

Relative pronouns: non-defining relative clauses

Introduction



These snacks, **which** are so easy to make, are absolutely delicious.

Non-defining relative clauses

We sometimes use a relative clause in order to add a little extra, unnecessary information. `<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />`

In these kinds of sentences, we use a comma before and after the clause:

My manager, **who** prefers bigger teams, wants to recruit more staff.
Our most recent project, **which** took two years to complete, was very successful.

If we remove the relative clause, the meaning of the sentence remains clear - we know which manager and project we are talking about:

My manager wants to recruit more staff.
Our most recent project was very successful.

So, there is a difference between these two sentences:

1. My sister, **who** lives in Paris, is an architect.
2. My sister **who** lives in Paris is an architect.

In sentence number 1. we know which sister we are talking about - maybe there is only one sister or it is already clear which one we are referring to. We could just say:

My sister is an architect.

In sentence number 2. the speaker has more than one sister and uses a defining relative clause to tell us which one is an architect. It is the one who lives in Paris.

Note that

1. in non-defining relative clauses, we cannot use **that**. We have to use **who** or **which**.

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

My sister, **that** lives in Paris, is an architect. ✗

My sister **who/that** lives in Paris is an architect. ✓

2. it is never possible to omit **which** and **who** in non-defining relative clauses:

My daughters, **who** are both students, live at home with me. ✓

My daughters, **who** are both students, live at home with me. ✗

The meeting, **which** was on Monday, wasn't very productive. ✓

The meeting, **which** was on Monday, wasn't very productive. ✗

3. the rules regarding **who** and **whom** are the same as for defining relative clauses :

My manager, **whom/who** I really like, is retiring next year.

My manager, **who** prefers bigger teams, wants to recruit more staff.

If there is any doubt, it is better to use **who** because it is much more commonly used than **whom** - both spoken and written.

4. We can use **where** and **whose** in non-defining relative clauses:

I'm going to Venice, **where** I first met my husband, with some friends next year.

The book, **whose** author is Mexican, is a best-seller.

5. We can use prepositions in non-defining relative clauses:

Our manager, for **whom** we have a lot of respect, always listens to our problems. [formal]

Our manager, **who** we have a lot of respect for, always listens to our problems. [conversational]

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