

35

Relative clauses

271 Summary

Introduction to relative clauses • 272

An adjective or prepositional phrase can modify a noun. A relative clause does the same.

Adjective:	<i>the red team</i>
Phrase:	<i>the team in red</i>
Relative clause:	<i>the team wearing red</i> <i>the team who were wearing red</i>

Some relative clauses do *not* have commas. They are identifying clauses and classifying clauses.

Identifying: *What's the name of the player **who was injured**?*
(The clause tells us *which* player is meant.)

Classifying: *A player **who is injured** has to leave the field.*
(The clause tells us *what kind* of player is meant.)

Some relative clauses have commas. They are adding clauses and connective clauses.

Adding: *Jones, **who was injured**, left the field.*
(The clause *adds information* about Jones.)

Connective: *The ball went to Jones, **who scored easily**.*
(The clause tells us *what happened next*.)

Relative pronouns in clauses without commas • 273

We use the relative pronouns *who* or *that* for people and *which* or *that* for things. These pronouns can be the subject or object of the clause.

Subject:	<i>We got on the first bus that came.</i>
Object:	<i>We got on the first bus that we saw.</i>
Object of a preposition:	<i>Next came the bus that we were waiting for.</i>

We can leave out the pronoun when it is not the subject.
*We got on the first bus **we saw**.*

Relative clauses with commas • 274

In an adding clause or connective clause we cannot use *that*, and we cannot leave out the pronoun.

*The first bus, **which came after five minutes**, was a seven.*

Whose • 275

*The player **whose** goal won the game was Jones.*

Participle relative clauses • 276

*The bus **coming** now is ours.*

*The player **injured** in the leg had to leave the field.*

Infinitive relative clauses • 277

*United were the first team **to score**.*

Which relating to a clause • 278

*United won easily, **which** pleased their fans.*

Relative adverbs • 279

*That's the stop **where** we get our bus.*

The relative pronoun *what* • 280

*United's fans got **what** they wanted.*

Whoever, whatever and whichever • 281

***Whoever** used the pans should wash them up.*

272 Introduction to relative clauses

1 SEVERN BODY CLUE

A body recovered from the River Severn at Tewkesbury at the weekend is thought to be a man who disappeared from the Midlands in January, police said yesterday.

(from *The Guardian*)

There are two relative clauses. Each clause relates to a noun (*body*, *man*). The second clause begins with a relative pronoun (*who*). The pronoun joins the relative clause to the main clause.

The body is that of a man. He disappeared in January.

The body is that of a man who disappeared in January.

- 2 There are different ways of modifying a noun.

Adjective:	<i>a dead body</i>
Noun:	<i>a Midlands man</i>
Phrase:	<i>a body in the river</i> <i>a man from the Midlands</i>
Participle relative clause:	<i>a body recovered from the river</i> <i>a man speaking in a Midlands accent</i>
Finite relative clause:	<i>a body which was recovered from the river</i> <i>a man who disappeared from the Midlands</i>

We usually choose the pattern that expresses the information in the shortest way. For example, *a man from the Midlands* is more usual than *a man who comes from the Midlands*.

NOTE

A relative clause can come after a pronoun such as *everyone, something*.

*He is thought to be **someone who** disappeared from the Midlands in January.*

But a clause after a personal pronoun is rather formal and old-fashioned.

*He **who** would climb the ladder must begin at the bottom.*

- 3 The following kinds of relative clause do not have commas around them, and in speech we do not pause before them.

a Identifying clauses

A clause can identify the noun, say which one we mean.

*The architect **who designed these flats** doesn't live here, of course.*

*I can't find the book **that I was reading**.*

The clause *that I was reading* identifies which book we are talking about.

NOTE

When there is an identifying clause, the determiner before the noun is usually *the*, not *my*, *your*, etc.

*I like **the** course that I'm doing now.*

NOT *I like my course that I'm doing now.*

My identifies which course, so we do not need it with an identifying clause.

b Classifying clauses

A clause can classify the noun, say what kind we mean.

*I hate people **who laugh at their own jokes**.*

*We're looking for a **pub that serves food**.*

The clause *that serves food* expresses the kind of pub we mean.

c Clauses used for emphasis

We can use a relative clause in a pattern with *it* in order to emphasize a phrase.

*It was Jones **who was injured**, not Brown. • 51(3)*

- 4 The following kinds of relative clause are separated from the noun, usually by a comma. In speech there is a short pause before the clause.

a Adding clauses

A clause can add extra information about a noun. • 274

*Aristotle was taught by Plato, **who founded the Academy at Athens**.*

The clause *who founded the Academy at Athens* adds extra information about Plato. We can leave out the adding clause and the sentence still makes sense.

b Connective clauses

A clause can tell us what happened next.

*I shouted to the man, **who ran off**.*

We use a connective clause to link two actions. In spoken English we often use two main clauses.

I shouted to the man, and he ran off.

5 Whether we use commas or not (or whether we pause) makes a difference to the meaning.

a Compare the identifying clause and the adding clause.

Identifying: *Two cars had to swerve to avoid each other. One car left the road and hit a tree, and the other one ended up on its roof. The driver of the car **which hit a tree** was killed.*

Adding: *A car had to swerve to avoid a horse and left the road. The driver of the car, **which hit a tree**, was killed.*

The identifying clause tells us which of the two cars is meant. The adding clause adds extra information about the car. It does not identify the car because in this context there is only one.

b In speech we make a difference between the two kinds of clause.

Identifying: *the driver of the car which hit a ↘ tree*

Adding: *the ↘ driver of the car, which hit a ↘ tree*

Before the adding clause there is a pause. There is a fall in intonation on both the noun phrase and the adding clause.

c Compare the classifying clause and the adding clause.

Classifying: *Cars **which cause pollution** should be banned.*

(Some cars should be banned because they cause pollution.)

Adding: *Cars, **which cause pollution**, should be banned.*

(All cars should be banned because they cause pollution.)

The classifying clause tells us what kind of cars are meant. The adding clause adds information about cars in general.

6 A relative clause usually comes directly after the noun it relates to, but it can come later in the sentence. These two examples are from real conversations.

*I can't think of any good **films** at the moment **that I'd like to see**.*

*The **train** was just pulling out of the station **that we were supposed to connect with**.*

We can do this when the clause has important information that we need to put at the end of the sentence. But separating the noun and its relative clause can be awkward, and in writing we often avoid it.

NOTE

We can use fronting or inversion to **get** the noun + clause at the end.

*At the moment I can't think of any good **films that I'd like to see**.*

Just pulling out of the station was the train that we were supposed to connect with.

When we use a relative pronoun, we do not use a personal pronoun as well.
*a man **who** disappeared in January* NOT *a man who he disappeared in January*
*a body **that** theyfound in the river* NOT *a body that theyfound it in the river*

NOTE

But in informal spoken English we sometimes use an extra personal pronoun when the relative clause has a sub clause.

We were talking about the factory that the police believe someone set fire to (it) deliberately.

273 Relative pronouns in clauses without commas

Here we look at clauses in which we use *who*, *whom*, *which* or *that*, and clauses without a pronoun. These are identifying and classifying clauses.

1 *Who* or *which*?

We use *who* for a person and *which* for a thing or an idea.

*Who was the **girl who** arrived late?* *It was a **dream which** came true.*

The difference between *who* and *which* is like that between *he/she* and *it*. • 184(3b)

We can use *that* with any noun.

*Who was the **girl who/that** you came with?*

*It was a **dream which/that** came true.*

With people, *who* is more usual than *that*. With other things, both *which* and *that* are possible, but *which* is a little more formal.

NOTE

The forms are the same whether the noun is singular or plural

*I don't know the **girl/girls who** arrived late.*

2 Relative pronoun as subject

The pronoun can be the subject of the relative clause.

*The young man **who/that lives on the corner** rides a motor-bike.*

(**He lives** on the corner.)

*I've got a **computer program which/that does the job** for me.*

(**It does** the job for me.)

NOTE

In general, *who* is more usual than *that* as subject of the clause. But we often use *that* when we do not mean a specific person.

*Anyone **who/that** knows the facts must disagree with the official view.*

3 Relative pronoun as object

a The pronoun can be the object of a relative clause.

*It's the same actor **who/that we saw at the theatre**.*

(We **saw him** at the theatre.)

*You can get back the tax **which/that you've paid**.*

(You've **paid** it.)

We often leave out the relative pronoun. • (5)

*It's the same actor **we saw at the theatre**.*

NOTE

Who and *that* are both possible as the object. But we normally use *that* rather than *which* for something not specific.

We can supply you with everything (that) you need.

- b When *who* is the object, we can use *whom* instead.

*It's the same actor **who/whom** we saw at the theatre.*

*A man **who/whom** Neil knew was standing at the bar.*

Whom is formal and rather old-fashioned. In everyday speech we use *who*, or we leave out the pronoun. • (5)

4 Prepositions in relative clauses

- a The relative pronoun can be the object of a preposition.

*I'll introduce you to the man **who/that** I share a flat **with**.*

(I share a flat **with** him.)

*Is this the magazine **which/that** you were talking **about** just now?*

(You were talking **about it** just now.)

In informal English the preposition comes in the same place as in a main clause (*share a flat **with**, talking **about***).

We often leave out the relative pronoun. • (5)

*I'll introduce you to the man **I share a flat with**.*

NOTE

In this pattern *whom* is possible but less usual.

*I'll introduce you to the man **who/whom** I share a flat with.*

- b In more formal English we can put the preposition before *whom* or *which*.

*The person **with whom** Mr Fletcher shared the flat had not paid his rent.*

*The topic **in which** Michael is most interested is scientific theory.*

We cannot leave out *whom* or *which* here, and we cannot use *who* or *that*.

5 Leaving out relative pronouns

We can leave out the pronoun when it is not the subject of the relative clause.

Clauses without pronouns are very common in informal English.

*The woman **Gary met** knows your sister.*

*The parcel **I posted on Monday** still hasn't got there.*

*That man **Angela was sitting next to** never said a word.*

*He certainly could not have committed the crime **he was accused of**.*

But we cannot leave out the pronoun when it is the subject.

*That man **who was sitting next to Angela** never said a word.*

Sometimes we can use a participle without a relative pronoun or an auxiliary.

- 276

*That man **sitting next to Angela** never said a word.*

NOTE

We usually leave out the object after a pronoun, a quantifier or a superlative.

*I don't think there's **anyone I can really trust**.*

***All you ever get** in this newspaper is sex.*

*This is the **worst summer I can remember**.*

We can also use *that* there.

6 Overview: *who*, *whom*, *which* and *that*

	People	Things
Subject	<i>the man who was talking</i> <i>the man that was talking</i>	<i>the music which was playing</i> <i>the music that was playing</i>
Object of verb	<i>the man who we met</i> <i>the man that we met</i> <i>the man we met</i> <i>the man whom we met</i>	<i>the music which we heard</i> <i>the music that we heard</i> <i>the music we heard</i>
Object of preposition	<i>the man who we talked to</i> <i>the man that we talked to</i> <i>the man we talked to</i> <i>the man whom we talked to</i> <i>the man to whom we talked</i>	<i>the music which we listened to</i> <i>the music that we listened to</i> <i>the music we listened to</i> <i>the music to which we listened</i>

274 Relative clauses with commas

- 1 An adding clause (or 'non-identifying clause') adds extra information. This news item contains a sentence with an adding clause.
- A bank robber escaped from prison last week, after climbing aboard a helicopter that had been hijacked by an armed accomplice, in Brittany. Claude Riviere, **who was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in 1987**, leapt into the helicopter while on an exercise period.*
(from *Early Times*)

The clause adds extra information that the reader may not know. But if we leave out the adding clause, the sentence still makes sense.

There are often adding clauses in informative texts. They are rather formal and typical of a written style.

For the difference between identifying and adding clauses, • 272(5).

- 2 We separate the adding clause from the main clause, usually with commas. We can also use dashes or brackets.
- Einstein, **who failed his university entrance exam**, discovered relativity.*
*The new manager is nicer than the old one - **whom the staff disliked**.*
*The cat (**whose name was Molly**) was sitting on the window-sill.*
*The drugs, **which were hidden in bars of chocolate**, have a street value of £20 million.*

In an adding clause we use *who*, *whom*, *whose* or *which* but not *that*. And we cannot leave out the pronoun from an adding clause.

- 3 A preposition can go before the pronoun, or it can stay in the same place as in a main clause.
- Tim's hobby is photography, **on which** he spends most of his spare cash.*
*Tim's hobby is photography, **which** he spends most of his spare cash **on**.*
It is more informal to leave the preposition at the end.

- 4 We can use a quantifier + *of whom/of which* to express a whole or part quantity.
*The police received a number of bomb warnings, **all of which** turned out to be false alarms. (All of them turned out to be false alarms.)*
*In the chair lift were two people, **one of whom** was slightly injured.*
*There are dozens of TV channels, **some of which** operate 24 hours a day.*
- 5 We use the same patterns in connective clauses to say what happened next.
*He presented the flowers to Susan, **who burst into tears.***
*Mike dropped a box of eggs, **all of which broke.***

275 Whose

- 1 *Whose* has a possessive meaning.
The people whose cars were damaged complained to the police.
 (Their cars were damaged.)
Tania is someone whose courage I admire.
The friend whose dog I'm looking after is in Australia.
Madame Tussaud, whose waxworks are a popular attraction, died in 1850.
 But NOT *someone whose the courage I admire*
- 2 *Whose* usually relates to a person, but it can relate to other things, especially a country or organization.
I wouldn't fly with an airline whose safety record is so poor.
 (Its safety record is so poor.)
The others were playing a game whose rules I couldn't understand.
- NOTE
 Instead of *whose* relating to a thing, we can use this pattern with *of which*.
*The others were playing a game **the rules of which** I couldn't understand.*
*We are introducing a new system, **the aim of which** is to reduce costs.*
- 3 *Whose* + noun can be the object of a preposition.
*The President, **in whose** private life the newspapers are so interested, has nothing to hide.*
*Phyllis is the woman **whose** cottage we once stayed at.*

276 Participle relative clauses

1 Active participles

- a We can use an active participle in a relative clause without a pronoun or an auxiliary.
*Those people **taking** photos over there come from Sweden.*
 (= those people **who are taking** photos)
*The official took no notice of the telephone **ringing** on his desk.*
 (= the telephone **which was ringing** on his desk)
*To Robin, **sunbathing** on the beach, all his problems seemed far away.*
 The participle can refer to the present (**are taking**) or the past (**was ringing**).
 For this pattern with *there + be*, • 50(3).
***There was** a telephone **ringing** somewhere.*

- b An active participle can also refer to a state.
*All the equipment **belonging** to the club is insured.*
 (= all the equipment **which belongs** to the club)
*Fans **wanting** to buy tickets started queuing early.*
 It can also report people's words.
*They've put up a sign **warning** of the danger.*
- c We can sometimes use the active participle for a repeated action.
*People **travelling** into London every day are used to the hold-ups.*
 (= people **who travel** into London every day)
 But the pattern is less usual for a single complete action.
*The gang **who stole** the jewels got away.*
 NOT *The gang stealing the jewels got away.*

2 Passive participles

We can use a passive participle in a relative clause without a pronoun or an auxiliary.

*Applications **sent** in after 23rd March will not be considered.*
 (= applications **which are sent** in)
*Stones **thrown** at the train by vandals smashed two windows.*
 (= stones **which were thrown** at the train)
*Police are trying to identify a body **recovered** from the river.*
 (= a body **which has been recovered** from the river)
*The first British TV commercial, **broadcast** in 1955, was for toothpaste.*

NOTE

We can also use a continuous form of the participle.
*Industrial training is the subject **being discussed** in Parliament this afternoon.*

3 Word order with participles

We can sometimes put a participle before a noun.

*a **ringing** telephone*

But we cannot normally put a whole relative clause before the noun. • 137

NOT *the on his desk ringing telephone*

277 Infinitive relative clauses

Look at this pattern with an adjective and a to-infinitive.

*Which was the **first** country **to win** the World Cup at rugby?*
 (= the first country **which won** the World Cup)

*The **last** person **to leave** will have to turn out the lights.*
 (= the last person **who** leaves)

*Maxicorp were the **only** company **to reply** to my letter.*

*William Pitt was the **youngest** person **to become** Prime Minister.*

We can use a to-infinitive after an ordinal number (*first, second* etc), after *next* and *last*, after *only*, and after superlative adjectives (*youngest*).

NOTE

a We can also use a passive to-infinitive.

*The first British monarch **to be filmed** was Queen Victoria.*

b For *I've got some **letters to write***, • 124(2).

278 Which relating to a clause

Which can relate to a whole clause, not just to a noun.

*The team has lost all its matches, **which** doesn't surprise me.*

(= **The fact that** the team has lost all its matches doesn't surprise me.)

*Anna and Matthew spent the whole time arguing, **which** annoyed Laura.*

*I get paid a bit more now, **which** means I can afford to run a car.*

In this pattern the relative clause with *which* is an adding clause. We normally put a comma before *which*. We cannot use *that* or *what* instead of *which* in this pattern.

279 Relative adverbs

- 1 There are relative adverbs *where*, *when* and *why*.

*The house **where** I used to live has been knocked down.*

*Do you remember the time **when** we all went to a night club?*

*The reason **why** I can't go is that I don't have time.*

We use *where* after nouns like *place*, *house*, *street*, *town*, *country*. We use *when* after nouns like *time*, *period*, *moment*, *day*, *summer*. We use *why* after *reason*.

NOTE

We can use *where* and *when* without a noun.

***Where** I used to live has been knocked down.*

*Do you remember **when** we all went to a night club?*

- 2 Instead of a clause with *where*, we can often use one with a preposition.

*The house (**that**) I used to live **in** has been knocked down.*

We can leave out *when* or *why*, or we can use *that* instead.

*Do you remember the time (**that**) we all went to a night club?*

*The reason (**that**) I can't go is that I don't have time.*

- 3 Clauses with *where* and *when* can be adding or connective clauses.

*We walked up to the top of the hill, **where** we got a marvellous view.*

*Can't we go next week, **when** I won't be so busy?*

We cannot leave out *where* or *when* here, and we cannot use *that*.

280 The relative pronoun *what*

We can use *what* in this pattern.

*We'd better write a list of **what** we need to pack.*

(= **the things that** we need to pack)

*I was going to buy a new coat, but I couldn't find **what** I wanted.*

(= **the thing that I** wanted)

But *what* cannot relate to a noun.

NOT *the coat what I wanted*

We can use *what* in indirect speech. • 269(3)

*I told you **what** we need to pack.*

We can also use *what* in a special pattern to emphasize a phrase. • 51 (4)

***What** we need to pack is just a few clothes.*

281 *Whoever, whatever and whichever*

Look at these examples.

Whoever *designed this building ought to be shot.*

(= **the person who** designed this building - no matter who it is)

*I'll spend my money on **whatever** I like.*

(= **the thing that I** like - no matter what it is)

Whichever *date we choose will be inconvenient for some of us.*

(= **the date that** we choose - no matter which it is)

We cannot use *who* in this pattern.

NOT *Who-designed this building ought to be shot.*

But we can use *what*. • 280

For *whoever* etc in another pattern, • 254.