



Relative Clauses

Subject and Object Relative Clauses

Subject Relative Clauses

J. K. Rowling is the author. She wrote the Harry Potter books. →

J. K. Rowling is the author **who wrote the Harry Potter books**.

Object Relative Clauses

She is the author. I have interviewed her. →

She is the author **that I have interviewed**.

Object Relative Clauses with Prepositions

She is the author. The committee gave an award to her. →

She is the author **that the committee gave an award to**.

She is the author **to whom the committee gave an award**. (*more formal*)

- Relative clauses are also called adjective clauses. Like adjectives, relative clauses modify nouns. These clauses identify, define, or comment on the noun that they follow.
- Relative clauses are dependent clauses; they cannot stand alone as independent sentences.
- Relative clauses usually begin with a relative pronoun (e.g., *who, that*). The relative pronoun and the modified noun refer to the same thing (e.g., *who, that = the author*).
- Sentences with relative clauses can be thought of as a combination of two sentences, i.e., as a shorter way of saying the same thing.
- **Subject relative clauses:** The relative pronoun takes the place of the subject of the clause (e.g., *she*). It is followed by a verb. The verb agrees with the noun that the clause modifies.
- **Object relative clauses:** The relative pronoun takes the place of the object of the clause (e.g., *her*). It is followed by a subject + a verb. The verb agrees with the subject.
- **Object relative clauses with prepositions:** The relative pronoun takes the place of the object of a preposition (e.g., *her*). It is followed by a subject + a verb. The verb agrees with the subject. The preposition usually appears at the end of the clause, but can also be put before the relative pronouns *which* or *whom*.

Relative Pronouns

Subject

The students who / that live next door make too much noise.

There are numerous viruses that / which cause the common cold.

Object

Last year, someone that / who I know had a book published.

The beach that / which we visited last week has been closed for the summer.

Object with Preposition

The man that / who I spoke to had a thick accent.

This is a problem that / which we know nothing about.

- The relative pronoun *who* can be used to refer to people and the relative pronoun *which* can be used to refer to things. *That* can refer to either people or things.
- In **subject relative clauses**, *who* is more commonly used to refer to people than *that*. In all other subject or object relative clauses, *that* is more common. *Which* and *who* usually sound more formal, but are often used in writing.
- In **object relative clauses**, *whom* can be used instead of *who* to convey a more formal tone.
Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce a woman **whom** I greatly admire.
- Object relative clauses with prepositions follow the same rules as object relative clauses. However, when the preposition is placed before the relative pronoun to create a more formal tone, *whom* or *which* must be used.
The woman **to whom** the award was given is a great humanitarian.

Omitting the Relative Pronoun

Object Relative Clauses

These are the documents **(that)** you need to enter the country.

You can ask anyone **(that)** I spoke to.

Kate is the woman **(who)** I told you about **that** I met on vacation. (2 relative clauses)

- In object relative clauses, the relative pronoun can be omitted with no change in meaning. This is also true in object relative clauses ending with prepositions. This is common in everyday speech.
- When there are two object relative clauses in a row, the first relative pronoun is usually omitted but the second one cannot be omitted.
- You cannot drop the relative pronoun in subject relative clauses.
X The lecture was given by a professor lived in Tibet for 20 years. (INCORRECT)

Restrictive vs. Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses

Restrictive Relative Clauses

My sister **who lives in New York** works for Donald Trump. (*Which sister? The one in New York.*)

The car **that I think changed the world** was the Model T. (*Sentence is meaningless without relative clause*)

Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses

My sister, **who lives in New York**, works for Donald Trump. (*Implies that I have only one sister and she lives in New York*)

The Model T, **which Ford produced from 1908 to 1927**, was the first affordable car. (*Sentence is still meaningful even if clause is omitted*)

- The preceding charts have addressed the most common kind of relative clause, called a **restrictive** (or defining) **relative clause**. This kind of clause answers the question: *Which one?* It is used to identify one noun and distinguish it from other similar nouns. The information in the restrictive relative clause is necessary to make the meaning of the sentence clear.
- There is another kind of relative clause called a **nonrestrictive** (or nondefining) **relative clause**. This kind of clause adds extra information to the noun you are talking about. The information in the clause is not necessary—it can be omitted and the meaning of the sentence is still understandable. These kinds of clauses are less frequently used and occur mainly in writing.
- Nonrestrictive relative clauses are used after proper nouns and other specific or unique nouns.
My mother, who lives in Texas, ...
The Model T, which Ford produced from 1908 to 1927, ...
- Nonrestrictive relative clauses are always offset by commas. They can only be used with the pronouns *who*, *whom*, or *which*. You cannot use *that* or omit the relative pronoun.
X My mother, that lives in Texas, sells real estate. (INCORRECT)
X The Model T, Ford produced from 1908 to 1927, was the first affordable car. (INCORRECT)

Other Relative Pronouns

Restrictive Relative Clauses

She is the author whose books have won many awards.

It was a time when I didn't have any money. (= a time during which...)

I often pass by the street where you used to live. (= a street on which...)

I know the reason why the workers went on strike. (= the reason that...)

Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses

J. K. Rowling, whose books are all bestsellers, donates a lot of money to charity.

I can't pay rent until next week, when I get my paycheck in the mail.

When I visit Taipei, where I used to live, I make sure to buy some of my favorite tea.

- Some object relative clauses can begin with other relative pronouns, (e.g., *whose*, *when*, *where*, *why*).
- **Restrictive relative clauses:** *Whose* shows a possessive relationship between the nouns before and after it. *When* can be used as a relative pronoun when it follows words like *time*, *month*, or *year*. *Where* follows words like *place*, *street*, *city*, and *situation*. You can use *why* after the noun *reason*.
- **Nonrestrictive relative clauses:** *Whose*, *when*, and *where* can also be used in these clauses. Unlike their use in restrictive relative clauses, *when* and *where* can follow specific times (e.g., *last summer*) or place names (e.g., *Taipei*).