



# OVERVIEW

## 1 DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

A defining clause (also called 'an identifying clause') gives essential information about a noun:

People **who talk too much** annoy me intensely.

I'd like to marry someone **whose star-sign is Libra**.

- Without the clause, the meaning of the sentence is different:

People annoy me intensely. I'd like to marry someone.

A non-defining (or 'non-identifying') clause gives additional information about a noun:

My younger brother, **who is painfully shy**, rarely speaks to anyone.

This watch, **which I was given for Christmas**, keeps perfect time.

- Without the clause, the main information of the sentence remains the same:  
My younger brother rarely speaks to anyone.  
This watch keeps perfect time.
- In writing, we use commas to separate non-defining clauses from the rest of the sentence.

### That

We often use **that** in defining relative clauses instead of **which** or (more informally) **who**:

It's the dark blue top **that** really appeals to me.

There are loads of people **that** believe in UFOs.

(See Watch out! below)

## 2 PEOPLE OR THINGS?

We use **who** and **whom** for people, and **that** or **which** for things, or for groups of people (a team etc.). We use **whose** for both (see 6 below):

It's usually the mother **who** has most influence on young children.

Nepal is a country **that / which** has always interested me.

## 3 WHO OR WHOM?

**Whom** is an object pronoun, **who** is a subject pronoun:

I had further discussions with Andreas, **whom** I had met the previous week. I don't like men **who** wear perfume.

- However, **whom** is now considered very formal and we often use **who** instead:

I saw John, **who** I had met the previous week.

(See Watch out! below)

## 4 WHERE, WHEN AND WHY

With relative clauses of place and time, we can use **where** and **when** instead of a preposition + **which**:

Tuesday is the day **when** (or: **on which**) I go to the fitness club. The school **where** (or: **at which**) I first studied English is in Thassos.

## 5 POSITION OF RELATIVE PRONOUNS

Relative pronouns usually immediately follow the noun they refer to:

✗ ~~The film was very interesting that we saw.~~

✓ The film **that** we saw was very interesting.

- A common exception, especially in newspaper reports, is when the noun and relative clause(s) are separated by another noun phrase:  
Is Richard Branson, **the Virgin boss**, **whose attempts to fly round the world in a hot air balloon have all ended in failure**, a better businessman than pilot?

## 6 WHOSE

**Whose** is a possessive relative pronoun. It's a determiner and so can only be used before a noun:

My uncle, **whose house** we stayed in every summer, never had any children of his own.

- We use **whose** with both people and things, but **of which** is more common with things:  
The house, **the gardens of which** sloped down to the beach, was enormous. The house, **whose gardens** sloped down to the beach, was enormous.
- We commonly use **with**:  
The house, **with gardens that** sloped down to the beach, was enormous.

### watch out!

- We use **whom**, not **who**, after prepositions and phrases like **most of**, **all of**:  
✗ ~~That's the man to who I sold my car.~~  
Several people came, **most of who** I hadn't met before.  
✓ That's the man to **whom** I sold my car. Several people came, **most of whom** I hadn't met before.
- We can't use **that** after prepositions or in non-defining clauses:  
✗ ~~My father, that has recently retired, spends all day reading the newspaper.~~  
This is the house in ~~that~~ I grew up.  
✓ My father, **who** has recently retired, spends all day reading the newspaper. This is the house in **which** I grew up / **that** I grew up in.

## SECTION I

### Words used with relative pronouns

#### 1 PREPOSITIONS IN RELATIVE CLAUSES

When a preposition is necessary, it can go before the relative pronoun or at the end of the relative clause.

When it goes before, it is generally more formal:

✗ *Chemistry is a subject **which** I always had problems.*

✓ *Chemistry is a subject **which** I always had problems **with**.* *Chemistry is a subject **with which** I always had problems.* (= more formal)

- We use many fixed prepositional phrases with **which** (and **when**) in non-defining relative clauses:  
*It might rain, **in which case** we'll get back as soon as possible.*  
*The hero died, **at which point** the curtain came down.*  
*There was a scandal, **as a result of which** all the ministers resigned.*  
*There was another scandal, **the result of which** was **that** the President himself resigned.*  
*He stopped playing in 1995, **since when** he hasn't kicked a ball.*  
*Plant them out in May, **by when** (or **by which time**) the risk of frost will have passed.*

#### 2 RELATIVE CLAUSES AFTER PRONOUNS

Defining relative clauses often follow these pronouns:

*someone anyone something anything  
everything all many those some nothing  
little much*

*Many **who** saw the film were unimpressed.*

- Instead of using **which**, we commonly use **that**, or omit the relative pronoun, when the pronoun is impersonal (*anything, something, nothing, etc.*):  
*I'm ready for **anything that** happens.*  
***Anything** you can do I can do better.*
- After the personal pronouns we use relative clauses only in formal or literary English:  
*He **who** laughs last laughs longest.* (proverb)  
*...**we that** are young*  
*Shall never see so much, or live so long.* (Shakespeare, King Lear)
- Those in structures like the following example nearly always refers to people rather than things:  
*Will all **those who** want to go please raise their hands?*
- *Much that* and *little that* are fairly formal:  
***Much that** has been done here is of profound significance. I will tell you the **little that** I know.*

### watch out!

The relative pronoun acts as both a linking word and a pronoun. It replaces other pronouns:

✗ *That was a very interesting film **which** we saw it.*

*The man **who** he called yesterday has just come in.*

✓ *That was a very interesting film **which** we saw.*

*The man **who** called yesterday has just come in.*

#### 3 RELATIVE PRONOUNS AFTER SOME OF, ALL OF, ETC.

**Who, whom, whose** and **which** frequently combine with *all of, some of, several of, both of* and other quantifiers:

*I bought a load of apples, **three quarters of which** were bad.*

*Thousands of people, **none of whom** realised what was about to happen, had come to Dallas to see the President.*

#### 4 WHICH WITH OTHER WH-WORDS

We can use **which** with other **wh**-words in non-defining clauses:

*He arrived at six, **which was when** the diamonds went missing.*

*She left her address, **which was how** we contacted her.*

*All delegates are in the lecture theatre, **which is where** you should be.*

*His fingerprints were all over it, **which was what** gave him away.*

*She had become separated from her mother in the shop, **which was why** she was crying.*

### ? check

Correct these sentences.

- My sister, who I am always being compared, is actually two years older than me.
- His second symphony, which I heard it last night, is not nearly as good as his first.
- I'm afraid that under the circumstances there is little which we can do.
- Many people were hurt in the explosion, several of who were standing a hundred metres away.
- She's always open to new ideas, that is what I really like about her.

## Practice

- 1 In each of the gaps in the following sentences, write in as many of the five words as possible.

Example: The team *who/which/that* wins will qualify for the final.

*who whom that whose which*

- Wasn't there some German or Czech author beginning with a K in ..... novels individuals got lost in bureaucratic mazes?
- We are blessed with good health, for ..... we should all be grateful.
- Anything ..... you want you can have.
- Anyone ..... wants to help should leave their contribution in this box.
- Much ..... has been said will soon be forgotten.
- We bought six loaves of bread for the party, half of ..... weren't touched.
- My daughter invited five of her friends to dinner, none of ..... expressed any kind of thanks.
- We had quite an informal supper actually, ..... is what may not have pleased them.

- 2 Rewrite each of the following sentences to include the word *which* and another *wh-* word.

Example: I had a holiday in Rome last year and that's the place it all began.

*I had a holiday in Rome last year, which is where it all began.*

- I met him in May and it was then that I fell in love with him.
- We met because a friend introduced us.
- He had the most beautiful smile and that was what attracted me initially.
- We spent a weekend in Venice and that was the place we decided to get engaged.
- We had a big white wedding and that was something I'd always wanted.

- 3 Underline the options that can complete each sentence. In each case, one, two or three may be possible.

- My tennis-playing friend retired in 1996, ..... he had earned over £3 million.  
a by which time   b since when   c at which point   d when
- Over there are the 12th century dungeons, ..... hundreds of well-known people were tortured.  
a when   b where   c in which   d from whose

- My parents, ..... speak fluent French, are off to Paris for a week.  
a that   b neither of who   c both of whom   d who
- There is a company, ..... escapes me, that sells such things.  
a the name of which   b its name   c whose name   d that
- I was interested to see that ..... who felt strongly about the issue were getting very worked up.  
a many   b all   c those   d these

- 4 Complete each of the following sentences so that it is as close in meaning as possible to the sentence printed before it.

- There were a lot of survivors and most of them were in pain.  
There were a lot of survivors, the .....
- We are holding a series of meetings to acquaint the general public with the facts.  
We are holding a series of meetings, the .....
- When the fire spread, the theatre was cleared.  
The fire spread, at .....
- The full-time librarian will lend you up to five books at any one time.  
There is a full-time librarian, from .....
- Numerous witnesses of the robbery were unable to identify the two men.  
Many who .....

- 5 Rewrite each sentence using the words printed below it.

Example: My thanks to my family, who made all of this possible. **without / none**  
*My thanks to my family, without whom none of this would have been possible.*

- Since writing a best-seller in 1995, Joe has hardly produced any good work at all.  
**wrote / since / very**
- He hasn't written much recently that's been appreciated by those attracted by his early style.  
**Little / who**
- Not only his appearance but also his manners leave great scope for improvement.  
**He / man / both / desired**
- By the time he realised where his career was going in the late nineties, it was too late.  
**In / which**
- He now regrets writing the article because it was that that caused him all the problems he's had.  
**now wishes / but for / not**