

RELATIVE CLAUSES

INTRODUCTION

There are two types of relative clauses:

1. Defining relative clauses
2. Non-defining relative clauses

DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

These describe the preceding noun in such a way to distinguish it from other nouns of the same class. A clause of this kind is essential to clear understanding of the noun.

The boy who was playing is my brother.

Defining Relative Pronouns

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE
For people	Who That	Whom/Who That	Whose
For things	Which That	Which That	Whose Of which

Defining Relative Clauses: people

- A. Subject: **who** or **that**

Who is normally used:

The man who robbed you has been arrested.

The girls who serve in the shop are the owner's daughters.

But **that** is a possible alternative after **all**, **everyone**, **everybody**, **no one**, **nobody** and **those**:

Everyone who/that knew him liked him.

Nobody who/that watched the match will ever forget it.

- B. Object of a verb: **whom**, **who** or **that**

The object form is **whom**, but it is considered very formal. In spoken English we normally use **who** or **that** (**that** being more usual than **who**), and it is still more common to omit the object pronoun altogether:

The man whom I saw told me to come back today.

The man who I saw told me to come back today.

The man that I saw told me to come back today.

The man I saw told me to come back today.

- C. With a preposition: **whom** or **that**

In formal English the preposition is placed before the relative pronoun, which must then be put into the form **whom**:

The man to whom I spoke...

In informal speech, however, it is more usual to move the preposition to the end of the clause.

Whom then is often replaced by **that**, but it is still more common to omit the relative altogether:

The man who/whom I spoke to...

The man that I spoke to...

The man I spoke to...

D. Possessive

Whose is the only possible form:

People whose rents have been raised can appeal.

The film is about a spy whose wife betrays him.

Short answers

To make short answers:

- we use the verb **to be** (am/is/are/was/were) for *Present Simple*, *Past Simple*, *Present Continuous*, *Past Continuous* and *Going To* questions.
- we use the verb **have** (have/has/had) for *Present Perfect* and *Past Perfect* questions.
- we use **will** for *Future Simple* questions.

Defining Relative Clauses: things

A. Subject

Either **which** or **that**. **Which** is more formal.

This is the picture which/that caused such a sensation.

The stairs which/that lead to the cellar are rather slippery.

B. Object of a verb

Which or **that** or no relative at all.

The car which/that I hired broke down.

The car I hired broke down.

Which is hardly ever used after **all**, **everything**, **little**, **much**, **none**, **no** and compounds of **no**, or after superlatives. Instead we use **that**, or omit the relative altogether, if it is the object of a verb:

All the apples that fall are eaten by the pigs.

This is the best hotel (that) I know.

C. Object of a preposition

The formal construction is preposition + **which**, but it is more usual to move the preposition to the end of the clause, using **which** or **that** or omitting the relative altogether:

The ladder on which I was standing began to slip.

The ladder which/that I was standing on began to slip.

The ladder I was standing on began to slip.

D. Possessive

Whose + a clause is possible but **with** + a phrase is more usual:

a house whose walls were made of glass

a house with glass walls

E. Relative adverbs: **when**, **where**, **why**

Note that **when** can replace **in/on which** (used of time):

the year when (= in which) he was born

the day when (= in which) they arrived

Where can replace **in/at which** (used of place):

the hotel where (= in/at which) they were staying

Why can replace **for which**:

the reason why he refused is...

When, **where** and **why** used in this way are called relative adverbs.

NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

Non-defining relative clauses are placed after nouns which are definite already. They do not therefore define the noun. But merely add something to it by giving some more information about it. They are not essential in the sentence and can be omitted without causing confusion. They are separated from their noun by commas. The pronoun can never be omitted in a non-defining relative clause.

The boy who was playing is my brother.

Non-Defining Relative Pronouns

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE
For people	Who	Whom/Who	Whose
For things	Which	Which	Whose Of which

Non-Defining Relative Clauses: people

A. Subject: **who**

No other pronoun is possible. Note the commas:

My neighbor, who is very pessimistic, says there will be no apples this year.

Peter, who had been driving all day, suggested stopping at the next town.

B. Object: **whom, who**

The pronoun cannot be omitted. **Whom** is the correct form, though **who** is sometimes used in conversation:

Peter, whom everyone suspected, turned out to be innocent..

C. Object of a preposition: **whom**

The pronoun cannot be omitted. The preposition is normally placed before whom:

Mr Jones, for whom I was working, was very generous about overtime payments.

It is however possible to move the preposition to the end of the clause. This is commonly done in conversation, and who then usually takes the place of whom:

Mr Jones, who I was working for, was very generous about overtime payments.

If the clause contains an expression of time or place, this will remain at the end:

Peter, with whom I played tennis on Sundays, was fitter than me.

could become:

Peter, who/whom I played tennis with on Sundays, was fitter than me.

D. Possessive: **whose**

Ann, whose children are at school all day, is trying to get a job.

This is George, whose class you will be taking.

Non-Defining Relative Clauses: things

A. Subject: **which**

That is not used here:

That block, which cost £5 million to build, has been empty for years.

The 8.15 train, which is usually very punctual, was late today.

B. Object: **which**

That is not used here, and the **which** can never be omitted.

She gave me this jumper, which she had knitted herself.

These books, which you can get at any bookshop, will give you all the information you need.

C. Object of a preposition

The preposition comes before which, or (more informally) at the end of the clause:

Ashdown Forest, through which we'll be driving, isn't a forest any longer.

Ashdown Forest, which we'll be driving through, isn't a forest any longer.

His house, for which he paid £10,000, is now worth £50,000.

His house, which he paid £10,000 for, is now worth £50,000.

D. Possessive: **whose** or **of which**

Whose is generally used both for animals and things. **Of which** is possible for things, but it is unusual except in very formal English.

His house, whose windows are all broken, was a depressing sight.

The car, whose handbrake wasn't very reliable, began to slide backwards.

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EXERCISES

1. Write sentences to describe people in box A using the information in box B.

A		B	
a thief	a dentist	takes photographs	is very intelligent
a butcher	a fool	sells meat	plays a musical instrument
a musician	a genius	is ill in hospital	doesn't tell the truth
a patient	a liar	steal things	looks after your teeth
a photographer		is very stupid	

a. *A thief is a person who steals things.*

b. A butcher is a person who _____

c. A musician is a person _____

d. A patient _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

h. _____

i. _____

2. Join the sentences to write a longer one.

a. A man phoned. He didn't say his name. *The man who phoned didn't say his name.*

b. A woman opened the door. She was wearing a yellow dress. The woman _____ a yellow dress.

c. Some people live next door to us. They are very nice. The people _____

d. A policeman stopped our car. He wasn't very friendly. The policeman _____

e. A boy broke the window. He ran away. The boy _____

3. Write *who/that/which* in the blanks.

a. I met a woman who can speak six languages.

b. What's the name of the man _____ lives next door?

c. What's the name of the river _____ goes through the town?

d. Everybody _____ went to the party enjoyed it very much.

e. Do you know anybody _____ wants to buy a car?

f. Where is the picture _____ was on the wall?

- g. She always asks me questions _____ are difficult to answer.
- h. I have a friend _____ is very good at repairing cars.
- i. A coffee-maker is a machine _____ makes coffee.
- j. I don't like people _____ never stop talking.
- k. Have you seen the money _____ was on the table?
- l. Why does he always wear clothes _____ are too small for him?

4. Join the sentences to write a single sentence.

- a. Ann took some photographs. Have you seen them? *Have you seen the photographs Ann took?*
- b. You lost a key. Did you find it? Did you find the _____
_____?
- c. Jill is wearing a jacket. I like it. I like the _____
- d. I gave you some money. Where is it? Where is the _____
_____?
- e. She told us a story. I didn't believe it. I _____ the _____
_____.
- f. You bought some oranges. How much were they? How _____
_____?

5. Complete the sentences with the information in brackets.

- a. (we met some people) The people we met were very nice.
- b. (I'm wearing shoes) The shoes _____ are not very comfortable.
- c. (you're reading a book) What's the name of the _____?
- d. (I wrote a letter to her) She didn't get the _____ I _____.
- e. (you gave me an umbrella) I've lost _____.
- f. (they invited some people to dinner) The people _____ didn't come.

6. Complete the sentences with the information in the box.

you went to a party	Linda is dancing with a man	you stayed at a hotel
we looked at a map	you were looking for a book	I was sitting on a chair
they live in a house	you spoke to a woman	

- a. What's the name of the hotel *you stayed at*?
- b. What's the name of the woman you _____?
- c. The house _____ is too small for them.
- d. Did you enjoy the party _____?
- e. The chair _____ wasn't very comfortable.
- f. The map _____ wasn't very clear.
- g. Did you find the book _____?
- h. Who is the man _____?

7. Complete the sentences with *where* and the information in the box.

we had dinner in a restaurant	John works in a factory
we stayed at a hotel	they live in a village

- a. What's the name of the hotel *where we stayed*?
- b. What's the name of the restaurant _____?
- c. Have you ever been to the village _____?
- d. The factory _____ is the biggest in town.

8. Join the sentences using *who* or *which*.

- a. We chose the hotel. It seemed to be the nicest. *We chose the hotel which seemed to be the nicest.*
b. She spoke to the man. He was standing next to her.

c. I read the letters. They came in the morning post.

d. He likes the other people. They work in his office.

e. She's that singer. She was on television last night.

f. Next week there is a festival. It happens in the village every summer.

g. I paid the bills. They came yesterday.

9. Complete the conversation by putting *who* or *which* into the gaps.

Carol: Did you watch that programme last night?

David: Which one?

Carol: The programme which I mentioned a couple of days ago. It's a new series _____ started last night.

David: No, I didn't see it. Was it good?

Carol: Yes. It was about a group of friends _____ were at school together. Well, Rupert ...

David: Who was Rupert?

Carol: He was an old student of the school _____ had become a doctor. He went to a party _____ his old teachers organised. He met a lot of people _____ had been at school with him many years before. They talked about the things _____ they did when they were at school. Then suddenly, Rupert saw an old girl-friend _____ was dancing with John ...

David: Don't tell me any more. It's getting too complicated!

10. Join these sentences using *who*, *which* or *that*, as in the example.

- a. She chose the books. She wanted to buy them. *She chose the books that she wanted to buy.*
b. We ate the sandwiches. Jack made them.

c. I'm doing some work. I have to finish it today.

d. She's an old woman. I often see her when I go to the shop.

e. He's an actor. A lot of people like him.

f. It's a magazine. I read it sometimes.

g. She was wearing a red dress. She wears it for parties.

11. Now join these sentences using *who* or *which*, as in the example.

a. The person phoned. He didn't leave a message. *The person who phoned didn't leave a message.*

b. The bus goes to the airport. It leaves every 20 minutes.

c. The picture was hanging near the door. It was horrible.

d. The instructor taught me how to drive. He was very patient.

e. The girl was sitting next to me. She started talking to me.

12. Complete the sentences using the information in brackets and *who* or *which*.

a. (I went to see a doctor. She had helped my mother.) I went to see the doctor *who had helped* my mother.

b. (A dog bit me. It belonged to Mrs Jones.) The dog _____ belonged to Mrs Jones.

c. (A woman wrote to me. She wanted my advice.) The woman _____ wanted my advice.

d. (A bus crashed. It was 23 years old.) The bus _____ was 23 years old.

e. (Ann talked to a man. He had won a lot of money.) Ann talked to a man _____.

f. (Mary was staying with her friend. He has a big house in Scotland.) Mary was staying with a friend _____.

g. (He's an architect. He designed the new city library.) He's the architect _____.

13. Complete the sentences using the information in brackets and *that*.

a. (Jack made a table. It's not very strong.) The table *that Jack made* is not very strong.

b. (I read about a new computer. I had seen it on TV.) I read about the new computer _____.

c. (Jane made a cake. Nobody liked it.) Nobody liked the cake _____.

d. (Mary sent me a letter. It was very funny.) The letter _____ was very funny.

e. (My sister wrote an article. The newspaper is going to publish it.) The newspaper is going to publish the article _____.

f. (I met an old lady. She was 103 years old.) The old lady _____ was 103 years old.

g. (I saw a house. My brother wants to buy it.) I saw the house _____.

14. Complete the sentences with one of the phrases in the box and *who* or *whose*.

interviewed me	has visited so many different countries
had saved their son	wives have just had babies
book won a prize last week	divorce was in the papers
car had broken down	complain all the time

a. The parents thanked the woman *who had saved their son*.

b. The couple *whose divorce was in the papers* have got married again.

c. It is very interesting to meet somebody _____.

d. The person _____ asked me some very difficult questions.

e. In my office there are two men _____.

f. What's the name of that writer _____?

g. I don't like people _____.

h. We helped the woman _____.

15. Put in *who* or *that* ONLY IF NECESSARY.

- The match ----- we saw was boring.
- Did I tell you about the people who live next door?
- The horse that won the race belongs to an Irish woman.
- I love the ice-cream ----- they sell in that shop.
- The book ----- I'm reading is about jazz.
- The woman ----- came to see us was selling magazines.
- We'll go to a restaurant ----- has a children's menu.
- The factory ----- closed last week had been there for 70 years.
- Have you read about the schoolgirl ----- started her own business and is now a millionaire?
- Jane says that the house ----- Tom has bought has a beautiful garden.

16. Make one sentence from the two that are given. Use *who* or *which* with the underlined words.

- Mont Blanc is between France and Italy. It is the highest mountain in the Alps.
Mont Blanc, which is between France and Italy, is the highest mountain in the Alps.
- Alfred Hitchcock was born in Britain. He worked for many years in Hollywood.

- The sun is really a star. It is 93 million miles from the earth
- John F Kennedy died in 1963. He was a very famous American President.
- Charlie Chaplin was from a poor family. He became a very rich man.
- The 1992 Olympics were held in Barcelona. It is the north-east of Spain.
- We went to see the Crown Jewels. They are kept in the Tower of London.

17. From the notes, make one sentence. Use *who* or *which* with the words in brackets.

- Greta Garbo. (She was born in Sweden.) She moved to America in 1925.
Greta Garbo, who was born in Sweden, moved to America in 1925.
- Football. (It first started in Britain.) It is now popular in many countries.
Football, -----
- Margaret Thatcher. (She was the Prime Minister of Britain for 11 years.) She studied science at university.

- Michelangelo. (He lived until he was 90.) He is one of Italy's greatest artists.

- The Nile. (It runs through several countries.) It is the longest river in Africa.

- Gandhi. (He was born in 1869.) He became India's nationalist leader.

- Elephants. (They are found in Africa and India.) They live to a great age.

18. From the notes make one sentence. Use *who* or *whose* with the words in brackets.

- Martina Navratilova. (She was born in Prague.) She became a US citizen in 1981.

- Darwin. (His ideas changed our view of the world.) He travelled to a lot of countries when he was young.

- c. Madonna. (Her parents were born in Italy.) She is a famous American singer.
- d. Bill Clinton. (His wife is a brilliant lawyer.) He became President of the USA in 1993.
- e. Sebastian Coe. (He was a successful English runner.) He is now a politician.
- f. Catherine of Russia. (She ruled for over 30 years.) She made many important changes.

19. Underline the words that *which* refers to.

- a. They climbed Snowdon, which is the highest mountain in Wales.
- b. They climbed Snowdon, which made them very tired.
- c. Maria sang and played the guitar, which everyone enjoyed a lot.
- d. The boat stopped at Sousse, which is in Tunisia.
- e. The coach stopped at a petrol station, which allowed everyone to get out.
- f. We listened to the news, which was in French.

20. Add the missing relative, but make a contact-clause where possible.

- a. I know a man _____ eats paper.
- b. The man _____ you want has just left.
- c. It's a kind of paper _____ you can eat.
- d. The lady _____ was here yesterday has gone out.
- e. He eats only the paper _____ his wife makes.
- f. The magazine _____ you lent me was very old.
- g. His wife is a woman _____ loves a joke.
- h. The chair _____ was broken is now mended.
- i. He's one of the people _____ I really like.
- j. The old man _____ lives next door has just died.
- k. You can write on the paper _____ she makes.
- l. Women _____ work in hospitals are admired.
- m. Has this paper got a flavour _____ pleases you?
- n. The cigarette _____ you are smoking is a Player's.
- o. Have you met anyone else _____ does such tricks?
- p. The girl _____ lives next door is very pretty.
- q. I'm looking for someone _____. I can trust.
- r. The fish _____ I ate yesterday was not so good.
- s. I want to find a man _____ will lend me money.
- t. The street _____ leads to the school is very wide.

21. Correct the errors in these sentences.

- a. Joan won the prize, that surprised me a lot.
- b. The children, that were playing football, broke one of my windows.
- c. The house in that I was born has just been demolished.
- d. Fred is the man who he lives next door.
- e. The books which they are on the table are mine.
- f. I can't remember the name of the person from who I borrowed this pen.

22. Rewrite these sentences omitting the relative pronoun. Other changes are necessary.

- a. This is the box in which I had put my English books. *This is the box I had put my English books in.*
- b. The man with whom she had lunch yesterday is her boss.
- c. The knife with which you are cutting the meat belonged to my great grandmother.
- d. The company for which he works has gone bankrupt.
- e. We didn't recognize the people at whom we were looking.
- f. I can't remember the person from whom I took the money.

23. Complete the sentences with relative pronouns.

- a. Christopher Columbus was the sailor who/that discovered America.
- b. This food has an ingredient _____ is very sweet.
- c. The lady _____ son plays football with me is the headteacher of my school.
- d. The house _____ I was born is now for sale.
- e. Antonio Banderas, _____ is married to Melanie Griffith, was born in Málaga.
- f. D.H. Lawrence, _____ was an English author, wrote many interesting novels.
- g. London, _____ is on the river Thames, is the capital of the United Kingdom.
- h. The Prado Museum, _____ is in Madrid, is one of the best art galleries in the world.

24. Join each pair of sentences with a relative clause. Omit the relative pronouns wherever possible.

- a. Last night we met a man. He's a millionaire. *Last night we met a man who/that is a millionaire.*
- b. Yesterday we found a wallet. It was empty.
- c. We like cereals. Well, if they are wholemeal.
- d. Michaelangelo was a famous artist. He painted the Sistine Chapel.
- e. She's bought a CD. It is broken.
- f. I had won some money. I spent it on a new bike.

25. Join each pair of sentences using non-defining relative clauses.

- a. Madonna is a popular pop singer and actress. She was born in the USA.
Madonna, who was born in the USA, is a popular pop singer and actress.
Madonna, who is a popular pop singer and actress, was born in the USA.
- b. My grandparents live in Córdoba. They are school teachers.
- c. Victoria Station is situated near Buckingham Palace. It is one of the most famous railway stations in London.
- d. "Guernica" was painted by Picasso. It is permanently exhibited in Madrid.
- e. My friend Luis has lived in many exotic countries. He works for the government.
- f. Sharon is a wonderful cook. She's married with two children.