

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.

In these kinds of sentences, the clause is often in the middle of a sentence, with a comma before and after it.

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.

As well as putting the clause in the middle of a sentence between two commas, we can also put it at the end of a sentence:

Our most recent project was successful, which made us all very happy.

She went on holiday to Italy, where her son lives.

Remember that in non-defining relative clauses, we cannot use **that**. We have to use **who** or **which**. Compare a non-defining and defining relative clause:

He cooked a meal for us last night, **which** was unusual. [He doesn't usually cook.]

He cooked a meal for us last night **which/that** was unusual. [The meal was unusual.]

This can be confusing because you might think you are hearing two separate sentences instead of a relative clause. We can, in fact, have two separate sentences but with 'that' as a demonstrative pronoun:

He cooked a meal for us last night. That was unusual. [He doesn't usually cook.]

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]

Examples



The people in this picture, **who/whom** I met at university, all live in the USA now.



I have four children. My daughters, **who** are both students, live at home with me.



"How was your trip?" "It rained all week, **which** wasn't pleasant, but we agreed on a deal."



Hello everyone. My name's Peter and I'm in charge of the innovation department, **whose** main target is to suggest new services for our portfolio.



Sydney, **where** I worked after graduating, is an amazing city.

Reduced relative clauses

Reduced relative clauses

In order to make certain relative clauses more succinct, we omit both the pronoun and the verb. Here are some examples:

	Full sentence	Reduced sentence
With a past participle	The equipment, which was needed for this job, arrived yesterday.	The equipment, needed for this job, arrived yesterday.
Note that the participle remains the same whether we are talking about the past, present or future.	Some data, which was known to be incorrect, was used so that the report could be completed on time.	Some data, known to be incorrect, was used so that the report could be completed on time.
With adjectives	The device, which was innovative at the time, is no longer used.	The device, innovative at the time, is no longer used.



Flamenco dancing, **not easy** to do, is great to watch.



Writing notes on someone's business card, **considered** impolite in Japanese culture, is quite acceptable in Europe.



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