A relative clause begins with a relative pronoun—such as who, which, or that—followed by a verb and often by other information:

Relative clause = **relative pronoun** + **verb** + **other information**

For example,

- who + leaped + off the roof of my high school
- which + will destroy + thousands of homes
- that + barks + every night at 2:03 a.m.

**Relative Pronouns & Relative Clauses:**

Like other pronouns, **relative pronouns** have antecedents (the noun to which the pronoun refers). A **relative clause** describes the noun it follows.

1. **Who, whose, and whom** refer to human or, depending on the speaker, to some animal antecedents.

   (Subject/antecedent) **relative clause**
   David, *who leaped off the roof of my high school*, is now a professional skydiver.

2. **That** refers to groups of people (i.e. that band, that U.S. Senator, etc.), objects, events, animals, and sometimes people.

   S   V   (antecedent) **relative clause**
   I loathed the *Chihuahua that barks every night at 2:03 a.m.*

3. **Which** refers to specific objects, events, and animals but never people.

   S   V   (antecedent) **relative clause**
   New Orleans is preparing for *Hurricane Katrina, which will destroy thousands of homes*.

**Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses:**

There are two types of relative clauses: **restrictive relative clauses** and **nonrestrictive relative clauses**.

**Restrictive relative clauses** give the reader **essential information** needed to clarify who, what, or which noun is being referred to.

**Ex.** The author **who wrote A Farewell to Arms** received the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In the sentence above, if the **relative clause**, who wrote A Farewell to Arms, is removed, what remains is a complete sentence.

**Ex.** The author received the Nobel Prize in Literature.
Sentence Variety VI: Relative Clauses

Because the author isn’t identified, the reader might ask, “Who is the author?” Therefore, the relative clause is needed to identify the author. This makes it a restrictive relative clause.

Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses give the reader extra information about the noun that is not necessarily needed to identify it. Essentially, a nonrestrictive relative clause describes a noun.

Ex. Val, who moved to Idaho, now has an unlisted phone number.

In the sentence above, if the relative clause, who moved to Idaho, is removed, what remains is also a complete sentence.

Ex. Val now has an unlisted phone number.

The relative clause just adds extra information and is not essential to help identify who has an unlisted number. Therefore, it a nonrestrictive relative clause and should be separated from the rest of the independent clause with commas.

Practice

1. Circle the relative pronoun and underline the relative clause in these sentences.
   a. Laura, who made peanut butter cookies and three pitchers of ice-cold lemonade, sold them along San Bernardo during the parade.
   b. Catch the bus that goes down Del Mar and out to TAMIU.

2. Add a nonrestrictive relative clause to this sentence. Remember: a nonrestrictive clause contains nonessential info and is set off with commas; the relative clause should provide nonessential information about either of the two nouns in this sentence—Mrs. Arthur or her garden.

   Mrs. Arthur spent the morning in her garden.

3. Add a restrictive relative clause to this sentence. Remember: a restrictive clause contains essential info and is not set off with commas; the relative clause should identify the politician or neighborhood.

   The politician campaigned in the neighborhood.

4. Write a sentence using the relative pronoun “which.”

5. Write a sentence with a nonrestrictive relative clause using the relative pronoun “who.”

6. Write a sentence with a restrictive relative clause using the relative pronoun “that.”

Work Consulted

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