

Relative pronouns: further information

For the definition, construction, uses and general information about **who**, **which**, **that**, **whose**, **whom** and **where**, see other rules. Here is some further information:

Omission of relative pronoun

In some **defining relative clauses**, it is possible to omit **who**, **which** or **that**.

The client (**who/that**) we met in London is coming to see us next week.

This is because 'the client' is the **object** of the verb 'met' and the **subject** of the verb 'is coming'. Here are some more examples:

These are the boots (**which/that**) I wear for hiking.

These are the people (**who/whom/that**) I met at the conference.

This is the report (**which/that**) I wrote after the conference.

The pictures (**which/that**) they showed us at the presentation were really interesting.

In the following, we cannot omit the relative pronoun because 'My sister' is the subject of the verb 'lives'.

My sister **who** lives in Paris is an architect. 

My sister **who** lives in Paris is an architect. 

Similarly:

I'm looking forward to meeting the client **who** is coming next week. 

I'm looking forward to meeting the client **is** coming next week. 

Prepositions with relative pronouns

Some English speakers believe that we should never end a sentence or a clause with a preposition. Instead, they place the preposition before **which**, **whom** or **whose**.

For example:

This is a company **in which** many talented people work.

It's an organisation **to whose** seminars people from around the world are invited.

Although this structure is acceptable in formal, written English, it sounds unnatural in

conversation:

Too formal in conversation	Preferred
The friends <u>with whom</u> we went on holiday are coming to dinner next week.	The friends we went on holiday <u>with</u> are coming to dinner next week.
To whom does this bag belong?	Who does this bag belong <u>to</u>?
Can you remember that Greek restaurant <u>to which</u> we went last year?	Can you remember that Greek restaurant we went <u>to</u> last year?
In whose team are you?	Whose team are you <u>in</u>?

What

Do not use 'what' in relative clauses. It does not have the same meaning as 'which' and 'that'.

This is the report what I wrote after the conference.

This is the report (which/that) I wrote after the conference.

If there is any doubt, think of 'what' as meaning 'the thing(s) that'.

This is what I wrote after the conference. ['what' = the thing that I wrote = the report]

Can you tell me what you have done today? [the things that you have done]

I told them what they have to bring with them to the conference. [the thing or things that they have to bring]

Note that it can be used either as a subject or an object. As a subject, it can take either a singular or a plural verb:

What they showed us at the presentation was very interesting. What I liked most were the pictures.

All that

With 'all', we do not use **which**. We use **that** in this kind of sentence:

All **that** happened was another disagreement about the launch date - it wasn't a productive meeting.

They provided all **that** was required.

But in this kind of sentence, when there is a subject and verb, it's better to omit **that**:

All we need to do is agree on a date - then we can go home.

I'm not an expert - all I know is how to switch it on and off.

Of which, whom, whose

We can use **which**, **whom** and **whose** with numbers and quantifiers in this kind of sentence in order to avoid using two sentences and a pronoun:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

They have three cars, one of **which** is a Renault.

= They have three cars. One of them is a Renault.

We stayed in a hotel in Paris, the name of **which** I can't remember.

= We stayed in a hotel in Paris. I can't remember the name of it.

There are two films on TV tonight, both of **which** I've seen before.

= There are two films on TV tonight. I've seen both of them before.

Matt has three brothers, two of **whom** are married.*

= Matt has three brothers. Two of them are married.

I have lots of clients in Asia, most of **whom** can't speak French. *

= I have lots of clients in Asia. Most of them can't speak French.

I deal with a company, many of **whose** clients are Asian.

= I deal with a company. Most of its clients are Asians.

She's an American writer, some of **whose** books have been translated into French.

= She's an American writer. Some of her books have been translated into French.

***Note that** in these examples, **who** is not possible and **whom** doesn't sound too formal or unnatural as it does in other relative clauses.

Nominal relative clauses

These are a kind of noun clause. They have a 'wh' word at the beginning and are found as subjects or objects in various kinds of sentences.

Here are some examples:

1. 'wh' + infinitive is used after some verbs, including the following:

I don't know **where** to have the meeting or **who** to invite.
She informed him **who** to contact about the changes.
They advised us **where** to park.

2. When we introduce something with the verb 'to be':

This is **where** I'd love to live.
This is **who** I've invited.

3. In questions:

Do you know **where** to put it?

4. Sentences that imply a question or a lack of information:

I wonder **who** that is.
I asked her **where** I could find a bank.

5. As a subject:

Where we're going to launch the new product has still to be decided.

6. **Note that** we can also make these kinds of sentences with 'what' and 'how'. For example:

I found out **what** to do with these - let me explain.
She warned us **what** to expect if we didn't take action immediately.
He told us **how** to fix it.
That isn't **what** I meant.
Here's **what** I've prepared so far.
This isn't **how** we usually do it.
Can you remember **what** he said?

What we learned at the seminar was really useful.

7. When we want to be emphatic, we use a noun clause at the beginning of a sentence as a subject:

Emphatic	Neutral
What I like most about him is his honesty.	I like his honesty most.
What I need right now is a strong cup of coffee and some chocolate.	I need a strong cup of coffee and some chocolate.
What I hated about that job was the long journey every morning.	I hated the long journey every morning in that job.
Where I'd really like to go this year is the US.	I'd really like to go to the US this year.

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