**THE ADJECTIVE (RELATIVE) CLAUSE**

There are three main types of dependent clauses: relative, noun, and adverbial.

**A relative clause** is an adjective clause that describes the noun. It is important to remember that a relative clause is not a complete thought! They are used in sentences to further describe the noun.

You can identify a relative clause by looking for three main components:

1. It will contain a subject and a verb.
2. It will begin with a relative pronoun or relative adverb. These would include 'who,' 'whom,' 'whose,' 'that,' and 'which' for a pronoun and 'when,' 'where,' or 'why' for an adverb. Looking for these signal words can help you identify this type of clause!
3. The relative clause will function as an adjective, answering questions about the noun, such as: 'Which one?' 'What kind?' 'How many?'

There are two ways to write a relative clause. First, you would have a relative pronoun, subject, and then verb. For example, 'when we go to the movies.' 'When' is the relative pronoun, 'we' is the subject, and 'go' is the verb.

Second, you would have a relative pronoun as a subject followed by the verb. For example, 'who walked out of the store.' In this example, 'who' is our subject and 'walked' is the verb. Or for another example, 'that swarmed us.' In this example, 'that' is the subject and 'swarmed' is the verb

**Who(m)**is used when an antecedent is a person.  
**That**is used to refer to either a person or thing.  
**Which**is used to refer to anything except a person.

(It is noteworthy that whom is not used much in spoken English.)

Remember that relative clauses cannot stand alone. These are incomplete thoughts and should be joined to an independent clause to become a complete sentence. In our earlier examples, we could write, 'When we go to the movies, we always buy popcorn.' The phrase 'we always buy popcorn' is an independent clause that completes the phrase. Or in another example, 'who walked out of the store,' we could write, 'Those are the two children who walked out of the store.' In the final example, 'that swarmed us,' we could write, 'We killed the bees that swarmed us.'

* I met my friends yesterday. The friend, who had curly hair, was very intelligent.
* The race was the one that I lost.

**Restrictive Relative Clauses and Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses**

Restrictive relative clauses are sometimes called defining relative clauses or identifying relative clauses. Similarly, non-restrictive relative clauses are called non-defining or non-identifying relative clauses and is preceded by a pause in speech or a comma in writing.

**Restrictive Clause Example:**

The programmer who develops web applications will make a large profit.

**Non-Restrictive Clause Example:**

The programmer, who develops web applications, will make a large profit.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Human** | **Nonhuman** |
| **RESTRICTIVE** |  |  |
| **Subject** | who, that | which |
| **Object** | who, whom, that | which |
| **After** [**preposition**](https://examplanning.com/types-of-prepositions-with-examples-list/) | whom | which |
| **Possessive** | whose, of whom | whose, of which |
| **NON-RESTRICTIVE** |  |  |
| which, that | who | which |
| which, that | who, whom | which |
| which | whom | which |
| whose, of which | whose, of whom | whose, of which |

When writing a relative clause, it is important to punctuate them correctly. Remember that these clauses describe a noun. Sometimes these descriptions are necessary to the meaning of the sentence, and other times they are just an extra detail.

An essential relative clause contains information that is needed in the sentence. Because the information is needed to understand the sentence, we would not include any commas. For example, 'The children who eat their dinner can have candy.' The phrase, 'who eat their dinner,' is essential to the sentence because it is only these children who can have candy. If we did not have this phrase, then it would read like all the children can have candy, which is not true. This would change the noun or subject of our sentence. It will also change the meaning of the sentence itself.

A nonessential relative clause is not necessary for the meaning of the sentence. Because of this, it does require commas. The information is helpful, but the meaning of the sentence and the noun would still be clear without the clause. For example, 'Aiden and his brother Julian, who is the oldest of the two, enjoy spending time together.' The clause, 'who is the oldest of the two,' adds extra details, but the sentence would still be clear without it. We would still know that it was Aiden and Julian who were brothers and that they enjoy spending time together. We would still have the same subject of the sentence without the relative clause, and the meaning of the sentence stays the same.