

UNIT 8

8.1 Introduction to relative clauses

It is important to understand the difference between two kinds of relative clauses.

- 1 Defining relative (DR) clauses qualify a noun, and tell us exactly which person or thing is being referred to.

*She likes people **who are good fun to be with**.*

*Politicians **who tell lies** are odious.*

*A corkscrew is a thing **you use to open a bottle of wine**.*

She likes people on its own doesn't mean very much; we need to know which people she likes.

who tell lies tells us exactly which politicians are odious. Without it, the speaker is saying that all politicians are odious.

A corkscrew is a thing doesn't make sense on its own.

- 2 Non-defining relative (NDR) clauses add secondary information to a sentence, almost as an afterthought.

*My friend Andrew, **who is Scottish**, plays the bagpipes.*

*Politicians, **who tell lies**, are odious.*

*My favourite building is Durham Cathedral, **which took over 200 years to build**.*

My friend Andrew is clearly defined. We don't need to know which Andrew is being discussed. The clause *who is Scottish* gives us extra information about him.

The clause *who tell lies* suggests that all politicians tell lies. It isn't necessary to identify only those that deceive – they all do!

My favourite building is clearly defined. The following clause simply tells us something extra.

- 3 DR clauses are much more common in the spoken language, and NDR clauses are more common in the written language. In the spoken language, we can avoid a NDR clause.

My friend Andrew plays the bagpipes. He's Scottish, by the way.

- 4 When we speak, there is no pause before or after a DR clause, and no commas when we write. With NDR clauses, there are commas before and after, and pauses when we speak.

I like the things you say to me. (No commas, no pauses)

My aunt (pause), who has been a widow for 20 years (pause), loves travelling.

Defining relative clauses

- 1 Notice how we can leave out the relative pronoun if it is the object of the relative clause. This is very common.

Pronoun left out

Did you like the present () I gave you?

Who was that man () you were talking to?

The thing () I like about Dave is his sense of humour.

- 2 We cannot leave out the pronoun if it is the subject of the clause.

Pronoun not left out

*I met a man **who** works in advertising.*

*I'll lend you the book **that** changed my life.*

*The thing **that** helped me most was knowing I wasn't alone.*

- 3 Here are the possible pronouns. The words in brackets are possible, but not as common. () means 'nothing'.

	Person	Thing
Subject	who (that)	that (which)
Object	() (that)	() (that)

Notes

- *That* is preferred to *which* after superlatives, and words such as *all*, *every(thing)*, *some(thing)*, *any(thing)*, and *only*.

*That's the **funniest** film **that** was ever made.*

*All **that's** left is a few slices of ham.*

*Give me **something that'll** take away the pain.*

*He's good at **any sport that** is played with a ball.*

*The **only thing that'll** help you is rest.*

- *That* is also preferred after *it is ...*
- *It is a film **that** will be very popular.*
- Prepositions usually come at the end of the relative clause.

*Come and meet the people I work **with**.*

*This is the book I was telling you **about**.*

*She's a friend I can always rely **on**.*

Non-defining relative clauses

- 1 Relative pronouns cannot be left out of NDR clauses.

Relative pronoun as subject

*Paul Jennings, **who** has written several books, addressed the meeting.*

*His last book, **which** received a lot of praise, has been a great success.*

Relative pronoun as object

*Paul Jennings, **who** I knew at university, addressed the meeting.*

*His last book, **which** I couldn't understand at all, has been a great success.*

- 2 Look at the possible pronouns. *Whom* is possible, but not as common.

	Person	Thing
Subject	... , who ... ,	... , which ... ,
Object	... , who (whom) ... ,	... , which ... ,

Note

Prepositions can come at the end of the clause.

*He talked about theories of market forces, **which I'd** never even heard of.*

In a more formal written style, prepositions come before the pronoun.
*The privatization of railways, **to which** the present government is committed, is not universally popular.*

Which

Which can be used in NDR clauses to refer to the whole of the sentence before.

*She arrived on time, **which** amazed everybody.*

*He gambled away all his money, **which** I thought was ridiculous.*

*The coffee machine isn't working, **which** means we can't have any coffee.*

Whose

Whose can be used in both DR clauses and NDR clauses.

*That's the woman **whose** son was killed recently.*

*My parents, **whose only interest is gardening**, never go away on holiday.*

What

What is used in DR clauses to mean *the thing that*.

*Has she told you **what's** worrying her?*

***What** I need to know is where we're meeting.*

Why, when, where

- 1 *Why* can be used in DR clauses to mean *the reason why*.

*I don't know **why** we're arguing.*

- 2 *When* and *where* can be used in DR clauses and NDR clauses.

*Tell me **when** you expect to arrive.*

*The hotel **where** we stayed was excellent.*

*We go walking on Mondays, **when** the rest of the world is working.*

*He works in Oxford, **where** my sister lives.*

▶ 8.2 Participles

- 1 When present participles (-ing) are used like adjectives or adverbs, they are active in meaning.

*Modern art is **interesting**.*

*Pour **boiling** water onto the pasta.*

*She sat in the corner **crying**.*

- 2 When past participles (usually -ed) are used like adjectives or adverbs, they are passive in meaning.

*I'm **interested** in modern art.*

*Look at that **broken** doll.*

*He sat in his chair, **filled** with horror at what he had just seen.*

- 3 Participles after a noun define and identify in the same way as relative clauses.

*I met a woman **riding** a donkey. (= who was riding ...)*

*The car **stolen** in the night was later found abandoned. (= that was stolen ...)*

- 4 Participles can be used as adverbs. They can describe:

- two actions happening at the same time.

*She sat by the fire **reading** a book.*

- two actions that happen one after another.

***Opening** his case, he took out a gun.*

If it is important to show that the first action is completed before the second action begins, we use the perfect participle.

***Having finished** lunch, we set off on our journey.*

***Having had** a shower, she got dressed.*

- two actions that happen one because of another.

***Being** mean, he never bought anyone a Christmas present.*

***Not knowing** what to do, I waited patiently.*

- 5 Many verbs are followed by -ing forms.

*I **spent** the holiday **reading**.*

*Don't **waste** time **thinking** about the past.*

*Let's **go** **swimming**.*

*He **keeps on** **asking** me to go out with him.*