GRAMMAR

11 Relative clauses

Explanations

Subject or object

- Subject or object

Relative clauses give extra information about a noun in the main clause. Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun *(who, which, that, whom, whose).* The relative pronoun can be the subject of the clause:

That's the woman ***who bought my car.***

The woman (subject) bought my car (object).

Or the object of the clause:

That's the car ***that I used to own.***

I (subject) used to own the car (object).

- Combining sentences

Note how sentences are combined.

Subject: *This is Jean. She bought my car.*
Jean is the person who bought my car.

She is not repeated, as the person is the subject.

Object: *That is Jean's car. I used to own it.*
That's the car that I used to own.

It is not repeated, as *the car* is the object.

Defining or non-defining

- Defining

Defining clauses give important information which tells us exactly what is being referred to.

That book ***which you lent me*** *is really good.*

This indicates which book we are talking about. Without the relative clause, it might be difficult to understand the meaning.

- Non-defining

Non-defining clauses add extra information. They are separated by commas in writing, and by a pause on either side (where the commas are) in speaking.

The book, ***which I hadn't read,*** *was still on the shelf.*

This gives extra information about the book. We could miss out the relative clause and the meaning would still be clear.

Omitting the relative pronoun

- Defining relative clauses

In a defining relative clause we can leave out the relative pronoun if it is the object of the clause.

That's ***the car (that) I used to own.***

We cannot miss out the relative pronoun if it is the subject of the clause.

That's the woman ***who bought my car.***

- Non-defining relative clauses

In a non-defining relative clause we cannot leave out the relative pronoun.

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Which, who and _that_

- *That* instead of *which*
  When we talk about things, *that* is often used instead of *which.* This is very common in speech.
  *Is this the house **that** you bought?*

- *That* instead of *who*
  When we talk about people, *that* can be used instead of *who.* This is less common, but we still do it, especially in speech.
  *Have you met the boy **that** Sue is going to marry?*

- *Which* in non-defining clauses
  That cannot be used to introduce a non-defining clause.
  *The hotel, **which** was a hundred years old, was very comfortable.*

- Prepositions
  That cannot be used after a preposition.
  *This is the car **(that/which)** I paid £2000 **for.*** (speech)
  *This is the car **for which** I paid £2000.* (formal)

Whom and _whose_

- *Whom* is the object form of *who.* It has to be used after prepositions. Its use is formal and quite rare.
  This is the person (who) I sold my car to. (speech)
  *This is the person **to whom I** sold my car.* (formal)

- *Whose* means *of whom,* and usually refers to people.
  This is Jack. His sister is staying with us.
  This is Jack, whose sister is staying with us.

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Practice

Underline any relative pronouns that can be left out in these sentences.

a) I think that my boss is the person who I admire most.
b) Harry, who was tired, went to bed very early.
c) We're taking the train that leaves at 6.00.
d) Have you seen the book that I left here on the desk?
e) The film which we liked most was the French one.
f) My radio, which isn't very old, has suddenly stopped working.
g) The clothes which you left behind are at the reception desk.
h) The couple who met me at the station took me out to dinner.
i) Last week I ran into an old friend who I hadn't seen for ages.
j) Don't cook the meat that I put in the freezer - it's for the dog.

2 Replace the relative pronouns in *italics* with *that,* where possible.

a) This is the magazine *which* I told you about.
.This is the magazine that I told you about......

b) John's flat, *which* is in the same block as mine, is much larger.

c) The girl *whose* bag I offered to carry turned out to be an old friend.

d) The policeman *who* arrested her had recognised her car.

e) I work with someone *who* knows you.

f) We don't sell goods *which* have been damaged.

g) Brighton, *which* is on the south coast, is a popular holiday resort.

h) I don't know anyone *whose* clothes would fit you.

i) There's a cafe near here *which* serves very good meals.

j) People *who* park outside get given parking tickets.

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3 Underline the most suitable word in each sentence.

a) My friend Jack, *that/who/ whose* parents live in Glasgow, invited me to spend Christmas in Scotland.
b) Here's the computer program *that/whom/whose* I told you about.
c) I don't believe the story *that/who/whom* she told us.
d) Peter comes from Witney, *that/who/which* is near Oxford.
e) This is the gun with *that/whom/which* the murder was committed.
f) Have you received the parcel *whom/whose/which* we sent you?
g) Is this the person *who/which/whose* you asked me about?
h) That's the girl *that/who/whose* brother sits next to me at school.
i) The meal, *that/which/whose* wasn't very tasty, was quite expensive.
j) We didn't enjoy the play *that/who/whose* we went to see.

4 Put a suitable relative pronoun in each space, or leave the space blank where possible.

a) My bike, ***which*** I had left at the gate, had disappeared.
b) The shoes ..... I bought were the ones ..... I tried on first.
c) The bag in ..... the robbers put the money was found later.
d) The medicine ..... the doctor gave me had no effect at all.
e) Peter, ... couldn't see the screen, decided to change his seat.
f) I really liked that tea ..... you made me this morning.
g) What was the name of your friend ..... tent we borrowed?
h) The flight ..... Joe was leaving on was cancelled.

5 Make one new sentence from each pair of sentences. Begin as shown, and use the word given in capitals.

a) Brenda is a friend. I went on holiday with her. WHO
Brenda is ***the friend who I went on holiday with.*** .....
b) This is Mr Smith. His son Bill plays in our team. WHOSE
This is Mr Smith .....
c) Her book was published last year. It became a best seller. WHICH
Her book .....
d) This is the bank. We borrowed the money from it. WHICH
This is the bank from .....
e) I told you about a person. She is at the door. WHO
The person .....
f) Jack's car had broken down. He had to take a bus. WHOSE
Jack, ...

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6 Make one sentence from each group of sentences, beginning as shown.

a) The hotel was full of guests. The hotel was miles from anywhere. The guests had gone there to admire the scenery.
The hotel, which ***was miles from anywhere, was full of guests*** . . . . . ***.who had gone there to admire the scenery***.....

b) I lent you a book. It was written by a friend of mine. She lives in France.
The book I.....

c) A woman's jewels were stolen. A police officer was staying in the same hotel. The woman was interviewed by him.
The woman whose.....

d) A goal was scored by a teenager. He had come on as substitute. This goal won the match.
The goal which.....

e) I was sitting next to a boy in the exam. He told me the answers.
The boy I.....

f) My wallet contained over £100. It was found in the street by a schoolboy. He returned it.
My wallet,.....

g) My friend Albert has decided to buy a motorbike. His car was stolen last week.
My friend Albert,.....

h) Carol is a vegetarian. I cooked a meal for her last week. She enjoyed it.
Carol,.....

7 Put one suitable word in each space, or leave the space blank where possible.

Murder At The Station by Lorraine Small. Episode 5. *Trouble on the 6.15.* The story so far: Jane Platt, (1)..... ***who*** ..... is travelling to London because of a mysterious letter, is the only person (2)..... witnesses a murder at Victoria Station. The detective to (3)..... she gives her statement then disappears. Jane goes to an office in Soho to answer the letter (4)..... she had received. There she discovers that her uncle Gordon, (5).....

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lives in South America, has sent her a small box (6)..... she is only to open if in trouble. Jane, (7)..... parents have never mentioned an Uncle Gordon, is suspicious of the box, (8)..... she gives to her friend Tony. They go to Scotland Yard and see Inspector Groves, (9)..... has not heard of the Victoria Station murder, (10)..... was not reported to the police. Jane gives Inspector Groves the murdered man's ticket (11)..... she found beside his body. Then Jane and Tony decide to go to Redhill, (12)..... was the town (13)..... the murdered man had come from. On the train they meet a man, (14)..... face is somehow familiar to Jane, (15)..... says he knows her Uncle Gordon...

8 These sentences are all grammatically possible, but not appropriate in speech. Rewrite each sentence so that it ends with the preposition in *italics*.

a) Margaret is the girl *with* whom I went on holiday.

b) The golf club is the only club *of* which I am a member.

c) That's the girl *about* whom we were talking.

d) It was a wonderful present, *for* which I was extremely grateful.

e) This is the school *to* which I used to go.

f) Is this the case *in* which we should put the wine glasses?

g) Can you move the chair *on* which you are sitting?

h) That's the shop *from* which I got my shoes.

i) Is that the person *next to* whom you usually sit?

j) This is Bill, *about* whom you have heard so much.

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9 Make one sentence from each group of sentences, beginning as shown.

a) I got on a train. I wanted to go to a station. The train didn't stop there.
The train I ***got on didn't stop at the station I wanted to go to.***.

b) I read a book. You recommended a book to me. This was the book.
The book I .....

c) The ship hit an iceberg and sank. Warning messages had been sent to it. The ship ignored these.
The ship, ...

d) The postman realised I was on holiday. You had sent me a parcel. The postman left it next door.
The postman, ...

e) I used to own a dog. People came to the door. The dog never barked at them.
The dog I .....

f) I bought my car from a woman. She lives in a house. You can see the house over there.
The woman I .....

g) We went to a beach on the first day of our holiday. It was covered in seaweed. This smelled a lot.
The beach we .....

h) My neighbours have three small children. The children make a lot of noise. My neighbours never apologise.
My neighbours, ...

i) I bought a new computer. It cost me a lot of money.
The new .....

Key points

1 Long sentences with relative clauses are more common in writing. In speech it is more usual to join shorter clauses with conjunctions.

The hotel, which was miles from anywhere, was full of guests. (writing)
The hotel was miles from anywhere. It was full of guests. (speech)
The hotel was miles from anywhere, and it was full of guests. (speech)

2 In speech, relative pronouns are usually left out when they are the object of the clause.

This is the hook I told you about.

3 In speech it is common to end relative clauses with a preposition.

That's the girl I live next door to.

→ SEE ALSO
Grammar 15: Consolidation 3

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