

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns are used to link two sentences that have the same noun or pronoun in them. Relative pronouns form the beginning of a *relative clause*. In English there are five basic relative pronoun forms:

that = used when referring to either an animate or inanimate noun

who = used when referring to an animate noun

which = used when referring to an inanimate noun

whose = used as a possessive

elliptical relative pronoun = occurs when the relative pronoun is omitted

The noun in the introductory clause is called the *antecedent*. A relative pronoun replaces the noun in the second clause—the relative clause.

Let's look at how relative pronouns connect two sentences. If the same noun or pronoun is found in both sentences, the second one can be omitted and replaced by a relative pronoun. Then the two sentences are stated as one. Notice how the animate and inanimate nouns change to relative pronouns.

Two Sentences: He likes *the girl*. *The girl* comes from Alaska.

Relative Clause: He likes the girl *who comes from Alaska*. **OR** He likes the girl *that comes from Alaska*.

Two Sentences: I bought *the car*. *The car* needs repairs.

Relative Clause: I bought the car *that needs repairs*. **OR** I bought the car *which needs repairs*.

Nouns can be used as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, objects of prepositions, and possessives; so, too, can relative pronouns that replace them.

There are specific uses for *that*, *who*, and *which*; however, in casual speech the relative pronoun *that* can be substituted for *who* or *which* except when the relative pronoun shows possession. Look at these examples with inanimate nouns:

Use in a Sentence	Pairs of Sentences	Relative Clauses Formed
subject	I found the money. The <i>money</i> was lost.	I found the money that was lost. I found the money which was lost.
direct object	I found the money. Bree lost the <i>money</i> .	I found the money that Bree lost. I found the money which Bree lost.
indirect object	N/A	N/A
preposition	I found the money. They spoke <i>about the money</i> .	I found the money that they spoke about. I found the money about which they spoke.
possessive	I found the money. The color <i>of the money</i> is green.	I found the money the color of which is green.

It is possible to substitute *whose* for a prepositional phrase starting with *of* with inanimate objects:
I found the money whose color is green.

Now look at similar examples with animate nouns:

Use in a Sentence	Pairs of Sentences	Relative Clauses Formed
subject	I found the boy. The <i>boy</i> was lost.	I found the boy that was lost. I found the boy who was lost.
direct object	I found the boy. Kim met the <i>boy</i> .	I found the boy that Kim met. I found the boy whom Kim met.
indirect object	I found the boy. They gave the <i>boy</i> a gift.	I found the boy that they gave a gift to. I found the boy to whom they gave a gift.
preposition	I found the boy. They spoke <i>about the boy</i> .	I found the boy that they spoke about. I found the boy about whom they spoke.
possessive	I found the boy. The <i>boy's</i> father is a soldier.	I found the boy whose father is a soldier.

Careful! If *whom* or *which* is part of a prepositional phrase, the preposition can stand in front of *whom* or *which*, or it can stand at the end of the relative clause:

I like the man *for whom* I work.
I like the man *whom* I work for.

These are the books *about which* she spoke.
These are the books *which* she spoke *about*.

When the relative pronoun is *that*, the preposition always stands at the end of the relative clause: I

like the man *that* I work *for*.
These are the books *that* she spoke *about*.

When an indirect object noun is changed to a relative pronoun, the preposition *to* or *for* should be added to give the meaning of the original sentence. Examples:

Do you know the man? I gave the man ten dollars.
Do you know the man *to whom* I gave ten dollars?

Andre saw the girl. I bought the girl some flowers.
Andre saw the girl *that* I bought some flowers *for*.

If the relative pronoun is used as direct object or object of a preposition, it can be omitted. It is then called *elliptical*. If a preposition is involved, it must stand at the end of the relative clause.

Usage	Relative Pronoun Used	Elliptical Relative Pronoun
direct object	He's the man <i>that</i> I met in Canada.	He's the man I met in Canada.
preposition	Where's the car in which she was sitting?	Where's the car she was sitting in?

Note: You should be aware that in casual speech many English speakers regularly substitute *who* for *whom*.

There are two types of relative clauses: *restrictive clauses* and *nonrestrictive clauses*. Restrictive relative clauses contain information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence. If that information is omitted, the sentence cannot be understood as intended. The restrictive relative clause identifies the person or thing talked about in the other clause. Here are two examples:

The woman *who* stole the ring was soon arrested. (*who stole the ring* is essential information)
What's the make of the car *that* you bought? (*that you bought* is essential information)

Nonrestrictive relative clauses merely give additional information but do not define the person or thing talked about in the other clause. The relative pronoun *that* should not be used in nonrestrictive relative clauses. However, in casual speech there is often substitution between *that* and the relative pronouns *who* and *which*. Here are two examples of nonrestrictive clauses:

The mayor, *who* is out of town right now, will give a speech on Friday. (*who is out of town right now* is additional but nonessential information)
The play, *which* lasted over three hours, was given rave reviews. (*which lasted over three hours* is additional but nonessential information)

Compare used to separate a nonrestrictive relative clause from the other clause in the sentence.

exercise

14-2

Combine the following sentences by changing the second sentence to a relative clause. Use *that* as the relative pronoun.

1. I found the money. The money belonged to Jack.

2. She has a good memory. Her memory always serves her well.

3. This is the woman. I told you about the woman.

4. I have a document. The document proves my innocence.

5. They want to visit the country. Marsha comes from the country.

Follow the same directions. Use *who*, *whom*, or *whose* as the relative pronoun.

6. This is the doctor. The doctor saved my life.

7. Do you know the musician? I met the musician in Hawaii.

8. She likes the gentleman. I was telling her about the gentleman.

9. I visited the sisters. The sisters' father had recently died.

10. Jerod noticed the stranger. All the neighbors were staring at the stranger.

Follow the same directions. Use **which** as the relative pronoun.

11. Pablo threw away the picture. The boys had found the picture.

12. I live in the house. My grandfather was born in the house.

13. He bought a suit. The suit is navy blue.

14. Anna has a new hat. I like the new hat very much.

15. He wanted to paint the bench. A man was sitting on the bench.

EXERCISE**14-2**

Complete each sentence with any appropriate phrase.

1. This is the lady about whom _____
2. We visited a country that _____
3. I don't like the people whom _____
4. Where's the basket in which _____?
5. Peter laughed at the story that _____
6. My aunt met the writer whom _____ about.
7. Sammie spoke with the teacher whose _____
8. I met the manager whom _____ for.
9. She hates the blouse that _____
10. Tell me about the tourists whose _____

exercise

14-3

Rewrite each sentence, changing the relative clause to its elliptical form. Omit the relative pronoun.

EXAMPLE: She's the girl whom I met there.

She's the girl I met there.

1. He was in the city that I visited last year.

2. Did you finally meet the woman about whom I was telling you?

3. Ron sold the house that he was born in.

4. My father lost the checkbook that he kept his credit card in.

5. Did you find the ball that I threw over the fence?

6. That's the pretty girl for whom I wrote this poem.

7. I don't know the people whom he gave the flowers to.

8. The hat from which the magician pulled a white rabbit was empty.

9. She forgot the tickets that she had placed next to her briefcase.

10. They live in a tiny village, which we finally located on a map.
