

Relative Pronoun

Definition of Relative Pronoun

A relative [pronoun](#) is a type of pronoun that links the relative [clause](#) to another clause in a [sentence](#), and introduces the relative clause or an [adjective](#) clause. It normally acts as a [subject](#) of the relative clause. A relative pronoun can stand alone as a subject or [object](#) of the sentence. The most common relative pronouns are:

whom
whomever
whoever
whose
who
which
that

For instance, in the sentence “On the plus side, death is one of the few things that can be done just as easily lying down” (*The Early Essays*, by Woody Allen), the word “that” is a relative pronoun.

Common Use of Relative Pronoun

This is a book that Anne has written.

“That Anne has written” is a relative clause, and the relative pronoun “that” has linked it to the main clause.

The man who stands in the middle hits the car.

Here, the word “who” is a relative pronoun, which is serving as a subject of the verb “stands.” It also introduces the relative clause “stands in the middle,” which acts as an adjective that modifies “man.”

I shall open whichever offers comes first.

Here, the word “whichever” is a relative clause that introduces the relative clause “whichever offers comes first.” This clause is functioning as a [direct object](#) of the compound verb “shall open.”

Whoever broke the pot will have to bring a new one.

In this line, the word “whoever” works as a subject of the verb “broke.”

The boy whose hand was bruised in a cricket match is my brother.

In this line, the word “boy” is a subject, “whose” is a relative pronoun, and they introduce the relative clause, “whose hand was bruised,” which modifies the subject “boy.”

Examples of Relative Pronoun in Literature

Example #1: *The Man Who Disliked Cats* (by P. G. Wodehouse)

“He was a Frenchman, a melancholy-looking man. He had the appearance of one who has searched for the leak in life’s gas-pipe with a lighted candle; of one whom the clenched fist of Fate has smitten beneath the temperamental third waistcoat-button.”

In this example, there are two relative pronouns underlined. The first, “who,” acts as a subject of the compound verb “has searched,” and the second, “whom,” one acts as an object of the subject noun [phrase](#) “the clenched fist.”

Example #2: *Farewell to Manzanar* (by James D. Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston)

“The people who had it hardest during the first few months were young couples, many of whom had married just before the evacuation began, in order not to be separated and sent to different camps ... All they had to use for room dividers were those army blankets, two of which were barely enough to keep one person warm. They argued over whose blanket should be

In this long excerpt, the relative pronouns are:

who
whom
which
whose

First three relative pronouns (underlined) are acting as direct objects of the auxiliary verbs “had” and “were.” The final relative pronoun is acting as an object of the noun “blanket.”

**Example #3: *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*
(by Rebecca West)**

“Franz Ferdinand would have gone from Sarajevo untouched had it not been for the actions of his staff, who by blunder after blunder contrived that his car should be slowed down and that he should be presented as a stationary target in front of Princip, the one conspirator of real and mature deliberation, who had finished his cup of coffee and was walking back through the streets, aghast at the failure of himself and his friends ...”

In this passage, the relative pronoun “who” provides more information about the subject, “staff,” and modifies it. The second “who” acts as an object.

Example #4: *The Great Gatsby* (by F. Scott Fitzgerald)

“I had a dog – at least I had him for a few days until he ran away – and an old Dodge and a Finnish woman, who made my bed and cooked breakfast and muttered Finnish wisdom to herself over the electric stove.”

Here, the relative pronoun “who” is functioning as a subject of the verb “made.” It has introduced a relative clause to complete the sense of the sentence.

Function

The basic function of a relative pronoun is to introduce the relative clause, which is a “subordinate”, or “dependent,” clause. Without a relative pronoun, a relative clause cannot exist. It also modifies a word, phrase, idea, or main clause. In addition, the relative pronoun plays five syntactic functions within a sentence. It can function as a subject, a direct object, a prepositional complement, a possessive determiner, or an adverbial phrase.