


# Grammar & Usage

## Unit 21 Relative clauses




**21.1** A **relative clause** is the part of a sentence that tells us which person or thing is being talked about, or gives more information about a person or a thing.





Which of those girls  
is Tom's sister?

The one **who is wearing  
glasses** (is Tom's sister).



Is that the novel  
**that you borrowed  
from Tom**?

No, this is the one (**that/which**)  
**I bought yesterday.**

There are two kinds of relative clauses: **defining** and **non-defining**. Both kinds can be introduced by relative pronouns (*who, whom, which, that, etc.*).



**21.2 Defining clauses** tell us who or what we are talking about.  
They begin with *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which* or *that*.



- about people (i.e. *who* is being talked about)

relative pronouns	subject/object of the relative clause	examples
<i>who, that</i>	subject	<p>The old couple <b>who/that</b> live next door seldom have visitors.</p> <p><b>Compare:</b> The old couple seldom have visitors. <b>They</b> live next door.</p>



relative pronouns	subject/ object of the relative clause	examples
<p><i>whom, that, who</i></p> <p><b>Teacher's notes</b></p>	object	<p>The boy <b>whom/that/who</b> we met just now is Susan's brother.</p> <p><b>Compare:</b> The boy is Susan's brother. We met <b>him</b> just now.</p>



relative pronouns	subject/ object of the relative clause	examples
<i>whose</i> + <i>noun</i>	subject, possessive relative pronoun — replacing <i>his/her/its</i>	<p>I have a friend <b>whose</b> <i>brother</i> is a famous designer.</p> <p><b>Compare:</b> I have a friend. <b>His</b> <i>brother</i> is a famous designer.</p>





- 1 As the object of the clause, the relative pronoun can be omitted.

The boy (**who/whom/that**) we met just now is Susan's brother.

- 2 *Who* can be substituted for *whom* as the object of the relative clause.

The boy **who** we met just now is Susan's brother.

- 3 *That* can be substituted for *who* in informal conversation.

The boy **that** we met just now is Susan's brother.

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- about things/places (i.e. *what* is being talked about)

relative pronouns	subject/object of the relative clause	examples
<p><i>which, that</i></p> <p><b>Teacher's notes</b></p>	<p>subject and object</p>	<p>Did you see the book <b>which/that</b> was on the table this morning? (<i>which/that</i> is the subject of the relative clause)</p> <p><b>Compare:</b> Did you see the book? <b>It</b> was on the table this morning.</p>



relative pronouns	subject/ object of the relative clause	examples
<i>which, that</i>	subject and object	<p>Is this the book <b>which/that</b> you bought last week? (<i>which/that</i> is the object of the relative clause)</p> <p><b>Compare:</b> Is this the book? You bought <b>it</b> last week.</p>






As the object of the relative clause, the relative pronoun can be omitted.

Is this the book you bought last week?



## Grammar Practice

-  Complete the sentences below using **who**, **which**, **that** or **whose**. If there is more than one possible answer, write **ONE** answer only. The first one has been done for you.



## 21.3 Non-defining clauses begin with:

- *who, whom, which, whose*

They do not tell us which person or thing is being described. We use them to give extra information about a person or thing that has already been specified.



relative pronouns	about	subject/object	examples
<i>who</i>	people	can be used as a subject	I'm grateful to Paul, <b>who</b> <i>helped</i> us when we moved house. ( <i>formal</i> )
<i>whom</i>	people	can be used as an object	It was not easy to part with Jodie, <b>whom</b> <i>she had known for years</i> . ( <i>formal</i> )



relative pronouns	about	subject/object	examples
<i>which</i>	things	can be used as a subject or an object	<p>We visited the Great Wall, <b>which was magnificent.</b> (<i>formal</i>) (<i>which</i> is the subject of the relative clause)</p> <p>I gave her my telephone number, <b>which she wrote down in her notebook.</b> (<i>formal</i>) (<i>which</i> is the object of the relative clause)</p>



relative pronouns	about	examples
<i>whose</i>	possession - people/things	Paul, <b>whose</b> <i>sister is my classmate</i> , is leaving for Australia tomorrow.



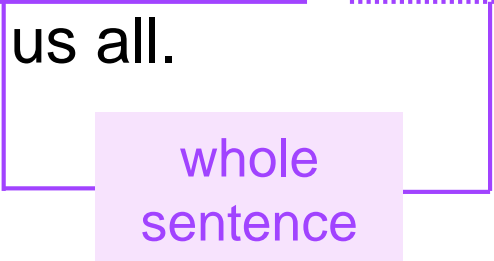


- *which* (referring to a whole sentence)

We can use *which* to refer to the whole sentence, rather than only the noun before it.

Susan failed the test, **which** surprised us all.

**Compare:** Susan failed the test. This/That  
surprised us all.



whole sentence





## Reminder

In non-defining clauses *who*, *whom* and *which* cannot be replaced by *that*, and they cannot be omitted, whether they are the subject or object of the clause.

In conversation, we often use *who* instead of *whom*.

It wasn't easy to break up with Paul, **who/whom** *she had been dating for years*.

