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

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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