

Relative clauses

Defining relative clauses

DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES define or identify which person or thing you are talking about:

- ▶ *The man **who** came in late is the boss.*

There is no comma before a defining relative clause. The pronouns that you use in these clauses are **who**, **whom**, **that** and **which**. They are called relative pronouns.

Use **who** or **that**:

when the subject is a person:

- ▶ *The man **who** came in late is the boss.*
OR *The man **that** came in late is the boss.*

Use **that** or **which**:

when the subject is a thing:

- ▶ *I sit at the desk **that** faces the window.*
OR *I sit at the desk **which** faces the window.*
(formal)

Use **who**, **that**, **whom**, or no relative pronoun:

when the object is a person:

- ▶ *She's the girl **who/that** I met last night.*
OR *She's the girl I met last night.*
OR *She's the girl **whom** I met last night.*
(formal)

Use **that**, **which**, or no relative pronoun:

when the object is a thing:

- ▶ *I've finished the book **that** you lent me.*
OR *I've finished the book you lent me.*
OR *I've finished the book **which** you lent me.*
(formal)

NOTE **That**, **who** and **which** can be left out when the thing or person is the object of the verb.

Use **whose**:

to show that something belongs to somebody:

- ▶ *He helped a woman **whose** car had broken down.*
▶ *They're the people **whose** house was burgled.*

Whose is not usually used to refer to a thing.

Of which is usually used instead:

- ▶ *He's reading the book, the name **of which** I can never remember.*

but it is more natural to say:

- ▶ *He's reading that book – I can never remember its name...*

Non-defining relative clauses

NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES add extra information about somebody or something which could be left out and the sentence would still make sense. This extra information is separated from the main clause by commas:

- ▶ *The film, **which** was shot in Mexico, has won an Oscar.*

The pronouns that can be used in non-defining clauses are **who**, **whom**, **which** and **whose**.

Use **who**:

when the subject is a person:

- ▶ *My sister, **who** is a vegetarian, ordered a salad.*

Use **which**:

when the subject is a thing:

- ▶ *The tickets, **which** can be bought at the station, are valid for a month.*

Use **who** or **whom**:

when the object is a person:

- ▶ *Peter, **who** nobody had met before, arrived late.*
OR *Peter, **whom** nobody had met before, arrived late.* (formal)

Use **which**:

when the object is a thing:

- ▶ *The tickets, **which** I've paid for, are still valid.*

Use **whose**:

when something belongs to somebody:

- ▶ *Lucy, **whose** car had broken down, didn't go.*

Relative clauses and prepositions

In spoken English a preposition in a relative clause is usually placed at the end of the clause, and the relative pronoun may be omitted. A more formal alternative is to put the preposition before the relative pronoun:

when the object is a person:

- ▶ *The man I spoke **to** was very friendly.*
OR *The man **who/that** I spoke **to** was very friendly.*
OR *The man **to whom** I spoke was very friendly.* (formal)

when the object is a thing:

- ▶ *The house I was born **in** is gone.*
OR *The house **that** I was born **in** is gone.*
OR *The house **in which** I was born is gone.* (formal)