

Relative clauses



What are Relative Clauses?

Relative clauses give extra information about a noun in a sentence. They often begin with relative pronouns like who, which, that, whose, or relative adverbs like where and when.

✓ Defining Relative Clauses

These give essential information. If you remove the clause, the sentence loses its meaning.

⚠ No commas are used.

Relative Pronoun	Refers to	Example
who	people	The officer who arrested the thief is retiring.
which	things	The tool which was used in the burglary was found.
that	people/things (informal)	The witness that called the police was very brave.
whose	possession	The man whose car was stolen reported it immediately.

✓ Non-defining Relative Clauses

These add extra, non-essential information. You must use commas.

⚠ "That" is not used in non-defining clauses.

Relative Pronoun	Refers to	Example
who	people	The judge, who was clearly angry, interrupted the lawyer.
whom	People when referring to the object	The lawyer, whom the suspect hired last week, has demanded a retrial.
which	things	The report, which was very detailed, helped solve the case.
whose	possession	The victim, whose phone was missing, contacted the police.

Relative adverbs	Refers to	Example
where	place	The window where burglars entered was broken.
when	time	Last week was when the attack happened.
why	reason	Nobody knows the reason why she murdered him.

Common mistakes!

- ✗ Don't use commas in defining clauses.
- ✗ Don't use "that" in non-defining clauses.
- ✗ Avoid double subjects ' The man who came *he* was my lawyer.