



A **relative clause** is a clause that either identifies people or objects, or provides more descriptive information about the word it is modifying. Some common **relative pronouns** include *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *that*, and *which*; choosing which relative pronoun to use depends on three factors:

1. Whether the relative pronoun is the subject or object of the clause or shows possession.

The student, who won the scholarship, is on the honor roll.

The advisor, to whom I was assigned, is very supportive and encouraging.

The artist, whose work is on display, is very talented.

2. Whether the relative pronoun's modifier is human (person) or non-human (object).

The person who was sitting at the table left a mess.

The car that is parked outside is being towed.

The book, which is in its third edition, has been fully revised.

3. Whether the relative clause is restrictive or non-restrictive.

- A. A restrictive clause is **necessary** to understand the full meaning of a sentence because it identifies the noun that it modifies.

← Restrictive clause, information necessary

Pens that have ball-point tips write more easily than fountain pens.

Consider: "Pens write more easily than fountain pens." Without this information the **meaning is unclear**, making "that have ball-point tips" a **restrictive clause**.

Restrictive clauses are not separated by commas and use *that* when modifying non-human nouns.

- B. A non-restrictive clause is not necessary (to understand the sentence) because it provides additional, extra information about a noun that has already been identified.

← Non-restrictive clause, extra information

That pen, which I bought for your birthday, was expensive.

Consider: "That pen was expensive." Without this information the **meaning** of the sentence **is still the same**, making "which I bought for your birthday" a **non-restrictive clause**.

Non-restrictive clauses are separated by commas and use *which* when modifying non-human nouns.



		1. Function of Relative Pronoun		
2. Modifier		Subject	Object	Possessive
Human		<i>who</i>	<i>whom</i>	<i>whose</i>
Non-human		<i>that or which</i>	<i>that</i> (restrictive) or <i>which</i> (non-restrictive) (see 3)	<i>of which</i> (formal) or <i>whose</i> (informal)

Practice

Fill in the correct relative pronoun and separate restrictive clauses with commas, when necessary.

- The haunted house _____ is around the corner is old and scary.
- The man _____ is across the street is my neighbor.
- Doctor Kelly _____ has been in practice for years is our family physician.
- That cat _____ collar is missing belongs to me.
- The birds _____ are outside my window are singing loudly.
- The student _____ backpack is in the corner left the room to get some water.
- The book _____ I ordered online is called *The New Earth*.
- The keys _____ unlock the front door are missing.
- The side of the hill _____ faces the sun is green.

Find out more. Search the web for **relative clauses**, **relative pronouns**, **restrictive (identifying or defining) relative clauses**, and **non-restrictive relative clauses**.

Answer Key:

- The haunted house, which is around the corner, is old and scary.
- The man who is across the street is my neighbor.
- Doctor Kelly, who has been in practice for years, is our family physician.
- That cat, whose collar is missing, belongs to me.
- The birds that are outside my window are singing loudly.
- The student, whose backpack is in the corner, left the room to get some water.
- The book that I ordered online is called *The New Earth*.
- The keys, which unlock the front door, are missing.
- The side of the hill that faces the sun is green.