

8 Relative pronouns and clauses

There are three kinds of relative clauses: defining (see 72-7), non-defining (78-81) and connective (82).

71 Defining relative clauses

These describe the preceding noun in such a way as to distinguish it from other nouns of the same class. A clause of this kind is essential to the clear understanding of the noun. In the sentence:

The man who told me this refused to give me his name

'who told me this' is the relative clause. If we omit this, it is not clear what man we are talking about. Notice that there is no comma between a noun and a defining relative clause.

Defining relative clauses usually follow the + noun, but they can also be used with a/an + noun, plural nouns without the and the pronouns all, none, anybody, somebody etc. and those. Clauses following a/an + noun, plural nouns without the and somebody /someone/something sometimes define their noun/pronoun only indirectly. The noun/pronoun in these cases is usually the object of a verb or preposition:

I met someone who said he knew you.

The book is about a girl who falls in love with ...

Sometimes these clauses are separated from their noun/pronoun by a "word or phrase:

"", There's a man here who wants . . .

I saw something in the paper which would interest you. But normally relative clauses should be placed directly after their noun or pronoun:

The noise that he made woke everybody up.

She was annoyed by something that I had said.

72 Relative pronouns used in defining relative clauses

The forms are as follows:

	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Object</u>	<u>Possessive</u>
For persons	who	whom/who	whose
That	that		
for things	which	which	whose/of which
that	that		

74 Defining relative clauses: persons

A Subject: **who** or **that**

who is normally used:

The man who robbed you has been arrested.

The girls who serve in the shop are the owner's daughters.

Only those who had booked in advance were allowed in.

Would anyone who saw the accident please get in touch with the police?

But that is a possible alternative after all, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody and those:

Everyone who/that knew him liked him.

Nobody who/that watched the match will ever forget it.

B Object of a verb: **whom** or **who** or **that**

The object form is **whom**, but this is considered very formal. In spoken English we normally use **who** or **that** (being more usual than **who**), and it is still more common to omit the object pronoun altogether:

The man whom I saw told me to come back today or

The man who I saw ... or The man that I saw ..., or

The man I saw ... (relative pronoun omitted)

The girls whom he employs are always complaining about their pay or

The girls who he employs ... or The girls that he employs ... or

The girls he employs. . .

C With a preposition: **whom** or **that**

In formal English the preposition is placed before the relative pronoun, which must then be

put into the form **whom**:

the man to whom I spoke

In informal speech, however, it is more usual to move the preposition to the end of the clause, **whom** then is often replaced by **that**, but it is still more common to omit the relative altogether:

the man who/whom I spoke to or

the man that I spoke to or the man I spoke to

Similarly:

The man from whom I bought it told me to oil it or

The man who/that I bought it from ... or

The man I bought it from...

The friend with whom I was travelling spoke French or

The friend who/that I was travelling with ... or

The friend I was travelling with...

D Possessive

whose is the only possible form:

People whose rents have been raised can appeal.

The film is about a spy whose wife betrays him.

75 Defining relative clauses: things

A Subject

Either **which** or **that**. **which** is the more formal:

This is the picture which/that caused such a sensation.

The stairs which/that lead to the cellar are rather slippery.

(See also B below.)

B Object of a verb **which** or **that**. or no relative at all:

The car which/that I hired broke down or The car I hired ...

which is hardly ever used after **all**, **everything**, **little**, **much**, **none**, **no** and compounds of **no**, or after superlatives. Instead we use **that**, or omit the relative altogether, if it is the object of a verb:

All the apples that fall are eaten by the pigs.

This is the best hotel (that) I know.

C Object of a preposition

The formal construction is preposition + **which**, but it is more usual to move the preposition to the end of the clause, using **which** or **that** or omitting the relative altogether:

The ladder on which I was standing began to slip or

The ladder which/that I was standing on began to slip or

The ladder I was standing on began to slip.

D Possessive

whose + a clause is possible but **with** + a phrase is more usual:

a house whose walls were made of glass a house with glass walls

E Relative adverbs: **when**, **where**, **why**

Note that **when** can replace **in/on which** (used of time):

the year when (= in which) he was born

the day when (= on which) they arrived

where can replace **in/at which** (used of place):

the hotel where (= in/at which) they were staying .

why can replace **for which**: *The reason why he refused is ...*

when, **where** and **why** used in this way are called relative adverbs.

76 Cleft sentences: **it + be + noun/pronoun + defining relative clause**

It was Tom who helped us. (not Bill or Jack)

It was Ann that I saw. (not Mary)

When the object is a proper noun, as above, **that** is more usual than **who**. With all other objects, **that** is the correct form:

It's the manager that we want to see.
It was wine that we ordered, (not beer)
that is usual for non-personal subjects:
It's speed that causes accidents, not bad roads.

77 A relative clause replaced by an infinitive or a participle

- A Infinitives can be used:
- 1 After **the first/second** etc. and after **the last/only** and sometimes after superlatives:
the last man to leave the ship = the last man who left/leaves the ship
the only one to understand = the only one who understood/understands
- Notice that the infinitive here replaces a subject pronoun + verb. It could not be used to replace an object pronoun + verb. For example the clause in *the first man that we saw* could not be replaced by an infinitive, for *the first man to see* would have a completely different meaning. If, however, that is the subject of a passive verb, e.g. *the first man that was seen*, we can replace the clause by a passive infinitive: *the first man to be seen*.
- 2 When there is an idea of purpose or permission:
He has a lot of books to read. (books that he can/must read)
She had something to do. (something that she could do/had to do)
They need a garden to play in. (a garden they can play in)
- Note that here the infinitive replaces a verb + relative pronoun as object. It might be thought that these two uses of the infinitive would lead to confusion but in practice this is very rare as the meaning of the infinitive is made clear by the rest of the sentence. By itself the phrase *the first man to see* could mean either *the first man that we must see* (*man* is the object) or *the first man who saw* (*man* is the subject), but when it is part of a sentence we can see at once which meaning is intended:
The first man to see is Tom = The first man that we must see is Tom, while
The first man to see me was Tom = The first man who saw me was Tom.
- B Present participles can be used:
- 1 When the verb in the clause is in the continuous tense:
People who are/were waiting/or the bus often shelter/sheltered in my doorway = People waiting/or the bus often shelter/sheltered . . .
- 2 When the verb in the clause expresses a habitual or continuous action:
Passengers who travel/travelled on this bus buy/bought their tickets in books = Passengers travelling ...
Boys who attend/attended this school have/had to wear uniform = Boys attending ...
a law which forbids/forbade the import = a law forbidding the import
a notice which warns/warned people = a notice warning people
an advertisement which urges/urged = an advertisement urging
- Similarly:
a petition asking a letter ordering/demanding/telling
a placard protesting placards protesting
- 3 When a verb in the clause expresses a wish, i.e. when the verb in the clause is wish, desire, want, hope (but not like):
people who wish/wished to go on the tour = people wishing to go on the tour
fans who hope/hoped for a glimpse of the star = fans hoping for a glimpse of the star
- 4 A non-defining clause (see 78 below) containing one of the above verbs, or any verb of knowing or thinking, e.g. *know, think, believe, expect*, can be similarly replaced by a present participle:
Peter, who thought the journey would take two days, said ... = Peter, thinking the journey would take two days, said...
Tom, who expected to be paid the following week, offered ... = Tom, expecting to be paid the following week, offered...
Bill, who wanted to make an impression on Ann, took her to ... = Bill, wanting to make an impression on Ann, took her to ...

78 Non-defining relative clauses

A Non-defining relative clauses are placed after nouns, which are definite already. They do not therefore define the noun, but merely add something to it by giving some more information about it. Unlike defining relative clauses, they are not essential in the sentence and can be omitted without causing confusion. Also unlike defining relatives, they are separated from their noun by commas. The pronoun can never 'be omitted in a non-defining relative clause. The construction is fairly formal and more common in written than in spoken English.

B Relative pronouns used in non-defining relative clauses:

	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Object</u>	<u>Possessive</u>
For persons	who	whom/who	whose
For things	which	which	whose/of which

79 Non-defining relative clauses: persons

A Subject: **who**

No other pronoun is possible. Note the commas:

My neighbour, who is very pessimistic, says there will be no apples this year.

Peter, who had been driving all day, suggested stopping at the next town.

Clauses such as these, which come immediately after the subject of the main verb, are found mainly in written English. In spoken English we would be more likely to say:

My neighbour is very pessimistic and says . . .

Peter had been driving all day, so/and he suggested . . .

But clauses placed later in the sentence, i.e. clauses coming after the object of the main verb, are quite common in conversation:

I've invited Ann, who lives in the next flat.

Clauses following a preposition + noun are also common:

I passed the letter to Peter, who was sitting beside me.

B Object: **whom, who**

The pronoun cannot be omitted, whom is the correct form, though **who** is sometimes used in conversation:

Peter, whom everyone suspected, turned out to be innocent.

As noted above, a non-defining clause in this position is unusual in spoken English. We would be more likely to say:

Everyone suspected Peter, but he turned out to be innocent.

But non-defining clauses coming later in the sentence, i.e. after the object of the main verb or after a preposition + noun, are common in conversation:

She wanted Tom, whom she liked, as a partner; but she got Jack.

whom she didn't like. She introduced me to her husband, whom I hadn't met before.

C Object of a preposition: **whom**

The pronoun cannot be omitted. The preposition is normally placed before whom:

Mr. Jones, for whom I was working, was very generous about overtime payments.

It is however possible to move the preposition to the end of the clause. This is commonly done in conversation, and who then usually takes the place of whom:

Mr. Jones, who I was working/or, . . .

If the clause contains an expression of time or place, this will remain at the end:

Peter, with whom I played tennis on Sundays, was fitter than me.

could become

Peter, who/whom I played tennis with on Sundays, was fitter than me.

D Possessive: whose

Ann, whose children are at school all day, is trying to get a job.

This is George, whose class you will be taking.

In conversation we would probably say:

Ann's children are at school all day, so she . . .

This is George. You will be taking his class.

80 all, both, few, most, several, some etc. + of + whom/which

This form can be used for both people and things. See examples below. For each a more

informal equivalent is given in brackets:

Her sons, both of whom work abroad, ring her up every week. (Both her sons work abroad, but they ring her up every week.)

He went with a group a/people, few of whom were correctly equipped for such a climb. (He went with a group of people; few of them . . .)

The buses, most of which were already full, were surrounded by an angry crowd. (Most of the buses were full, and/but they were surrounded by an angry crowd.)

I met the fruit-pickers, several of whom were university students. (I met the fruit-pickers; several of them were . . .)

I picked up the apples, some of which were badly bruised. (I picked up the apples; some of them . . .)

The house was full of boys, ten of whom were his own grandchildren. (The house was full of boys; ten of them . . .)

81 Non-defining relative clauses: things

A Subject: **which**

that is not used here:

That block, which cost £5 million to build, has been empty for years. The 8.15 train, which is usually very punctual, was late today.

In speech we would be more likely to say:

That block cost £5 million to build and has been empty for years. The 8.15 train is usually punctual; but it was late today.

B Object: **which**

that is not used here, and the **which** can never be omitted:

She gave me this jumper, which she had knitted herself or

She gave me this jumper; she had knitted it herself.

These books, which you can get at any bookshop, will give you all the information you need or

These books will give you all the information you need. You can get them at any bookshop.

C Object of a preposition

The preposition comes before **which**, or (more informally) at the end of the clause:

Ashdown Forest, through which we 'll be driving, isn 't a forest any longer or

Ashdown Forest, which we 'll be driving through, isn 't a forest any longer.

His house, for which he paid £10,000, is now worth £50,000 or

His house, which he paid £10,000 for, is now . . .

D **which** with phrasal verbs

Combinations such as *look after*, *took forward to*, *put up with* (see chapter 38) should be treated as a unit, i.e. the preposition/adverb should not be separated from the verb:

This machine, which I have looked after/or twenty years, is still working perfectly.

Your inefficiency, which we have put up with far too long, is beginning to annoy our customers.

E Possessive: **whose** or of **which**

whose is generally used both for animals and things. **of which** is possible for things, but is unusual except in very formal English.

His house, whose windows were all broken, was a depressing sight.

The car, whose handbrake wasn't very reliable, began to slide backwards.

82 Connective relative clauses

The pronouns are **who**, **whom**, **whose**, **which**. Commas are used as with non-defining clauses. Connective clauses do not describe their nouns but continue the story. They are usually placed after the object of the main verb:

I told Peter, who said it wasn't his business

or after the preposition + noun:

I threw the ball to Tom, who threw it to Ann.

They can be replaced by and/but + he/she etc.:

I threw the ball to Tom and he threw it . . .

I told Peter, but he said . . .

Sometimes it may be difficult to say whether a clause in this position is non-defining or connective, but there is no need for students to make this distinction, as the two forms are the same. More examples of connective clauses:

He drank beer, which made him fat = He drank beer and it made him fat.

We went with Peter, whose car broke down before we were halfway there =

We went with Peter but his car broke down before we were halfway there.

We can use **one/two** etc., **few/several/some** etc. + **of + whom/which** as shown in 80:

I bought a dozen eggs, six of which broke when I dropped the box.

He introduced me to his boys, one of whom offered to go with me.

The lorry crashed into a queue of people, several of whom had to have hospital treatment.

which can also stand for a whole clause:

The clock struck thirteen, which made everyone laugh.

He refused to do his share of the chores, which annoyed the others.

(His refusal annoyed them.)

The rain rattled on the roof all night, which kept us awake.

She was much kinder to her youngest child than she was to the others, which made the others jealous.

83 **what** (relative pronoun) and **which** (connective relative)

what = the thing that/the things that:

What we saw astonished us = The things that we saw astonished us.

When she sees what you have done she will be furious = When she sees the damage that you have done she will be furious.

Be careful not to confuse the relative **what** with the connective relative **which**. Remember that **which** must refer to a word or group of words in the preceding sentence, while **what** does not refer back to anything. The relative **what** is also usually the object of a verb, while the connective **which** is usually the subject:

He said he had no money, which was not true.

Some of the roads were flooded, which made our journey more difficult. (See also 82.)

84 **The importance of commas in relative clauses**

Remember that a defining relative clause is written without commas. Note how the meaning changes when commas are inserted:

(a) The travellers who knew about the floods took another road.

(b) The travellers, who knew about the floods, took another road.

In (a) we have a defining relative clause, which defines or limits the noun travellers. This sentence therefore tells us that only the travellers; who knew about the floods took the other road, and implies that there were other travellers who did not know and who took the flooded road.

In (b) we have a non-defining clause, which does not define or limit the noun it follows. This sentence therefore implies that all the travellers ^ knew about the floods and took the other road.

(c) The boys who wanted to play football were disappointed when it rained.

(d) The boys, who wanted to play football, were disappointed . . .

Sentence (c) implies that only some of the boys wanted to play football. There were presumably others who didn't mind whether it rained or not. Sentence (d) implies that all the boys wanted to play and all were disappointed,

(e) The wine which was in the cellar was ruined.

(f) The wine, which was in the cellar, was ruined.

Sentence (e) implies that only some of the wine was ruined. Presumably some was kept elsewhere and escaped damage. Sentence (f) states that all the wine was in the cellar and ruined.

85 **whoever, whichever, whatever, whenever, wherever, however**

These have a variety of meanings and can introduce relative and other clauses. The other clauses do not technically belong to this chapter but it seems best to group these **-ever** forms together.

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

Whoever gains the most points wins the competition.

Whichever of them gains the most/mints wins.

Whichever team gains the most points wins.

Whoever gets home first starts cooking the supper.

Whichever of us gets home first starts cooking.

Whoever cleans your windows doesn't make a good Job of it.

B **whatever** (pronoun and adjective), **whenever**, **wherever**:

You can eat what/whatever you like. (anything you like)

When you are older you can watch whatever programme you like.

My roof leaks when/whenever it rains, (every time it rains)

You will see this product advertised everywhere/wherever you go.

Go anywhere/wherever you like.

C **whoever, whichever, whatever, whenever, wherever, however** can mean 'no matter who' etc.:

If I say 'heads, I win; tails you lose', I will win whatever happens or whichever way the coin falls.

Whatever happens don't forget to write.

I'll find him, wherever he has gone. (no matter where he has gone)

whatever you do is often placed before or after a request/command to emphasize its importance:

Whatever you do, don't mention my name.

however is an adverb of degree and is used with an adjective or another adverb:

I'd rather have a room of my own, however small (it is), than share a room.

However hard I worked, she was never satisfied.

D **whatever, wherever** can indicate the speaker's ignorance or indifference:

He lives in Wick, wherever that is. (I don't know where it is, and

I'm not very interested.)

He says he's a phrenologist, whatever that is. (I don't know what it is and I'm not very interested.)

who ever? when ever? what ever? etc. may be written as separate words, but the meaning then changes (see 61):

I lost seven kilos in a month. ~ How ever did you lose so much in such a short time?

BILL (suspiciously): / know all about you.

TOM (indignantly): What ever do you mean?

Where ever did you buy your wonderful carpets?