

Relative Clause

A clause is a part of a sentence which can be either complete or incomplete. A clause that modifies nouns is referred to as **relative clause**. It is a type of dependent clause that describes, restricts or gives further information about the head noun with in the noun phrase. The relative clause is used to put two pieces of information (or sentences) about the same noun into one sentence. In relative clause structure, the **relative pronouns (RP)** are used to link the head noun and the modifying clause with the main clause. The relative pronouns are (*who, whom, which, that, and whose*). Relative clauses are essential to the clear understanding of the noun in the main clause.

NOTE: *A relative clause is always located immediately after the noun it modifies.*

Let us examine the following illustration to understand the natures of relative clause:

The woman is a billionaire. **She** lives next door. (*the woman & She* is the **head nouns**)
(*sentence one*) (*sentence two*)

The woman **who lives next door** is a billionaire.
(*who* is **RP**, *lives next door* is a **modifying clause**, *who lives next door* is a **relative clause**)

The woman **who is a billionaire** lives next door.
(*who* is a **RP**, *is a billionaire* is a **modifying clause**, *who is a billionaire* is a **relative clause**)

The relative pronoun which introduces the relative clause has different functions inside the relative clauses: they can function as a **subject**, the **object of a verb** and **preposition**, and **possessive** in the sentence. Here is a detail explanation with examples on the use or function of relative pronouns:

- The relative pronoun '**who**' is used as a **subject** of a relative clause for persons (human beings), '**which**' for things (*non-living and animals*) and '**that**' for both human and non-human:

E.g. I thanked the woman. **She** helped me.
I thanked the woman **who** helped me.
I thanked the woman **that** helped me.

The book is mine. **It** is on the table.
The book **which** is on the table is mine.
The book **that** is on the table is mine.

NOTE: the relative pronoun '**that**' is only used in **defining** relative clause.

- The relative pronoun '**who/whom**' is used as the **object of a verb** of a relative clause for persons (human beings), '**which**' for things (*non-living and animals*) and '**that**' for both human and non-human.

E.g. The man was Mr. Jones. I saw **him**.
The man **whom** I saw was Mr. Jones.
The man **that** I saw was Mr. Jones.
The man I saw was Mr. Jones.

The movie was very good. We saw **it** yesterday.
The movie **which** we saw yesterday was very good.
The movie **that** we saw yesterday was very good.
The movie we saw yesterday was very good.

NOTE: here, it is possible to omit the *relative pronoun* when it is used as the *object of a verb* in **defining** relative clauses. '**Which**' is less often used after indefinite pronouns like *all, any(thing), every(thing), few, little, many, much, none, no*, etc. instead we use '**that**' or omit the relative altogether, when it is the object of a verb.

➤ The relative pronoun '**whom**' is used as the **object of a preposition** of a relative clause for persons (human beings), '**which**' for things (*non-living and animals*) and '**that**' for both human and non-human.

E.g. She is the woman. I told you **about** her.
She is the woman **about whom** I told you.
She is the woman **whom** I told you **about**.
She is the woman **that** I told you **about**.
She is the woman I told you about.

The music was good. We listened **to** it yesterday.
The music **to which** we listened yesterday was good.
The music **which** we listened **to** yesterday was good.
The music **that** we listened to yesterday was good.
The music we listened to yesterday was good.

NOTE: here, in formal English, the preposition is placed before the relative pronoun which must be put in the form '**whom**' and '**which**'; in informal English it is more usual to move it to the end of the clause.

➤ The relative '**whose**' is the only possessive marker relative pronoun for both human and non-human:

E.g. I know the man. **His** bicycle was stolen.
I know the man **whose** bicycle was stolen.

The house is interesting. **Its** walls are made of glass.
The house **whose** walls are made of glass is interesting.

NOTE: A **relative adverb** such as '**where**', '**when**' and '**why**' are also used as the **object of a verb** of a relative clause (or an adjective clause) to modify a **place** (*city, country, room, house, etc.*), a noun of **time** (*year, day, time, century, etc.*), and for **reason**, respectively.

NOTE: relative clauses with **who, which, that** as a subject pronoun can be replaced with a participle to make the sentence shorter and easier to understand.

Defining and Non-defining relative clauses

Relative clauses may be defining or non-defining. A **defining** relative clause gives relevant information defining a general term or expression and makes the meaning of the sentence complete. A **non-defining** relative clause, on the other hand, merely gives additional information. As a matter of the fact, it is impossible to remove the **defining** relative clause from the sentence, whereas it is possible to remove the **non-defining** relative clause without a change in the meaning of the sentence, the sentence still makes sense or remains complete. In **non-defining** relative clause, comma (,) is always used before and after the **non-defining** relative clause to separate it from the main clause.

Activity 1:

Identify the relative clause in the following paragraph, and determine whether each relative pronoun refers to the subject or object of a sentence.

The man that I met yesterday has really annoying character. Every utterance that comes from his mouth has bad odor and offensive for every patient individual. I tried to stay with him for ten mints, and within these minutes he told me ten offensive stories which are highly terrifying. Particularly, his last story which was about his former manager who died of car coincident will never be erased from my mind. His girlfriend that he liked ten years back was surprisingly living with him irrespective this stinky behavior.

Activity 2:

Read the following paragraph thoroughly and identify the sentence that contains relative clauses. Then decide whether the relative clauses are restrictive or non-restrictive relative clauses.

Ethiopia is the homeland of people that speak different languages. Enhancing communication among these people has economic, social and cultural significances. Providing any document that contains languages of these people is the primary instrument to facilitate communication among these peoples. All professionals, whether they are second language teachers, translators, interpreters, learners, journalists, or editors should obtain materials that supply knowledge of these languages. It is obvious that these languages are widely used. Hence, to facilitate language learning, and strengthen the culture exchange among these languages, this communication among the speakers of the language will play significant role.

Activity 3

Join each pair of sentences using the relative pronoun in brackets.

- a. Mary is having a child. She lives two flats away from us. (who)
- b. Adama is a very cosmopolitan town. We've lived there for three years. (where)
- c. Sara is a very charming girl. Her brother is a friend of mine. (whose)
- d. Two years ago we bought a house. We got married then. (when)
- e. Our new car has broken down again. We bought the car only last month. (which)