

RELATIVE CLAUSES

DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

As the name suggests, these clauses give essential information to define or identify the person or thing we are talking about. Obviously, this is only necessary if there is more than one person or thing involved.

Example:

Elephants who marry mice are very unusual.

In this sentence we understand that there are many elephants, but it is clear that we are only talking the ones *who marry mice*.

Punctuation

Commas are not used in defining relative clauses.

Relative pronouns

The following relative pronouns are used in defining relative clauses:

	Person	Thing	Place	Time	Reason
Subject	who/that	which/that			
Object	who/whom/that/∅	which/that/∅	where	when	why
Possessive	<i>whose</i>	<i>whose</i>			

Notes:

1. The relative pronoun stands in place of a noun.

This noun usually appears earlier in the sentence:

The woman	who/that	spoke at the meeting	was very knowledgeable.
Noun, subject of main clause	relative pronoun referring to 'the woman', subject of 'spoke'	verb + rest of relative clause	verb + rest of main clause

2. *Who*, *whom* and *which* can be replaced by *that*. This is very common in spoken English.

3. The relative pronoun can be omitted (∅) when it is the *object* of the clause:

*The mouse **that the elephant loved** was very beautiful.*
*OR The mouse **the elephant loved** was very beautiful.*

Both of these sentences are correct, though the second one is more common in spoken English.

The mouse	that/ø	the elephant loved	was very beautiful.
Noun, subject of main clause	relative pronoun, referring to 'the mouse, object of 'loved'	verb + rest of relative clause	verb + rest of main clause.

(You can usually decide whether a relative pronoun is an object because it is normally followed by another subject + verb.)

4. *Whose* is used for things as well as for people.

Examples:

*The man **whose car was stolen.***

*A tree **whose leaves have fallen.***

5. *Whom* is very formal and is only used in written English. You can use *who/that*, or omit the pronoun completely :

The doctor ***whom/who/that/ø I was hoping to see*** wasn't on duty.

6. *That* normally follows words like *something, anything, everything, nothing, all*, and superlatives.

Examples:

There's something ***that you should know.***

It was the best film ***that I've ever seen.***

Examples:

A clown is someone ***who makes you laugh.***

An elephant is an animal ***that lives in hot countries.***

The plums ***that were in the fridge*** were delicious. I have eaten them.

Where are the plums ***(that) I put in the fridge?***

Has anyone seen ***the book I was reading?***

Nothing ***that anyone does*** can replace my lost bag.

Let's go to a country ***where the sun always shines.***

They live in the house ***whose roof is full of holes.***

RELATIVE CLAUSES

NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

The information in these clauses is not essential. It tells us more about someone or something, but it does not help us to identify them or it. Compare:

1. *Elephants **that love mice** are very unusual.* (This tells us which elephants we are talking about).
2. *Elephants, **which are large and grey**, can sometimes be found in zoos.* (This gives us some extra information about elephants - we are talking about all elephants, not just one type or group).
3. *John's mother, **who lives in Scotland**, has 6 grandchildren.* (We know who John's mother is, and he only has one. The important information is the number of grandchildren, but the fact that she lives in Scotland might be followed with the words "by the way" - it is additional information).

Punctuation

Non-defining relative clauses are always separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. The commas have a similar function to brackets: *My friend John has just written a best-selling novel. (He went to the same school as me) > My friend John, **who went to the same school as me**, has just written a best-selling novel.*

Relative pronouns in non-defining clauses

	Person	Thing	Place
Subject	who	which	
Object	who/whom	which	where
Possessive	whose		

Notes:

1. In non-defining clauses, you cannot use 'that' instead of *who*, *whom* or *which*.
2. You cannot leave out the relative pronoun, even when it is the object of the verb in the relative clause:
He gave me the letter, which was in a blue envelope.
He gave me the letter, which I read immediately
3. The preposition in these clauses can go at the end of the clause, e.g. *This is Stratford-on-Avon, which you have all heard about.*

This pattern is often used in spoken English, but in written or formal English you can also put the preposition before the pronoun: e.g. *Stratford-on-Avon, about which many people have written is Shakespeare's birthplace.*

4. Non-defining clauses can be introduced by expressions like *all of*, *many of* + relative pronoun:

	Person	Thing
<i>all of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>any of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>(a) few of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>both of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>each of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>either of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>half of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>many of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>most of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>much of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>none of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>one of</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>
<i>two of etc...</i>	+ <i>whom</i>	+ <i>which</i>

Examples:

- a. There were a lot of people at the party, ***many of whom*** I had known for years.
- b. He was carrying his belongings, ***many of which*** were broken.

5. The relative pronoun *which* at the beginning of a non-defining relative clause, can refer to all the information contained in the previous part of the sentence, rather than to just one word.

- a. Chris did really well in his exams, ***which was a big surprise***. (= the fact that he did well in his exams was a big surprise).
- b. An elephant and a mouse fell in love, ***which is most unusual***. (= the fact that they fell in love is unusual).

Examples:

- a. My grandmother, ***who is dead now***, came from the North of England.
- b. I spoke to Fred, ***who explained the problem***.
- c. The elephant looked at the tree, ***under which she had often sat***.
- d. We stopped at the museum, ***which we'd never been into***.
- e. She's studying maths, ***which many people hate***.
- f. I've just met Susan, ***whose husband works in London***.
- g. He had thousands of books, ***most of which he had read***.

WHERE TO PUT THE PREPOSITION IN A RELATIVE CLAUSE

There are often prepositions in relative clauses, and the relative pronoun is the *object* of the preposition. This means that the preposition can sometimes be omitted.

1. The preposition is normally placed at the end of the relative clause:

Is that the man (who) you arrived **with**?

Do you know the girl (that) John is talking **to**?

2. In formal or written English, the preposition is often placed before the relative pronoun, and in this case the pronoun cannot be omitted:

The person with whom he is negotiating is the Chairman of a large company.

It is a society to which many important people belong.

However, this is unusual in spoken English.

Examples:

The jungle **the elephant lived in** was full of strange and unusual animals.

He was very fond of the mouse **that he lived with**.

The tree **under which they had their home** was the largest and oldest in the jungle.

In the middle of the jungle was a river **that all the animals went to every day**.

It was the stream **in which the elephant and the mouse preferred to swim**.