

GRAMMAR

# Relative clauses in depth

**LEVEL**

Upper-Intermediate  
(B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_3042G

**LANGUAGE**

English

## Learning outcomes

- I can explain the differences between defining and non-defining relative clauses.
- I can use defining and non-defining relative clauses to give clear and detailed information.



# Warm-up

Tell the class about...

**...a place where you  
like to go for food on  
special occasions.**



**...an activity that you  
only do at certain times  
of the year.**



# Two types of relative clause

**Label** the type of relative clause shown in the table.

**Identify** the noun being described by the relative clause in each sentence.

- **Defining relative clauses** tell us **which noun** the speaker means.
- **Non-defining relative clauses** give us **extra information** about the noun.

\_\_\_\_\_ relative clause

I bought a tablet **that has a detachable keyboard** for my daughter.

My friend **who owns a bakery** is visiting tomorrow.

\_\_\_\_\_ relative clause

My mother, **who is great at cooking**, taught me everything I know.

Our school, **which has 400 pupils**, is known for academic excellence.



Option: complete this activity **in breakout rooms**.



# Defining relative clauses

**Defining relative clauses** make it clear **which noun** we are talking about.

We introduce them using **relative pronouns**: *who*, *which*, *that*, *when*, *where*, and *whose*.



Sam is the colleague **who** helped fix my computer.

That's the artist **whose** exhibition we went to last week.





# Defining relative clauses

Read the example sentences. **Complete** the blue box.

I went to the shop.  
The shop sells the coffee we  
like.



I went to the shop **that** sells the  
coffee we like.

- A **defining clause** gives **essential** information about someone or something.
- It can help to think of defining relative clauses as **joining** two independent clauses together.

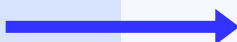
- Look at the sentences above. Identify the **main clause** and the **defining clause**.
- Which relative pronoun is used to join the clauses together? Which noun does it refer to?

# Removing the relative pronoun

You can sometimes remove the relative pronouns **that**, **who** and **which** from defining clauses. You can only do this when the relative pronoun replaces the **object** of the clause.

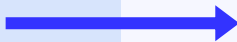
*I found **a recipe** (that) we could try → I found **a recipe**. We could try **it**.*

This is the cake **that** I baked yesterday.



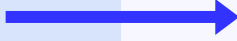
This is the cake I baked yesterday.

I met a friend **who** I last saw in May.



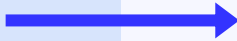
I met a friend I last saw in May.

I heard a joke **which** you would like.



I heard a joke you would like.

I have a black dress that you can wear.



I have a black dress you can wear.



You **cannot** remove **relative pronouns** which replace the **subject** of a clause.



# Using whose in defining relative clauses

Read the example sentences below. Complete the blue box.



Amelia

**My father taught me the guitar.**



Darius

**My children speak three languages.**

- Imagine you met Amelia and Darius at a party. They tell you something about themselves. Now, you are telling your friend about them.
- Finish the sentences below using *whose*:

*I met someone...*

*I also met someone...*



**Remember** to change all the necessary pronouns in the sentence.





**Wow, I don't know how  
I'll remember  
everyone's names and  
what they do...**

**Don't worry, it's your  
first day. You'll soon  
learn **who's who**.**

Have you heard this phrase before?

Can you rephrase the sentence so that it  
has a similar meaning?



# Choose the correct relative pronoun(s)

1 We use \_\_\_\_\_ when we talk about objects.

- a. that                      b. which                      c. that and which                      d. who

2 We use \_\_\_\_\_ when we talk about people, not objects.

- a. that                      b. who                      c. who and that                      d. which

3 We use \_\_\_\_\_ when something belongs to the object of the sentence.

- a. where                      b. that                      c. which                      d. whose

4 We use \_\_\_\_\_ when we talk about a place in the relative clause.

- a. whose                      b. when                      c. where                      d. that



# Transform the sentences

**Change** each set of sentences into a single sentence using the correct relative pronoun.

1 They served us a meal. It was cold and flavourless.



They served us a meal **which** was cold and flavourless.

2 This is the land. Our new office will be built here.



3 I've met the woman. Her daughter sold us the land.



4 I get the train. It leaves at 6:15 am.



5 We hired the architect. She designed the theatre in town.



6 I went to the café. It has those delicious pastries.



# Non-defining relative clauses

**Non-defining** relative clauses provide us with **extra information**.

- These clauses are **not necessary** to understand the sentence as a whole.
- They can be **removed** from the sentence **without affecting** the overall meaning.



Frank studied on Easter Island, **which is full of mysterious statues.**

Cassandra, **who had slept badly,** was very tired in her English class.





# Non-defining relative clauses

Non-defining relative clauses very often appear **between two commas**, separating the subject of a sentence from the main verb.

We also add non-defining relative clauses **after a comma** at the end of a main clause.



Andre, **who enjoys reading**, is a member of a book club.

Mason has just flown to Madrid, **where his girlfriend lives**.





# Non-defining relative clauses

Read the examples. Complete the blue box.

Our neighbour, ~~that's~~ originally from Germany, has moved out.

Greta, **who** likes to cycle to work, bought herself a new bike.  
She has also just started a new job, **which** she is really enjoying.

- You **cannot** use the relative pronoun **that** to introduce a non-defining relative clause.
- You must use **who** for people or **which** for things.
- **Correct** the first sentence above.

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# Non-defining relative clauses

Read the examples. Complete the blue box.

Greta, **who** likes to cycle to work, bought herself a new bike.  
She has also just started a new job, **which** she is really enjoying.

- Non-defining relative clauses can also describe the **object** of the **main clause**.
- In which sentence above is the relative clause referring to the **object**?

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# Non-defining relative clauses

**Read** the example sentences below. **Complete** the blue box.

**We camped by the side of a lake, which was absolutely beautiful.**

**I said goodbye to Laura, who was flying home to Australia.**

**We're happy with Liam, whose idea it was to change the design logo.**

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- Identify the **object** in the main clause in each sentence.
- What **relative pronoun** is used in each sentence? Why?



# Match the sentence parts

1. **Match** the sentences.
2. **Form single sentences** with a non-defining relative clause.



**Consider** whether the relative clause refers to the **object** or the **subject** of the main clause.

1 Johnny got a standing ovation from the crowd.

2 Katerina is my grandmother.

3 He picked up a bunch of bananas.

4 Marsupials are very interesting animals.

5 I was just travelling through Vietnam.

a Her father was an artist.

b They are commonly found in Australia.

c Johnny impressed everyone with his guitar solo.

d He noticed the bananas were rotting.

e I had the trip of a lifetime there.

# Add a non-defining relative clause

**Add** your own non-defining relative clauses to these sentences.

The swans  
glided  
gracefully on  
the lake.

Sarah and  
Andy started  
working on the  
garden.

The President  
decided to call  
off the press  
conference.

Francine's  
father trudged  
slowly up the  
stairs.

Roberto played  
the synthesiser  
in the band.

My friend has  
just toured  
around the  
world with his  
comedy act.

Lisa danced for  
hours last  
night.

Koalas are not  
actually bears.

My mother  
comes from  
Cambodia.



## Discuss

**Name the person who had the biggest influence on you as a child.**

**Name a film that made you laugh or cry (or both)!**

**Do you know anyone whose star sign is the same as yours?**

**Think of a time when you achieved something important.**





# End of the lesson

Idiom

***Nothing to write home about***

**Meaning:** Use this expression to describe an experience that wasn't very exciting or memorable

**Example:** I tried that new restaurant by the river. Nothing to write home about, to be honest.



# Additional practice



# Review: relative clauses

**Categorise** the statements below.

- 1 These relative clauses tell us which noun is being referred to.
- 2 These relative clauses add information about a noun.
- 3 If you remove this relative clause, the sentence is still 'complete'.
- 4 No comma is necessary when introducing this type of relative clause.
- 5 We often insert this type of relative clause between two commas.
- 6 For this type of relative clause, we cannot use the relative pronoun 'that'.

## Defining relative clauses

## Non-defining relative clauses



# Writing activity

**Write** a short text using one of the prompts below. **Use** as many relative clauses as you can.  
**Share** your text with the class.

Write a short text (100-200 words) about one of the following:

A **person** you haven't seen in a long time

A **place** where you feel relaxed

A **product** that you couldn't live without

A **task** that you hate doing



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# Describe the people you met at the party



My job takes me all over the world.



My ambition is to become an actor.



My ex-husband was a gambler.



I love classical music.



# Defining relative clauses

**Write sentences** using the prompts below.

- 1 Your brother is wearing a fashionable jacket.  
You say to your brother:



I like the jacket (that) you're wearing.

- 2 You arrive at the station. It's much busier than usual.  
You tell your colleague:



- 3 You visit a restaurant. Your friend Isha had recommended it.  
You tell another friend:



- 4 You've organised a conference. Not everyone can come.  
You tell the delegates:



- 5 You're moving flat. You've chosen your favourite part of the city.  
You tell your sister:



- 6 You're going on holidays. You're going to the place you used to go as a child.  
You tell your partner:







# Categorise

**Categorise** the sentences.

- 1 Here are some of the patients who have been waiting.
- 2 The jar, which was half full of water, was knocked from the table.
- 3 They should offer assistance to those who have been affected by the disaster.
- 4 Julie, a prominent lawyer, decided to take on the case.
- 5 I've just come back from Colombia, where I had the best coffee.
- 6 These are the candidates that the panel has identified as promising.

**Defining relative clauses**

**Non-defining relative clauses**



# Answer key

**P.4:** Column 1: Defining relative clause Column 2: Non-defining relative clause

**P.6:** Main clause: I went to the shop. Defining clause: The shop sells the coffee we like.  
Relative pronoun: that → refers to *the shop*

**P.8:** I met someone whose father taught her to play the guitar. I also met someone whose children speak three languages.

**P.9:** Possible answer: You'll soon learn who everyone is.

**P.10:** 1. c 2. c 3. d 4. c

**P.11:**

2. This is the land where our new office will be built.

3. I've met the woman whose daughter sold us the land.

4. I get the train that/which leaves at 6.15 am.

5. We hired the architect who designed the theatre in town.

6. I went to the café that/which has those delicious pastries.

**P.14:** Our neighbour, who's originally from Germany, has moved out.

**P.15:** Sentence 2. Object: → a new job

**P.16: Objects:** lake, Laura, Liam **Relative pronouns:** which, who, whose

# Answer key

**P.17:** 1. c 2. a 3. d 4. b 5. e

Johnny, who got a standing ovation from the crowd, impressed everyone with his guitar solo.

Katerina, whose father was an artist, is my grandmother.

He picked up a bunch of bananas, which he noticed were rotting.

Marsupials, which are commonly found in Australia, are very interesting animals.

I was just travelling through Vietnam, where I had the trip of a lifetime.

**P.23:** Defining relative clauses: 1, 4 Non-defining relative clauses: 2, 3, 5, 6

**P.26:** (other answers are possible)

2. There were hundreds of people whose train had been cancelled.

3. I went to the restaurant (that/which) Issa had recommended.

4. Some people who said they could come cannot make it.

5. My new flat is in the area (that) I love.

6: It's the place (where) we used to go when I was a child.

**P.27:** Defining relative clauses: 1, 3, 6 Non-defining relative clauses: 2, 4



# Summary

## Relative clauses:

- **Defining relative clauses** tell us **which noun** the speaker means. *I bought a tablet that has a detachable keyboard for my daughter.*
- **Non-defining relative clauses** give us **extra information** about the noun. *My mother, who is great at cooking, taught me everything I know.*

## Defining relative clauses:

- A **defining clause** gives **essential** information about someone or something.
- It can help to think of defining relative clauses as **joining** two independent clauses together.
- *I went to the shop. The shop sells coffee that we like. - I went to the shop **that** sells the coffee we like.*

## Removing the relative pronoun:

- You can sometimes remove the relative pronouns **that, who** and **which** from defining clauses. You can only do this when the relative pronoun replaces the **object** of the clause.
- *I found **a recipe** (that) we could try → I found **a recipe**. We could try **it**.*

## Non-defining relative clauses:

- **Non-defining** relative clauses provide **extra information**. They are **not necessary** to understand the sentence. They can be **removed** from the sentence **without affecting** the overall meaning.
- *Frank studied on Easter Island, **which is full of mysterious statues**.*
- *Cassandra, **who had slept badly**, was very tired in her English class.*



# Summary

## Non-defining relative clauses:

- Often appear **between two commas**, separating the subject of a sentence from the main verb. We also add non-defining relative clauses **after a comma** at the **end** of a main clause.
- *Andre, **who likes reading**, is a member of a book club.*
- *Mason has just flown to Madrid, **where his girlfriend lives**.*

## Non-defining relative clauses:

- You **cannot** use the relative pronoun **that** to introduce a non-defining relative clause. You must use **who** or **which**.
- *Greta, **who** likes to cycle to work, bought herself a new bike.*
- *She has also just started a new job, **which** she is really enjoying.*

## Non-defining relative clauses:

- Non-defining relative clauses can also describe the **object** of the **main clause**.
- *She has also just started a new **job**, **which** she is really enjoying.*



# Vocabulary

detachable

pupil

who's who

flavourless

standing ovation

marsupial



