

Grammar Reference

Defining relative clauses

Meaning and use

Defining relative clauses give us important information about the **person**, **thing** or **place** that we are talking about. When making a relative clause, we can use the following relative pronouns: **who** for people, **that** and **which** for things, and **where** for places.

*The police officer arrested the man **who robbed the bank**.*

In this example, '**who robbed the bank**' tells us which man the police officer arrested. Without this information, we do not know which man was arrested.

*David visited the place **where we first met**.*

Again, '**where we first met**' tells us which place David visited.

*These are the shoes **that I bought in Tokyo**.*

*Summer is the season **which I enjoy the most**.*

'**That I bought in Tokyo**' adds information about the shoes, and '**which I enjoy the most**' adds information about the season.

Form

A defining relative clause is made with **noun + relative pronoun + rest of clause**.

Positive

*My father is **the man who owns this restaurant**.*

***The restaurant where we met** closed down last year.*

Negative

***This isn't the sandwich that I ordered**.*

*David didn't recognise **the woman who waved at him**.*

Question

*Are you **the person who called earlier**?*

*Is this **the cafe where you left your handbag**?*

Take note: using 'whom' instead of 'who'

In **formal** speech and written English, **whom** replaces **who** when the relative pronoun refers to the **object** of the relative clause.

*The person **who called me** was my father. (who = subject)*

*The person **whom I called** was my father. (who = object)*

Spoken English

In **informal** speech, the pronoun **that** can replace **who**, **which** and **where**.

*Jennifer is the woman **that I love**.*

*The library is the place **that I feel the most relaxed**.*

If the relative pronoun functions as the **object** of the relative clause, the relative pronoun can be left out completely.

*Kelly is the woman **whom I love**. = Kelly is the woman I love.*

*This is the bag **that I bought**. = This is the bag I bought.*

However, if the relative pronoun is the **subject** of the relative clause, it cannot be left out. Here, **who** refers to the **subject**.

He's the man. He found my wallet.

*He's the man **who** found my wallet.*

Therefore, the following sentence is **incorrect**:

He's the man found my wallet.