

9B Defining and non-defining relative clauses

► 09.07 Defining and non-defining relative clauses

Defining relative clauses define a noun or make it more specific. They tell us which particular thing or what kind of thing. In defining relative clauses, we can use *that*, *which*, or *who*:

*I love music **that/which makes people dance.***

*I hate books **that/which don't have happy endings.***

*My dad met the woman **who reads the news on TV** yesterday!*

Non-defining relative clauses often start with *which* or *who*. They give extra information about a noun, but they are not necessary for the sentence to make sense:

The DJ was playing hip-hop. (This sentence is complete.)

*The DJ was playing hip-hop, **which is my favorite kind of music.** (This relative clause adds more information.)*

My parents are from Honduras. (This sentence is complete.)

*My parents, **who came to the U.S. 20 years ago**, are from Honduras. (This relative clause adds more information.)*

In writing, we need a comma before and after a non-defining relative clause.

Don't use commas in defining relative clauses:

*We visited the market on a **Sunday, when they sell clothes and jewelry.***

*I met Lucy, **who was staying with relatives nearby**, for coffee.*

In both types of relative clause, we can use *who*, *which*, *whose*, *where*, and *when*.

Don't use *that* in a non-defining relative clause:

*Have you been to **that restaurant where you cook your own food at the table?***

*Did you meet **the girl whose father climbed Mt. Everest?***

After *where*, we need to add a new subject to the relative clause. Compare:

*That's the shop **that sells** dictionaries. (that is the subject of the relative clause)*

*That's the shop **where you can buy** dictionaries. (the relative clause has a new subject: you)*

Omitting relative pronouns

We can often leave out *who/which/that* or *when* from defining relative clauses:

*He likes the cheese **(which/that) I bought.** (I bought the cheese. cheese = object)*

Don't leave out the relative pronoun if it's the subject of the relative clause (*who*, *which*, or *that*):

*He likes the cheese **that** comes from Turkey. (The cheese comes from Turkey. cheese = subject)*

Never leave out the relative pronoun from a non-defining relative clause:

*This cheese, **which** Greg really likes, comes from Turkey.*

NOT *This cheese, **Greg really likes,** ...*

I think we should buy the chair you are sitting in.



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a Complete the sentences with a word from the box. Sometimes more than one answer is possible. You will use some words more than once. Which sentence is also correct without a relative pronoun?

that which who where when whose

- 1 I love people _____ can make me laugh.
- 2 I told Paula my secret, _____ she then told everyone!
- 3 The movie _____ I saw was really good.
- 4 Yesterday was the day _____ everything went wrong.
- 5 This album, _____ came out in 1967, has some great songs.
- 6 Mark is the person _____ father used to be a singer.
- 7 The store _____ I bought this T-shirt has closed now.
- 8 I met Sara, _____ husband I work with, yesterday.

b Rewrite the sentences, adding the information in parentheses as a non-defining relative clause. Use relative pronouns that refer to the underlined words.

- 1 Ariana Grande performed "No Tears Left to Cry." (She recorded it in 2018.)
Ariana Grande performed "No Tears Left to Cry," which she recorded in 2018.
- 2 "Auld Lang Syne" is sung around the world on New Year's Day. (It was written by the poet Robert Burns.)
We're going to Cuba. (Mambo music comes from there.)
- 3 The Glastonbury Festival also has theater, comedy, and circus performances. (It's most famous as a music festival.)
- 5 My favorite singer is Beyoncé. (Her album *Lemonade* was released in 2016.)
- 6 The best day of the festival is the last day. (There's a big fireworks display then.)

c Rewrite the sentences, adding the information in parentheses as a defining relative clause. Leave out *who*, *which*, or *that* if possible.

- 1 I like the tune. (You were singing it.)
I like the tune you were singing.
- 2 That's the DJ. (He was here two weeks ago.)
That's the DJ.
- 3 We need music. (It makes you want to dance.)
We need music.
- 4 That's the stage. (We're going to perform there.)
That's the stage.
- 5 I downloaded a new song. (You'll like it.)
I downloaded a new song.
- 6 What did you think of the music? (I chose it.)
What did you think of the music?
- 7 What's the name of your friend? (You borrowed his earbuds.)
What's the name of your friend?
- 8 The song changed my life. (It's playing on the radio.)
The song changed my life.

d Are the sentences below correct (✓) or incorrect (✗)? Sometimes both sentences in a pair are correct.

- 1 a I like music that makes me dance. ✓
b I like music makes me dance. ✗
- 2 a It's a drum that you play with your hands.
b It's a drum you play with your hands.
- 3 a My father, that is a dentist, looks after my teeth.
b My father, who is a dentist, looks after my teeth.
- 4 a This album, I bought last week, is really good.
b This album, which I bought last week, is really good.