

RELATIVE CLAUSES

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

How to Form Relative Clauses

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

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

It would be easier with a relative clause: you put both pieces of information into one sentence.

As your friend cannot know which girl you are talking about, you need to put in the additional information – the girl is talking to Tom. Use ‘the girl’ only in the first part of the sentence, in the second part replace it with the relative pronoun (for people, use the relative pronoun „who“). So the final sentence is:

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.

This is the shop **in which** I bought my bike.

→ This is the shop **where** I bought my bike.

relative adverb	Meaning	use	example
when	in/on which	refers to a time expression	the day <i>when</i> we met him
where	in/at which	refers to a place	the place <i>where</i> we met him
why	for which	refers to a reason	the reason <i>why</i> we met him

Defining Relative Clauses

Defining relative clauses **give detailed information** defining a general term or expression.

Imagine, Tom is in a room with five girls. One girl is talking to Tom and you ask somebody whether he knows this girl. Here the relative clause defines which of the five girls you mean.

Do you know the girl who is talking to Tom?

Defining relative clauses are often used in **definitions**.

A seaman is someone who works on a ship.

Non-Defining Relative Clauses

Non-defining relative clauses give additional information on something, but do not define it. Non-defining relative clauses are put in **commas**. **The information between the commas can be omitted without affecting the meaning of the sentence.**

My friend, **who lives in Madrid**, is a professional pianist.

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

Omission of relative pronouns

We can omit the relative pronoun if it is the object of the relative clause.

- *That's the film (**that/which**) we saw.*
- *He's the teacher (**that/who**) I can't stand.*

We often omit the relative pronouns **that**, **which** and **who** in speech.

Remember!

- We cannot omit the relative pronoun **whose**.