**relative pronouns, who, whom, whose, which, that**

**Pronouns** are words that take the place of a noun. **Relative pronouns** are used at the beginning of an adjective clause (a dependent clause that modifies a noun). The three most common relative pronouns are *who*, *which* and *that*.

***Who*** has two other forms, the object form ***whom*** and the possessive form ***whose***.

* *Who* and *whom* are used mainly for people. However, these pronouns can also be used to refer to animals that are mentioned by name and seen as persons.
  + The musician who wrote this song is Canadian.
  + The witnesses whom I interviewed gave conflicting evidence.
  + The vacuum scared our cat Scooter, who was sleeping on the rug.
* Whose can be used for people, animals or things:
  + The man whose daughter won the tournament is a tennis coach.
  + A dog whose owner lets it run loose may cause an accident.
  + The tree whose branches shade my kitchen window is an oak.

***Which*** is used for animals in general or things.

* Bridget visited the park with her dog, which likes to chase squirrels.
* Jason bought the top hybrid car, which will help him save on gas.

***That*** can be used for people, animals or things.

* The musician that won the award is Canadian.
* The car that Jason bought runs on electricity and gas.
* The dog that is chasing the squirrels belongs to Bridget.

***That* vs. *which***

*That* and *which* are used to start two different types of adjective clauses, called essential and non-essential clauses.

**Essential clauses**

***That*** always indicates a clause that is **essential** to the meaning of the sentence because it defines or identifies the noun it refers to. An essential clause does not take a comma before it.

* Lisa wore the shoes that she bought in Italy.  
  (What shoes? The ones that she bought in Italy. The clause identifies the shoes.)

***Which*** may also be used to introduce an essential clause.

* Lisa wore the shoes which she bought in Italy.

**Non-essential clauses**

***Which*** is used in a non-essential clause modifying an animal or a thing. A non-essential clause is one that gives secondary, **non-essential** information about a noun that is already fully identified. A non-essential clause is separated from its noun with a comma:

* Lisa wore her best leather shoes, which she bought in Italy.  
  (What shoes? Her best leather ones. The clause is not needed to identify the shoes, so it is non-essential.)

***Who* vs. *whom***

The relative pronoun *who* may cause confusion because it has both a subject form (*who*) and an object form (*whom*). The key to choosing between these forms is to see what the pronoun is doing **in its own clause**.

Use ***who*** if the pronoun is the **subject of the verb** in the dependent clause.

* The people **who** just boarded the plane are in a rock band.  
  (The pronoun is subject of the verb *boarded*.)

Use ***whom*** if the pronoun is the **object of the verb** in the dependent clause.

* The cousin **whom** we met at the family reunion is coming to visit.  
  (The pronounisobject of the verb*met*.)

Use ***whom*** if the pronoun is the **object of a preposition** in the dependent clause.

* The agent with **whom** I spoke was able to help me.  
  (The pronoun is object of the preposition *with*.)

**Tips**

If in doubt, reword the clause to see which personal pronoun you need: *he/him, she/her*, etc. Then replace that pronoun with *who* or *whom*, using the following rule:

* Use WHO for *he, she, they, we*:
  + The people **who** just boarded the plane are in a rock band.  
    (Reword: **They** just boarded the plane—so use *who*.)
* Use WHOM for *him, her, them, us:*
  + The cousin **whom** we met at the family reunion is coming to visit.  
    (Reword: We met **him** at the family reunion—so use *whom*.)
  + The agent with **whom** I spoke was able to help me.  
    (Reword: I spoke with **her**—so use whom.)