**Relative clauses**

**Meaning and use**

Relative clauses are used to give additional information about a noun, such as a person, place or thing. **Relative pronouns** introduce a relative clause. They include **who**for people, **that**and **which**for things, **when**for time, and **whose**to show possession.

 Relative clauses belong to one of two categories: **defining**relative clauses and **non-defining** relative clauses.

1. **Defining**relative clauses add **essential**information to a sentence.

*The woman****who found my wallet****handed it in to reception.*

*The student****whose dog has run away****has gone to look for it.*

*I remember the day****when we first met****.*

*These are the earrings****that my mother gave me****.*

These clauses give **essential** information about the subject of the sentence. They define the**person**, **time**or **thing**that we are talking about. If we remove the clause, the sentence does not make sense.

2. **Non-defining** relative clauses add **extra**information to a noun or noun phrase.

*My friend’s birthday,****which was last weekend****, was great fun.*

*My current girlfriend,****who I love very much****, calls me every night.*

This extra information is **not essential**. If we remove the clause, the sentence still makes sense. This type of clause is more common in written English.

**Form**

**Defining relative clauses** are made with **noun + relative pronoun + rest of clause**.

*A kangaroo is****an animal which lives in Australia****.*

***The man who came for lunch****was my uncle.*

*Winter is****a time when it sometimes snows.***

**Non-defining relative clauses** are made in the same way. An important difference, however, between both types of clause, is the use of **punctuation**. With **non-defining**relative clauses, we separate the clause with **commas**. We cannot use **that**in this type of clause.

*My favourite food,****which used to be Italian,****is now Japanese.*

*Rachel,****who we met yesterday,****lives in this neighbourhood.*

*My car,****which I bought seven years ago,****needs replacing.*

*This shirt,****which I bought last weekend,****cost £50.*

*My best friend,****who I met at university,****is coming for dinner.*

**Take note: replacing the relative pronoun**

In **informal**communication, relative pronouns, such as **who**and **when**, are commonly replaced with **that**in defining relative clauses.

*The woman****that****called last night was very polite.*

*Do you remember the time****that****you first met?*

**Take note: leaving out the relative pronoun**

When using defining relative clauses in **informal**speech and writing, the relative pronoun can be **left out completely** if it refers to the **object**of the relative clause.

*This is the shirt****that****I bought.*

*This is the shirt I bought.*

*The girl****who****I like isn’t here yet.*

*The girl I like isn’t here yet.*

In **non-defining** relative clauses, the relative pronoun**cannot be left out**.

**Take note: spoken English**

The relative pronoun **who** is used when referring to people. However, in **formal** written and spoken English, if the pronoun refers to the **object** of the clause, we use **whom** instead.

My German teacher, **whom** I really admired, retired last year.

The woman **whom** I called this morning was my secretary.