

Relative clauses

USES

We use relative clauses to give additional information about something without starting another sentence. By combining sentences with a relative clause, your text becomes more fluent and you can avoid repeating certain words.

Imagine, a girl is talking to John. You want to know who she is and ask a friend whether he knows her. You could say:

A girl is talking to John. Do you know the girl?

That sounds rather complicated, doesn't it? It would be easier with a relative clause: you put both pieces of information into one sentence.

Do you know the girl who is talking to Tom?

Relative Pronouns:

relative pronoun	use	example
who	subject or object pronoun for people	I told you about the woman <i>who</i> lives next door.
which	subject or object pronoun for animals and things	Do you see the cat <i>which</i> is lying on the roof?
which	referring to a whole sentence	He couldn't read <i>which</i> surprised me.
whose	possession for people animals and things	Do you know the boy <i>whose</i> mother is a nurse?
whom	object pronoun for people, especially in non-defining relative clauses (in defining relative clauses we colloquially prefer <i>who</i>)	I was invited by the professor <i>whom</i> I met at the conference.
that	subject or object pronoun for people, animals and things in defining relative clauses (<i>who</i> or <i>which</i> are also possible)	I don't like the table <i>that</i> stands in the kitchen.

Relative Adverbs:

A relative adverb can be used instead of a relative pronoun plus preposition. This often makes the sentence easier to understand. For example:

The day **when** we visited her.

The place **where** we met for the first time.

The reason **why** we studied English.

DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

They provide information integral to the sentence without which the sentence makes no sense. We do not use commas to separate a defining relative clause from the rest of the sentence.

‘A stepfather is a man who is married to your mother but isn’t your father’.

Object pronouns in defining relative clauses can be dropped. We can leave out the relative pronoun who, which and that when they are followed by a noun or a pronoun.

‘The boy **who** we met yesterday is very nice’.

NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

They give additional information on something, but do not define it. They are put into commas.

‘Hector, **who is a brilliant actor**, took the main role’.

Note: In non-defining relative clauses, who/which may not be replaced with that.

‘Ed, **who lives in Montreal**, couldn’t come to the funeral’.

Reduced relative clauses

Relative clauses with who, which, that as subject pronoun can be replaced with a participle. This makes the sentence shorter and easier to understand.

‘Elderly people **living** alone (who live alone) should have family to care for them’

‘Children **raised** (who were raised) in a bilingual environment may begin to speak a little later’.