

Help Centres – English Support



Relative Clauses: Defining & Non-Defining

1. What is a Relative Clause?

- Relative clauses modify nouns or pronouns in sentence and give us information about them
- They are dependent (subordinate) clauses that begin with either a pronoun or an adverb
- **Relative Pronouns:** *who, which, that, whom, whose*
- **Relative Adverbs:** *where, when, why*

2. How do we use them?

Defining Clause: These relative clauses are necessary to give more details about the noun or pronoun. They make it more specific.

Example:

- The woman ***who lives next door*** is from Mexico.
- The neighbourhood ***where I grew up*** has changed a lot.

(In these sentences the relative clause is giving us essential information about the nouns. It is necessary to understand who we are talking about, so we don't use commas around it.)

- **Which/That:** In defining clauses, we can use which or that as the relative pronoun for people or things, but '*that*' is more commonly used in these clauses

Example:

- Dogs ***that/which have a lot of fur*** need to be brushed daily.
- The computer ***that/which I borrowed*** isn't working.

Non- Defining Clause: These relative clauses give extra information about a noun or pronoun that is already specific. These are not essential clauses, but they provide more details for the noun or pronoun.

Example:

- Marcia, ***who lives next door***, is from Mexico.
- San Francisco, ***where I grew up***, has changed a lot.

(Marcia and San Francisco are specific nouns, so the information in the relative clause is extra or non-essential information that gives us more details about them.)

- **Which:** In non-defining clauses, we can only use which as the relative pronoun for things.

Example:

- My friend's dog, **which has a lot of fur**, needs to be brushed daily.
- John's laptop, **which I borrowed**, isn't working.

Practice:

A) *Combine the two sentences into a single sentence with a non-defining relative clause.*

1. Ottawa is very cold in winter. Canada's federal government meets in Ottawa.
2. My new phone has some problems. I bought my new phone last week.
3. Rachael went to Mexico. Her brother is a famous singer.
4. Dr. Lee is taking a semester off. Dr. Lee teaches Russian.
5. Christmas day can be a bit boring. Christmas day is the quietest time of year.

B) *Combine the two sentences into a single sentence with a defining relative clause*

1. The campsite is well maintained. We stayed there last summer.
2. The man has moved away. His dog once bit me.
3. The doctor opened a practice this year. She lives across the street.
4. Where is the book? It has a green cover.
5. We are holding a meeting. The reason is to meet each other.