



# RELATIVE CLAUSES IN ENGLISH

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Subject: English Language - Lecture # 11

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# RELATIVE CLAUSES

- Relative clauses are non-essential parts of a sentence. They may add meaning, but if they are removed, the sentence will still function grammatically.
- There are two broad types of relative clauses in English. It is important to distinguish between them because it affects the choice of pronoun used to introduce the clause.

# DEFINING CLAUSES

- A **defining or identifying clause** tells us which specific person or thing we are talking about in a larger group of people or things.
- If a defining relative clause is removed, the meaning of the sentence changes significantly.
- A defining relative clause is not separated from the rest of the sentence by commas or parentheses.
- **The woman who visited me in the hospital** was very kind.
- **The umbrella that I bought last week** is already broken.
- **The man who stole my backpack** has been arrested.
- **The weather that we had this summer** was beautiful.

# NON-DEFINING CLAUSES

- A **non-defining or non-essential clause** gives us more information about the person or thing we are talking about.
- If a non-defining relative clause is removed from a sentence, we lose some detail, but the overall meaning of the sentence remains the same.
- Non-defining relative clauses are always set off from the rest of the sentence with commas or parentheses.

- The farmer, **whose name was Fred**, sold us 10 pounds of potatoes.
- Elephants, **which are the largest land mammals**, live in herds of 10 or more adults.
- The author, **who graduated from the same university I did**, gave a wonderful presentation.
- My mother, **who is 86**, lives in Paris.

## PREPOSITION PLACEMENT IN RELATIVE CLAUSES

- There are often prepositions in relative clauses, and a relative pronoun is the object of that preposition.
- In everyday English, the preposition is normally placed at the end of the relative clause and the pronoun may be included or omitted.
- In formal English, the preposition is placed before the relative pronoun, and in this case the pronoun cannot be omitted.

- In the examples below, the pronouns in parentheses can be omitted.

Everyday English	Formal English
Is that the man <b>(who) she arrived with?</b>	Is that the man <b>with whom she arrived?</b>
Does he know the girl <b>(that) John is talking to?</b>	Does he know the girl <b>to whom John is talking?</b>
The person <b>(who) he is negotiating with</b> is the Chairman of a large company.	The person <b>with whom he is negotiating</b> is the Chairman of a large company.
It is a club <b>(which) many important people belong to.</b>	It is a club <b>to which many important people belong.</b>
He liked the people <b>(that) he lived with.</b>	He liked the people <b>with whom he lived.</b>
The tree <b>(that) they had their picnic under</b> was the largest and oldest in the park.	The tree <b>under which they had their picnic</b> was the largest and oldest in the park.
It was the river <b>(that) the children preferred to swim in.</b>	It was the river <b>in which the children preferred to swim.</b>
The jungle <b>(that) the tribe lived in</b> was full of strange and unusual animals.	The jungle <b>in which the tribe lived</b> was full of strange and unusual animals.

# NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

- non-defining relative clauses tell us more about someone or something, but the information in these clauses does not help us to define what we are talking about.

for example the sentence: *Gorillas, which are large and originate in Africa, can sometimes be found in zoos.*

In this sentence we are talking about all gorillas, not just some of them. The information in the non-defining relative clause tells us something more about gorillas in general. It does not define a small group of gorillas or an individual gorilla.

If the non-defining relative clause were removed from the sentence, the sentence would still be grammatically correct and the meaning would not have changed, although we would have less detail.



- Non-defining relative clauses are composed of a relative pronoun, a verb, and optional other elements such as the subject or object of the verb. Commas or parentheses are always used to separate non-defining relative clauses from the rest of the sentence.
- John's mother, **who lives in Scotland**, has 6 grandchildren.
- My friend John, **who went to the same school as me**, has just written a best-selling novel.
- My grandmother, **who is dead now**, came from the North of England.
- We stopped at the museum, **which we had never visited before**.
- I've just come back from London, **where John lives..**
- Yesterday I met a woman named Susan, **whose husband works in London**.

# RELATIVE PRONOUNS

- The following relative pronouns are used in non-defining relative clauses. These relative pronouns appear at the start of the non-defining relative clause and refer to a noun that appears earlier in the sentence.

	Person	Thing	Place
Subject	who	which	
Object	who/whom	which	where
Possessive	whose		

## DIFFERENCES WITH DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

- In defining relative clauses, the pronouns who, whom, and which are often replaced by that in spoken English.
- In non-defining relative clauses, you cannot replace other pronouns with *that*.
- You also cannot leave out the relative pronoun in non-defining relative clauses, in the way you sometimes can in defining relative clauses. The pronoun is required, even when it is the object of the verb in the relative clause.
- Finally, non-defining relative clauses are always separated from the rest of the sentence by commas, unlike defining relative clauses, which have no punctuation.

- **He gave me the letter, which was in a blue envelope.** (non-defining clause: There was only one letter, it happened to be blue. You must use *which*)
- **He gave me the letter which/that was in a blue envelope.** (defining clause: There were several letters of different colors and he gave me the blue one. *Which* may be replaced by *that*. The commas are removed.)
- **He gave me the letter, which I read immediately.** (non-defining clause: There was only one letter. *which* is the object of *read*, but it still must be included in the sentence.)
- **Stratford-on-Avon, which many people have written about, is Shakespeare's birthplace.** (Any preposition that appears is normally placed at the end of the clause.)
- **Stratford-on-Avon, about which many people have written, is Shakespeare's birthplace.** (In formal written English, you can also put the preposition before the pronoun.)

## INTRODUCTORY EXPRESSIONS IN NON-DEFINING CLAUSES

- Non-defining clauses can be introduced by expressions like all of or many of followed by the relative pronoun.

	Person	Thing
all of, any of, some of, a few of, both of, each of, either of, half of, many of, most of, much of, none of, one of, two of, etc.	whom	which

- There were a lot of people at the party, **many of whom I had known for years.**
- There are 14 girls in my class, **a few of whom are my friends.**
- He was carrying his belongings, **many of which were broken.**
- He had thousands of books, **most of which he had read.**
- He picked up a handful of stones, **one of which was sharp.**

## USING "WHICH" TO REFER TO ANOTHER CLAUSE

- The relative pronoun which at the beginning of a non-defining relative clause can refer to all the information contained in the previous part of the sentence, rather than to just one word.
- Chris did really well in his exams, **which is quite a surprise.**
- My friends were all hiding in my apartment, **which isn't what I'd expected.**
- She's studying to become a doctor, **which is difficult.**

Thank you for your attention

