alle Studenten, **deren** Hunde ihre Hausaufgabe gefressen haben, kriegen eine 6.

A student whose alarm doesn't go off should buy a new one.

That's the man whose car we drove.

I don't know a single woman whose husband is willing to share the housework with her.

That's the same professor in whose lecture you fell asleep.

The photographer whose camera you used wants it back now.

All students whose dogs ate their homework will get an F.

Other forms of relative pronoun:



Whoever wants to protect the aroma of the best coffee also
knows how to release it.

"**wer**" can be used only in the sense of "he who" or "whoever" — this is not technically a relative pronoun, since it has no antecedent; rather the whole clause in which it occurs occupies the position of a subject or an object. Similarly, "**was**" can mean "that which" or "whatever":

Wer zuerst kommt, mahlt zuerst.

He who comes first, grinds [his flour] first (i.e., First come, first served).

Wer eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein.

Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein.

Wen der Herr liebt, den züchtigt er.

Whom the Lord loveth, He correcteth.

Was mich ärgert, ist, dass sie sich nicht entschuldigt hat.

What annoys me is that she didn't apologize.

Was er Ihnen gesagt hat, war eine Lüge.

What he told you was a lie.

In colloquial speech, "**wo**" can sometimes be a substitute for a prepositional phrase that expresses time, space, or a process:

In der Zeit, **wo** ich studierte, hatte ich kein Geld.

[*instead of:*] In der Zeit, **in der** ich studierte, hatte ich kein Geld.

When I was a student I had no money.

Der Ort, **wo** er wohnt, ist ziemlich klein.

[instead of:] Der Ort, **in dem** er wohnt, ist ziemlich klein.

The town where he lives is pretty small.

Ich möchte in einer Stadt arbeiten, **wo** ich kein Auto brauche.

[instead of:] Ich möchte in einer Stadt arbeiten, **in der** ich kein Auto brauche.

I'd like to work in a city where I don't need a car.

In der Tradition, **wo** er aufgewachsen ist, spielen Geschenke eine wichtige Rolle.

[instead of:] In der Tradition, **in der** er aufgewachsen ist, spielen Geschenke eine wichtige Rolle.

In the tradition he grew up in, gifts play an important role.



You don't have to build everything you use.

"was" is the relative pronoun after certain antecedents:

the neuter pronouns "das" or "dem":

Leben ist das, **was** passiert, wenn du gerade andere Pläne schmiedest.
Sofri hält die Balance zwischen dem, **was** man sieht, und dem, **was** man fühlt.

Life is what happens while you are forging other plans.

Sofri [a form of yoga] keeps a balance between that which one sees and that which one feels.

etwas

Ich habe etwas, **was** ich dir geben möchte.

I have something that I'd like to give you.

alles

Ist das alles, **was** du zu sagen hast?

Is that all that you have to say?

nichts

Es gibt nichts, **was** er jetzt sagen könnte.

There's nothing that he could say now.

wenig

Ich habe nur wenig, **was** ich Ihnen bieten könnte.

I have only little that I could offer you.

viel

Es gibt viel, **was** Sie für ihn tun könnten.

There's a lot that you could do for him.

vieles

Vieles, **was** er sagt, ist Quatsch.

Much of what he says is nonsense.

a neuter noun formed from a superlative adjective

Das Beste, **was** er zu bieten hat, ist seine Wohnung.

The best thing he has to offer is his apartment.

Das ist das Klügste, **was** du in dieser Situation tun könntest.

That's the smartest thing you could do in this situation.

a neuter noun formed from an ordinal number

Das Erste, **was** ich sagen möchte, ist ganz einfach.

The first thing I want to say is very simple.

das Letzte

Das ist das Letzte, **was** ich für dich wollte.

That's the last thing I wanted for you.

das Einzige

Das Einzige, **was** ich zum Geburtstag bekommen möchte, ist Geld.

The only thing I want for my birthday is money.

a whole phrase

Er kann nicht mehr sprechen, **was** nicht so schlecht ist.

He can't talk any more, which isn't such a bad thing.

Wir gehen zum Zoo, **was** immer Spaß macht.

We're going to the zoo, which is always fun.

When **"was"** is the relative pronoun, it becomes a **"wo-**
" compound in [prepositional phrases](#):

Sofri hält die Balance zwischen innerer und äußerer Schönheit - zwischen dem, was man sieht und dem, was man spürt und fühlt



Systempflege von Sofri nutzt

- das Chi - unsere Lebensenergie
- das Wissen um unsere Energiezentren, auch Chakren genannt, denen jeweils eine Farbe zugeordnet wird
- die Energie von Farben
- hochwirksame Pflanzenextrakte

Sofi keeps the balance between inner and external beauty - between that which one sees and that which one senses and feels.

Das ist etwas, **worum** ich bitten möchte.

That's something that I'd like to request.

Das Erste, **wovon** sie gesprochen hat, war die Situation in den Schulen.

The first thing that she talked about was the situation in the schools.

When the relative pronoun is part of a prepositional phrase and refers to something not human, colloquial speech sometimes uses a "wo-" compound:

Das ist der Bus, **worauf** wir alle warten.

That's the bus we're all waiting for.

Der Wagen **womit** wir gefahren sind, war ziemlich alt.

The car that we drove was pretty old.

But normally the preposition should precede the relative pronoun:

Das ist eine Firma, **für die** ich gerne arbeiten würde.

That is a firm I'd like to work for.

Ich brauche eine Lupe, **mit der** ich das lesen könnte.

I need a magnifying glass with which I could read that.