

Relative pronouns

Reminder → J1-J5

A

Defining and non-defining relative clauses begin with a *relative pronoun*, which can sometimes be omitted:

- We went to a beach (**which / that**) Ali had recommended to us.

Here the relative pronoun refers to 'a beach', and the subject of the relative clause is 'Ali'. Compare:

- I know a man **who / that** ran in the New York Marathon last year.

where the relative pronoun refers to 'a man', and the subject of the relative clause is also 'a man'. In this case, the relative pronoun can't be omitted.

B

Relative pronouns are used to add information in *defining relative clauses* as follows:

adding information about things

subject	which	that	
object	which	that	no relative pronoun

adding information about people

subject	who	that		
object	who	that	no relative pronoun	whom

- ☆ When we add information about things, we can use **that** (or **no relative pronoun**) as object in conversation and **which** in more formal contexts:
 - Decorating's a job (**that**) I hate. (*rather than* '... which ...' in this informal context)
- ☆ When we add information about people, we generally prefer **that** (or **no relative pronoun**) as object in informal contexts rather than **who** or **whom**:
 - He's the man (**that**) I met at Aisha's party (*rather than* ... who / whom I met ...)
- ☆ **whom** is very formal and rarely used in spoken English:
 - The boy **whom** Elena had shouted at smiled. (*less formally that, no relative pronoun or who*)
- ☆ We use **that** as subject after: **something** and **anything**; words such as **all**, **little**, **much**, and **none** used as pronouns; and noun phrases that include superlatives. **Which** is also used as subject after **something** and **anything**, but less commonly:
 - These walls are *all that remain* of the city. (*not* ... which remain of the city.)
- ☆ Note that we can use **that** (or **no relative pronoun**) as object after **something / anything**; **all**, etc.; and noun phrases with superlatives. For example:
 - She's one of *the kindest people (that)* I know. (*not* ... one of the kindest people who I know.)

C

Relative pronouns are used to add information in *non-defining relative clauses* as follows:

adding information about things

subject	which	that
object	which	that

adding information about people

subject	who	
object	who	whom

- ☆ Note that we must include a relative pronoun in a non-defining relative clause.
- ☆ We can use **who** or **whom** as object, although **whom** is very formal:
 - Professor Johnson, **who(m)** I have long admired, is to visit the university next week.
- ☆ When we add information about things, we can use **which** as subject or object. **That** is sometimes used instead of **which**, but some people think this is incorrect:
 - The Master's course, **which** I took in 2001, is no longer taught. (*or* ... **that** I took ...)

Exercises

53.1 Put brackets around the italicised relative pronoun if it can be omitted. **A**

- 1 We talked about the party *which* Natalia wants to organise for my birthday.
- 2 To get to Maxim's house, take the main road *that* bypasses the village.
- 3 The paintings *which* Mr Flowers has in his house are worth around £100,000.
- 4 Let's go through the main points *that* he made in his lecture.
- 5 He received a low mark for his essay, *which* was only one page long.
- 6 Mrs Yang, *who* is 42, has three children.
- 7 Dev is a friend *who* we stayed with in Australia.
- 8 In the shop window there's a sign *that* says '10% off'.
- 9 The couple *who* live next to us have 16 grandchildren.
- 10 There was little *that* we could do to help her.

53.2 Rewrite these sentences including the information in brackets as relative clauses (defining or non-defining). Give alternative relative pronouns if possible. (Use (-) to indicate 'no relative pronoun'.) **B & C**

- 1 Oliver said something. (I couldn't hear it clearly) Oliver said something that / which / - I couldn't hear clearly.
- 2 Eva's father has just come back from a skiing holiday. (he is over 80)
.....
- 3 The problems faced by the company are being resolved. (I'll look at these in detail in a moment)
.....
- 4 She was greatly influenced by her father. (she adored him)
.....
- 5 He pointed to the stairs. (they led down to the cellar)
.....
- 6 These drugs have been withdrawn from sale. (they are used to treat stomach ulcers)
.....
- 7 The singer had to cancel her concert. (she was recovering from flu)
.....
- 8 The minister talked about the plans for tax reform. (he will reveal them next month)
.....
- 9 I have two older sisters. (I love them very much)
.....

53.3 If necessary, correct or make improvements to these sentences. If they are already correct, write ✓. **A-C**

- 1 There's something which I should tell you.
- 2 The doctor whom Ingrid went to see was very thorough.
- 3 Yesterday was the hottest day I can remember.
- 4 There isn't much can go wrong with the machine.
- 5 Thieves whom stole paintings from Notford art gallery have been arrested in Paris.
- 6 It may be the most important decision which you will ever take.
- 7 The boy took the photograph was paid £100.
- 8 I heard many different accents in the room, but none which I could identify as Polish.
- 9 He just said anything which came into his head.
- 10 There's this dream which I have every night about falling downstairs.

