

Defining relative clauses

1. Use

A defining relative clause defines a word (usually a noun) more closely. Without the defining relative clause it would be unclear who or what is meant.

*The boy **who is talking to Mr Smart** is new here.*
*Don't forget the DVD **that I lent you last week**.*

(In English there is no comma between the main clause and the relative clause.)

2. The relative pronoun as subject

If the pronoun relates to a **person**, we use *who* or (in spoken English) *that*. *Who* is more frequent.

*The man **who/that** phoned earlier is here.*
*I need someone **who/that** can help me with my work.*

With **things** and **animals** we use *which* or *that*. *Which* is more typical of formal English.

*Take the videos **that/which** are on the table.*
*She wants a pet **that/which** is cuddly.*

Note: After *all*, *everything*, *something*, *anything*, *nothing* we use *that*.

*Is that **all that** has to be done?*
*There is **nothing that** can help you.*

3. The relative pronoun as object / contact clauses

With **people**, we use *who* or *that*.

*The people **who/that** we met on holiday were nice.*

With **things** and **animals** we use *which* or (more often) *that*.

*The books **that/which** I've read are all by Jane Austen.*

When the relative pronoun is the object, we often leave it out.

The books I've read are all by Jane Austen.

4. Contact clauses with prepositions

The man (who/that) I was talking to is our teacher.
..., mit dem ich gesprochen habe, ...

The bike (which/that) you're pointing at is my sister's.
..., auf das du gerade zeigst, ...

5. The relative pronoun *whose*

Whose (= dessen, deren) expresses possession. *Whose* is always followed by a noun (singular or plural)

Look, that's the boy whose brother drives him to school in a Ferrari.

The first three people whose names are drawn win a free holiday.

A factory whose workers often go on strike must have serious production problems.

A company whose products are advertised on TV can expect to increase its profits.

Note: Don't confuse *whose* with *who's*!

Is that the man whose house was burgled last week?

The man who's waiting over there is my brother's best friend.