

Relative pronouns and relative clauses

Relative pronouns act as link words between two sentences.

The main relative pronouns are

Who – only used for people. E.g. *The woman who lives next door is a doctor.*

Which – for things and animals. *This is the book which I asked you to read.*

That – can be used for everything (people and things), but “that” cannot be used in non-defining relative clauses (see below).

Whose – indicates possession. *That’s the student whose bag was stolen.*

Where – is used for places

When – is used for time

There is an important difference between *defining* and *non-defining* relative clauses (a clause is part of a sentence with a noun and a verb).

Defining relative clauses

1/ Defining relative clauses give essential information. If you take them out of the sentence, it does not make much sense. For example,

The student who sits in the front row always answers questions.

Here “who sits in the front row” provides important information to the sentence. Just writing *The student always answers questions* is a bit meaningless.

It is often possible to omit *who*, *which* or *that*, if it is not the subject of the verb that follows.

E.g. *The phone (which, that) I bought yesterday is already broken.*

This is the book (which, that) I asked you to read.

Non-defining relative clauses

These provide extra information and can be excluded from the sentence. These clauses are put in commas.

My sister, who lives in Germany, came to visit Paris last month.

London, which is the capital of the UK, is a huge city.

(“That” cannot be used in non-defining relative clauses.)

This is a good video and webpage which explains relative clauses:

<https://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/relative-clauses.html>

Online exercises with relative pronouns

1/ https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises/pronouns/relative_pronouns.htm

2/ <https://www.anglaisfacile.com/exercices/exercice-anglais-2/exercice-anglais-11065.php>

3/ <https://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/relative-clauses/exercises?04>