
Relative Clauses

Relative Clauses generally act as adjectives to nouns or some pronouns.

Relative Pronouns have 2 functions:

- (1) to act as either subjects, objects, or complements of the relative clause;
- (2) to connect the relative clause to the noun or pronoun, like a conjunction.

Relative Clauses are of **3 types**:

(1) **Defining**: modify the preceding noun distinguishing it from other nouns of the same class. It is not separated by commas (in speech, with no pause). Usually used immediately after the noun they modify. Less formal.

(2) **Non-defining**: modify a preceding noun that is already defined, merely adding more information about it. It is separated by commas (in speech, with a pause / intonation breaks). More formal.

(3) **Connective**: do not modify a noun but simply continue the story. It is separated by commas.

Relative pronoun	Refers to	Subject	Object / Complement	Defining clause ¹	Non defining clause (commas)	Notes
Who	People	Yes The plumber who came yesterday fixed the pipe.	Yes The teacher who the student answered to was pleased.	Yes The man who saved me is called Superman.	Yes Mr. John, who is my neighbor, helped me yesterday.	It can be elided when it is the object of a defining clause.

¹ Defining clause is also called identifying or restrictive clause. The same applies to non-defining, which can be called non-identifying, or non-restrictive.

Relative Clauses

Whom	People	No	Yes The teacher, whom the student answered to, was pleased.	Yes The woman whom we met last week called.	Yes Ms. Holmes, whom we all know, just left.	More formal; More British.
Whose (relative possessive)	People, animals, or things ²	Not by itself, but whose + noun can be a subject: I saw a monk whose behavior inspired me.	Yes Stefano, whose phone I cannot find, is trying to find it.	Yes The man whose backpack was stolen just called the guards.	Yes Mr. Wick, whose weapons have been confiscated, is a fugitive.	Used instead of her, his, its, their or 's. Only used as a determiner (before a noun ³) More formal. When informal: use "with". ⁴
Which	Things (or people and animals with a quantifying determiner [..., some of	Yes The clock which is ticking on the table is yellow.	Yes The clock (which) I have just bought is broken.	Yes The object which was taken from him was a fake passport.	Yes The fake passport, which was taken from him, was	Can be elided when it is the object of a defining clause; can refer to a <u>whole clause</u> (connecting relative) (He passed the exam, which gladdened everybody)

2 For things, the following is more common:

noun + of which: This is the book the name of which I don't know.

that...of: This is the book that I don't know the name of.

of which... + noun: This is the book of which I don't know the name.

3 He is the student of a teacher (~~whose~~) of whom you may have heard / that you may have heard of.

4 Formal: I know some people **whose** houses were burnt down.

Informal: I know some people **with** houses that were burnt down.

Relative Clauses

	which...])				destroyed.	
That	People, animals, or things	Yes I called the doctor that had helped me in the past.	Yes I called the doctor that I had met the day before.	Yes The teacher that I took dependence from is very knowledgeable .	No My dad, that is a pilot, is always traveling.	Can substitute who, whom, which, when; more informal; very common after quantifiers ⁵ (is this all that is left?) and superlatives (it's the best movie that I've ever seen)
Relative adverbs						Used in the same way as a preposition + which
Where	Place	No	Yes That is the place where we met.	Yes The place where we met yesterday is called Trocadero.	Yes The Trocadero, where we met yesterday, is in Paris.	Or preposition + which : That is the place in which we met.
When	Time	No	Yes The week when we have no classes is in	Yes The day (when) we first met was	Yes Last Monday, when I received my	Or Preposition + which : That is the day on which I was born. Can be elided in defining clauses

⁵ Quantifiers: all, every(thing), some(thing), any(thing), no(thing), none, little, few, much, only...,

Relative Clauses

			January.	memorable.	package, I began studying.	
Why	Reason	No	Yes This is the reason (why) I left.	Yes The reason why she called is obvious.	No	Or Preposition + which : That is the reason for which I like you. Can be elided. Usually after “the reason”. Some grammarians consider it wrong, but it is commonly used.

Don't use **two** subjects or objects:

Subject: The monk took the bag which (~~it~~) contained unoffered food.

Object: Let's go to the elder whom our teacher talked about.

Verbs that go with a preposition (prepositional verbs) only have one object.

To look at: That masterpiece, which John is looking at (~~it~~), was painted by Alphonse Mucha.

What (Interrogative pronoun as a relative pronoun)

It does **not** refer to a noun that comes before it.

We have all the material (~~what~~) that we need.

It acts as **noun + relative pronoun** together, meaning: “the thing(s) which”.

Clauses beginning with “what” can act as subjects, objects, or complements after *be*.

Subject: What the teacher said was very important.

Object: Please, give me what I want.

Relative Clauses

Complement after *be*: That information was exactly what I needed.

Subject Complement: This follows a linking verb and provides information that renames or describes the subject.

It can be used as a determiner (before a noun), meaning: “the only”, “the little”, or “the few”.

What knowledge the king has comes from his advisors. (The little knowledge that the king has...)

Note (common mistake): “what” does not refer to anything, so it should not be confused with the connective relative “which”.

He ran away, ~~what~~ which made her cry.

Prepositions in relative clauses

They can come before the relative pronoun (formal) or at the end of the relative clause (informal)

More formal: The dog loved the people **with** whom it worked.

More informal: The dog loved the people (that) it worked **with**.

“that” is not used after prepositions:

The dog loved the people **with** (~~that~~) whom it worked.

“who” is not normally used as well:

The dog loved the people **with** (~~who~~) whom it worked.

If the preposition is part of a **phrasal verb**, it should be together with the verb.

That is the baby whom I must look after.

That is the baby ~~after~~ whom I must look.

Relative Clauses

Person

Relative clauses most often refer to a third-person (he, she, it, they).

First person (I who...You who...We who...) is very formal.

First- and Second-person reference is used commonly in relative clauses of **cleft sentences**.

Quantifying Determiners (some, any, none, all...) + of whom / which / whose (in non-determining clauses)

I saw many people, **some of which** were looking at me. (very formal: of which some)

We gave hundreds of suggestions, **none of which** were implemented. (very formal: of which none)

Also used with expressions of quantity, superlatives, with first, second, etc. and last.

half of which

the oldest of whom

the last of which...

-ever

whoever, whichever, whatever, whenever, wherever, however (whomever exists but is outdated)

whoever (pronoun) and **whichever** (pronoun and adjective) can mean 'the one who', 'he who'

Whoever comes first wins the prize.

The one who comes first wins the prize.

He who comes first wins the prize.

Whichever of them persists will succeed.

Whichever group wins gets the bonus.

whatever (/what) (pronoun and adjective), **whenever, wherever**: they substitute a **noun + relative pronoun**.

Draw **anything that** you want. → Draw **whatever / what** you want.

You can come **any day that** you want. → You can come **whenever** you want.

I see this advertisement **any place that** I go. → I see this advertisement **wherever** I go.

All can mean 'no matter who', etc.

Whatever happens, don't forget to message me.

I'll find him **wherever** he may be.

Whatever you do, don't lie. (emphasis)

However (adverb of degree) + adjective / verb

I'd prefer living in a safe place, **however** costly (it is), than living in fear.

Relative Clauses

However hard he studied, he couldn't get the highest scores.

Whatever and wherever can show the speaker's ignorance or indifference:

He lives in Caxias do Sul, **wherever** that is. (I don't know where it is, and I'm not interested)

They are studying horology, **whatever** that is.

Reduced Relative Clauses (some of these cases are not clearly reduced relative clauses; there are different opinions on the matter)

Infinitive (e.g.: to do)

1. After **the first / second**, etc., after **the last / only**, and sometimes after **superlatives**. It only happens when the relative pronoun is the **subject of an active verb / object of a passive verb**.

Subject of an active verb:

The last monk **who leaves** should turn the lights off. → The last monk **to leave** should turn the lights off.

The last monk that (**O**) we saw... → The last monk ~~to see...~~

The first bee **which came** got the pollen. → The first bee **to come** got the pollen.

Object of a passive verb:

Passive Infinitive (e.g.: to be done)

The first tree **that (O) was planted** has survived the winter. → The first tree **to be planted...**

2. To show purpose or permission.

She has many things **that she must do**. → She has many things **to do**.

They need a place **where they can study**. → They need a place **to study**.

Note: 2 possible meanings

The first monk **to visit...**

The first monk **to visit** was the abbot. (The first monk that we had to visit is the abbot.)

The first monk **to visit** us was the abbot. (The first monk who visited us was the

abbot.)

Present Participle (e.g.: doing)

1. Continuous:

Who's the gentleman **that is waiting** for us? → Who's the gentleman **waiting** for us?

Jessie, **who is working on his project**, called me. → Jessie, **working** on his project, called me.

2. Simple / Past expressing habits / ongoing actions

Any pupil **who wants/wanted** to take dependence should come at 8. → Any pupil **wanting** to take dependence should come at 8.

note: "want" is not used in the present continuous, but here, it is not present continuous.

A law allowing...an inscription informing...letters requesting...

3. Wish/desire/want/hope

Venerables **who wish to join** the pilgrimage should sign the paper. → Venerables **wishing** to join...

4. In non-defining relative clauses: wish/desire/want/hope and know/think/believe/expect

Jessie, **who knew the teaching**, explained it to me. → Jessie, knowing the teaching, explained it to me.

Past Participle (e.g.: done): can substitute a relative clause in the **passive voice (be + past participle)**

Past Participle (before the noun):

The book **that had been stolen** was found. → The **stolen** book was found.

Past Participle Phrase (after the noun):

The house **that was covered** in snow is now available. → The house **covered** in snow is now available.

Mr. Jacob, **who was appointed president**, just called. → Mr. Jacob, **appointed president**, just called.

Adjectives: the relative clause is reduced to an adjective / adjective phrase that fulfills the same role in the sentence.

Adjective (before the noun):

The petas **who were hungry** came to the offering. → The **hungry** petas came to the offering.

Relative Clauses

Adjective (after the noun): Available and Possible

These are all the seats that are **available**. → These are all the seats **available**.

The vacation period is the only time **that is possible**. → ...the only time **possible**.

Adjective phrase (after the noun):

These are all the seats **that are available** now. → These are all the seats **available** now.

The student **who was/is responsible for the project** is here. → The student **responsible for the project** is here.

Appositive – a noun phrase that renames or explains the noun – (uses commas):

The man **who is tall and strong** just won the race. → The man, **tall and strong**, just won the race.

Prepositional Phrases (relative pronoun + be + prepositional phrase)

The books **that are on the shelf** are new. → The books **on the shelf** are new.

NOT: The documents **that she filed with the court** are missing. → The documents ~~with the court~~ are missing.

It cannot be reduced because it changes the meaning (the documents she filed with the court are not the documents with the court).

Relative Clauses in Cleft Sentences (it + be + noun/pronoun + defining relative clause)

Greger saw us. → It was Greger **who saw us**.

Alcohol caused the accident. → It was alcohol **that caused the accident**.

Non-defining Relative Clauses that are Connecting Relative Clauses

Some non-defining relative clauses do not describe a noun but continue the story.

After the object of the main verb.

She asked the teacher, **who answered it was correct**.

After a preposition + noun

Percy gave it to Harry, **who gave it to Ron**.

Relative Clauses

The clause could be replaced by **and/but**: Percy gave it to Harry and he gave it to Ron.
They drank wine, **which made them drunk**.
The donors bought a dozen avocados, **six of which were lost on the way**.
When **which** refers to the whole clause:
He ran away, **which made her cry**.

Relative Clauses separated from their noun / pronoun

by a **word**:

There is a dog **here** that wants some food. (that refers to dog)

by a **phrase**:

I read something **in an article** which would interest him. (which refers to something)

Note: Normally, after **the + noun**, the clause follows immediately:

The sound that the alarm made startled everyone.

by **multiple relative clauses**:

The man **who is tall** and **who just won the competition** is my brother.

by an **appositive**

Gandalf, **the Grey**, who was an old wizard, was the main responsible for the downfall of Sauron.

Exercises

Elementary

[Exercise 1](#)

[Exercise 2](#)

[Exercise 3](#)

[Exercise 4](#)

[Exercise 5](#)

Intermediate

[Exercise 1](#)

[Exercise 2](#)

[Exercise 3](#)

[Exercise 4](#)

[Exercise 5](#)

[Exercise 6](#)

[Exercise 7](#)

[Exercise 8](#)