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.

   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.

   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.

Adapted from:
*Keys for Writers*, 2008 and *Practical English Usage*, 2005
Relative Pronouns & Clauses

1. Function of Relative Pronoun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifier</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
<td>whose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-human</td>
<td><em>that or which</em></td>
<td><em>that (restrictive) or which (non-restrictive)</em></td>
<td><em>of which</em> (formal) <em>whose</em> (informal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Modifier Subject Object Possessive

Practice

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

1. The haunted house _________ is around the corner is old and scary.

2. The man _________ is across the street is my neighbor.

3. Doctor Kelly _________ has been in practice for years is our family physician.

4. That cat _________ collar is missing belongs to me.

5. The birds _________ are outside my window are singing loudly.

6. The student _________ backpack is in the corner left the room to get some water.

7. The book _________ I ordered online is called The New Earth.

8. The keys _________ unlock the front door are missing.

9. 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:
1. The haunted house, which is around the corner, is old and scary.
2. The man who is across the street is my neighbor.
3. Doctor Kelly, who has been in practice for years, is our family physician.
4. That cat, whose collar is missing, belongs to me.
5. The birds that are outside my window are singing loudly.
6. The student, whose backpack is in the corner, left the room to get some water.
7. The book that I ordered online is called The New Earth.
8. The keys, which unlock the front door, are missing.
9. The side of the hill that faces the sun is green.

Adapted from: Keys for Writers, 2008 and Practical English Usage, 2005