Mastering Urban Descriptions: Combining Relative and Reflexive Pronouns

Navigating a modern city requires us to describe both the environment around us and our personal interactions within it. To do this with precision, we rely heavily on two essential grammatical tools: **relative pronouns** (*who*, *which*, *that*) and **reflexive pronouns** (*myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *ourselves*, *themselves*).

When combined, these pronouns allow us to connect ideas seamlessly while emphasizing personal agency, responsibility, or autonomy within the bustling urban landscape.

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1. Understanding the Tools

Relative Pronouns: Connecting the Elements of the City

Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses, which provide essential or extra information about a noun without starting a new sentence.

- **Who:** Used exclusively for **people**.
  - *Example:* The barista **who** makes my coffee every morning just won an award.
- **Which:** Used exclusively for **animals, objects, and abstract ideas**.
  - *Example:* The new subway line, **which** opened last week, has drastically reduced traffic.
- **That:** A versatile pronoun used for **people, animals, or objects** in defining (essential) clauses.
  - *Example:* The skyscraper **that** dominates the skyline is 100 stories tall.

Reflexive Pronouns: Reflecting Action and Adding Emphasis

Reflexive pronouns are used when the **subject and the object of a sentence are the exact same entity**, meaning the person or thing performs the action *to* or *for* themselves. They are also used as intensive pronouns to emphasize that an action was done **independently (without help)**.

- *Reflexive action:* The city **itself** seems to change every single day.
- *Intensive/Independent action:* Because the buses were stalled, I walked to the downtown gallery **myself**.

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2. Combining Them in Urban Narratives

When we describe city life, we often find ourselves identifying a specific person or object (using a relative pronoun) and immediately highlighting an independent action or state related to them (using a reflexive pronoun).

Scenario A: Describing Urban Residents (People)

Cities are defined by the individuals who keep them running. When describing them, **who** or **that** identifies the person, while the reflexive pronoun highlights what they did on their own.

- *Example:* "The street artist **who** painted the massive mural downtown did it all by **himself** in just two days."
- *Analysis: Who* connects the artist to the action of painting; *himself* emphasizes that he had no assistance.

Scenario B: Describing City Infrastructure (Objects & Spaces)

Urban landscapes are filled with automated systems, self-contained architecture, and dynamic environments. Here, we use **which** or **that** alongside **itself**.

- *Example:* "The eco-friendly smart building **that** was built next to the park manages its energy grid by **itself**."
- *Analysis: That* specifies which building is being discussed; *itself* highlights the automated, self-sustaining nature of the structure.

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3. Practical Practice: Matching Exercises

Test your understanding of relative and reflexive pronouns in an urban context with the exercises below.

Exercise 1: People in the City

Instructions: Match the sentence starter on the left with the correct urban conclusion on the right.

Sentence Starter	Conclusion
1. The honest commuter **who** found my lost wallet...	**A.** ...always books the architectural tours for **herself**.

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2. The local politicians **who** organized the rally...	**B.** ...handed it in to the station manager **himself**.
3. The architect **that** designed the new city hall...	**C.** ...cleaned up the entire public square **themselves** afterward.
4. The tourist **who** loves historical neighborhoods...	**D.** ...proudly presented the blueprints to the council **herself**.

Answer Key (Exercise 1)

- **1 – B:** The honest commuter **who** found my lost wallet handed it in to the station manager **himself**.
- **2 – C:** The local politicians **who** organized the rally cleaned up the entire public square **themselves** afterward.
- **3 – D:** The architect **that** designed the new city hall proudly presented the blueprints to the council **herself**.
- **4 – A:** The tourist **who** loves historical neighborhoods always books the architectural tours for **herself**.

Exercise 2: Objects and Infrastructure in the City

Instructions: Match the sentence starter on the left with the correct urban conclusion on the right.

Sentence Starter	Conclusion
1. The vintage bicycle **which** I bought at the flea market...	**A.** ...reboots **itself** every night at midnight to clear errors.
2. The digital transit kiosk **that** stands by the platform...	**B.** ...was a mechanical issue I managed to fix **myself**.
3. The historic theater **which** was scheduled for demolition...	**C.** ...proved to be an incredible challenge **itself**.
4. Navigating the complex maze of alleyways **that** look identical...	**D.** ...saved **itself** from destruction by drawing massive crowds.

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Answer Key (Exercise 2)

- **1 – B:** The vintage bicycle **which** I bought at the flea market was a mechanical issue I managed to fix **myself**.
- **2 – A:** The digital transit kiosk **that** stands by the platform reboots **itself** every night at midnight to clear errors.
- **3 – D:** The historic theater **which** was scheduled for demolition saved **itself** from destruction by drawing massive crowds.
- **4 – C:** Navigating the complex maze of alleyways **that** look identical proved to be an incredible challenge **itself**.

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