

Session 2

In Session 1, you learned about the people and stories behind some of London's famous Blue Plaques. In this session, we will focus on adding important, additional information to sentences using relative clauses. We will look at the use and structure of these clauses and do some practice activities.

Activity 1

Getting a handle on relative clauses

"The place where Handel AND Hendrix lived!"

In this session, we are taking a close look at *relative clauses* – these add information about people, places, and things to sentences and they are useful when explaining or defining something.

Look at the following examples:

*This is the house **where** Virginia Woolf lived.*

*Handel was a German composer **who** lived in London in the 18th Century.*

*The guitar **which/that** Jimi Hendrix used for most of his performances was a Fender Stratocaster.*

As you can see, we use *where*, *who*, *which*, and *that* with relative clauses – but when do we use these words? Watch the Blue Plaque video from Session 1 again and listen carefully for these words. Can you figure out when they are used?



The answer is simple – we use **where** to add information about a place (a country, city, building, or other space); we use **who** to give details about a person; and we use **which** to begin a relative clause about an item, an idea, or a thing. **That** can sometimes be used in place of **which**, and it can also sometimes be used in place of **who**. Look at the following examples:

*The demonstration **which/that** Logie Baird gave in 1926 was the first time the world watched TV!*

*Florence Nightingale is someone **who/that** I really admire.*

We can't use **that** in place of **where**, however.

*University College of London has a blue plaque to show **where** Charles Darwin used to live.*

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.*

In all of these examples, the relative clause adds some important information about the person, place or thing mentioned in the sentence. These clauses can be used to explain, define, or emphasise something or to give specific information about it.

For example, if someone hasn't heard of Handel, we could tell them: "*He was a famous composer **who** lived 300 years ago.*"

When we say: “*This is the house **where Virginia Woolf lived***” we are describing what is special about this house and what makes it different from the many other houses in the street.

We can also use relative clauses for emphasis. We could simply say: “*Handel was born in Germany but he lived in London*” but we can highlight this contrast by saying: “*Handel was born in Germany but London is the city **where he lived***.”

Of course, we may already know who Jimi Hendrix is and we definitely know what a guitar is but we can say: “*The guitar **which/that Jimi Hendrix used for most of his performances** was a Fender Stratocaster*” to give information about a specific guitar.

We have looked at quite a few examples so far. What have you noticed about the position of the relative clauses? Do they come at the end of a sentence, in the middle of a sentence, or in both positions?

Relative clauses can be used in the middle or at the end of a sentence. The important thing is that the relative clause will usually come directly after the person, place, or thing it describes.

So, if we want to give some information about Florence Nightingale, we can explain:

*She was the woman **who set up the nursing school at St. Thomas's Hospital**.*

But, if we want to focus on the hospital, we can structure the sentence as follows:

*She worked at St. Thomas's hospital, **where she set up a special nursing school**.*

To do

We hope that explanation has helped you start to understand relative clauses! Test what you have learned so far with our next activity.

Next

Have you finished the quiz? Well done! That was our introduction to relative clauses but there is still more to learn! Continue to Activity 2 to focus on *where* and *which*.

