

Relative clauses (1) (The girl who I was talking about.)

A A **relative clause** gives more information about someone or something referred to in a main clause. Some relative clauses (**defining relative clauses**) are used to specify *which* person or thing we mean, or which *type* of person or thing we mean:

- *The couple who live next to us* have sixteen grandchildren.
- Andrew stopped *the police car that was driving past*.

Notice that we don't put a comma between the noun and a defining relative clause. Relative clauses begin with a **relative pronoun**: a *wh*-word (**who**, **which**, etc.) or **that**. However, sometimes we omit the *wh*-word / **that** and use a **zero relative pronoun** (see B below):

- We went to a *restaurant (which/that) Jane had recommended to us*.

We prefer to put a relative clause immediately after or as close as possible to the noun it adds information to:

- The building for sale was **the house which had a slate roof** and was by the stream. (rather than The building for sale was the house by the stream which had a slate roof.)

B When we use a defining relative clause, the relative pronoun can be the subject or the object of the clause. In the following sentences the relative pronoun is the *subject*. Notice that the verb follows the relative pronoun:

- Rockall is an uninhabited *island which/that lies* north west of mainland Scotland.
- We have a *friend who/that plays* the piano.

In the following sentences the relative pronoun is the *object*. Notice that there is a noun (or pronoun) between the relative pronoun and the verb in the relative clause. In this case, we can use a **zero relative pronoun**:

- He showed me the *rocks (which/that) he had brought back* from Australia.
- That's *the man (who/that) I met* at Allison's party.

Adding information about things

Relative pronoun	<i>which</i>	<i>that</i>	zero relative pronoun
subject	✓	✓	✗
object	✓	✓	✓

Adding information about people

Relative pronoun	<i>who</i>	<i>that</i>	zero relative pronoun
subject	✓	✓	✗
object	✓	✓	✓

We can also use **whom** instead of **who** as object, although **whom** is very formal:

- She's an actress **whom** most people think is at the peak of her career.

We use **that** as *subject* after **something** and **anything**; words such as **all**, **little**, **much**, and **none** used as nouns; and **superlatives**. (**Which** is also used as subject after **something** and **anything**, but less commonly.) We use **that** or **zero relative pronoun** as *object* after these:

- These walls are *all that remain* of the city. (*not ...all which remain...*)
- She's one of *the kindest people (that) I know*. (*not ...who I know.*)
- Is there *anything (that) I can do to help?* (*rather than ...anything which I can do...*)

C You can't add a subject or object to the relative clause in addition to the relative pronoun:

- The man **who** gave me the book was the librarian. (*not The man who he gave me...*)
- Notice also that adding a pronoun to the main clause in addition to the relative clause is unnecessary, although it is found in speech:
 - A friend of mine **who** is a solicitor helped me. (*or, in speech A friend of mine who is a solicitor – she helped me.*)

EXERCISES

70.1 Complete the sentences with the correct or most appropriate relative pronoun. Give alternatives if possible. (Use – to indicate zero relative pronoun.) (B)

- 1 The thought of going home to his family was all kept him happy while he was working abroad.
- 2 She was probably the hardest working student I've ever taught.
- 3 Lewis, the man Johnson beat in the last World Championships, has broken the world record.
- 4 Lighting bonfires at this time of the year is a tradition goes back to the 17th century.
- 5 Dorothy said something I couldn't hear clearly.
- 6 There was little we could do to help her.
- 7 The Royal Floridian is an express train runs between New York and Miami.
- 8 The machine I have to use in my job cost over a million pounds.
- 9 The diary Ron kept when he was in prison was sold for \$50, 000.
- 10 I have a friend ran in the New York Marathon last year.
- 11 We were told that we would be held responsible for anything went wrong.
- 12 He's probably the best golfer I've played against.

70.2 Write the information in brackets as a relative clause in an appropriate place in the sentence. Give alternative relative pronouns if possible. (Use – to indicate zero relative pronoun.) (A & B)

- 1 Jane has now sold the old car. (she was given it by her parents) Jane has now sold the old car which/that/– she was given by her parents.
- 2 The house is for sale. (it is next to ours)
- 3 Most of the forests have now been destroyed. (they once covered Britain)
- 4 He took me to see the old farmhouse. (he is rebuilding it).
- 5 There have been complaints about the noise from people. (they live in the flats)
- 6 A doctor has had to retire through ill health. (we know him)

70.3 Correct these sentences or put a ✓. (A–C)

- 1 My brother who is in the army he came to see us.
- 2 A small amount of money was all which was taken in the robbery.
- 3 The path was made by walkers who crossed the mountains each summer.



- 4 The difficulties of living near the volcano are well understood by the people farm the land there.
- 5 The danger of driving is something which worries me each time I travel.
- 6 The park which I usually go running in is across the road.
- 7 I bought the present that I gave him it for Christmas in Japan.
- 8 The person whom we selected to represent us on the committee has had to resign due to illness.
- 9 It's one of the most interesting books I've read this year.