
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

Defining relative clauses



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Finn.

Alice

And me, Alice. Hello.

Finn

Today we're talking about **defining relative clauses**.

Alice

That's right: defining relative clauses. We'll explain what they are...

Finn

We'll look at how they work...

Alice

We'll hear lots of examples...

Finn

And we'll have a quiz to practice what we've learned. So: on with the show. Let's start by looking at what relative clauses are, and how we make them.

Alice

Yes. Defining relative clauses give information about a noun in a sentence or question. They define – or, give more information about – the thing that we are talking about. Here's Catherine with our first example:

Catherine

Have you seen the shoes that I bought today?

Finn

The defining relative clause is the phrase **that I bought today** – and it tells us **which** shoes Catherine is talking about.

Alice

That's right. Catherine probably has several pairs of shoes: adding the phrase **that I bought today** tells us exactly which shoes she means.

Finn

So: let's have a closer look at the grammar of relative clauses. We start with a noun and then we add a relative pronoun, such as **who** or **that**, plus a verb phrase. The relative pronoun **who** is for **people**... Catherine.

Catherine

The man **who** owns this restaurant is my best friend.

Alice

So the defining relative clause **who owns this restaurant** tells us exactly which man is Catherine's best friend.

Finn

The pronoun **which** is for things, and we use **that** for both people and things. Here's an example with **which**.

Catherine

Spring is the season **which** I enjoy the most.

Finn

Ahh – me too! So, to give more information about a thing – the season – we add the relative pronoun – **which**, plus the verb phrase **I enjoy the most**.

Alice

Here's another example.

Catherine

That woman is the doctor **who** saw me yesterday.

Finn

This time, the pronoun **who** refers to the doctor. And the doctor is the subject of the verb saw – the doctor saw Catherine.

Alice

Right. **Who** refers to the **subject** of the verb: The doctor who saw me yesterday. Now this next example is slightly different: listen carefully.

Catherine

That woman is the doctor **who I saw** yesterday.

Alice

Again, **who** refers to the doctor. But this time, the doctor is the **object** of the verb **saw** - Catherine saw the doctor.

Finn

So the rule is: when the pronoun refers to the **subject**, it's:

Catherine

She's the doctor **who saw me** yesterday.

Alice

And when the pronoun refers to the **object**, it's:

Catherine

She's the doctor **who I saw** yesterday.

Alice

Now some people like to use **whom** instead of **who** in object relative clauses:

Catherine

...the doctor **whom I saw**....

Alice

And that's fine. **Whom** is correct here.

Finn

Although **who** is probably more common in spoken English these days.

IDENT

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

Alice

And we're talking about defining relative clauses.

Finn

And now it's quiz time. They're all about Harry Potter, these questions. So if you like the film it may be easier for you...I'll say some key words and you have to make them into a sentence with a defining relative clause. Here's the first one. **Robbie Coltrane - actor - play - Hagrid.**

Alice

Robbie Coltrane is the actor **who** played Hagrid... in Harry Potter.

Finn

And another one: **Hogwarts - school - Harry Potter - go.**

Alice

Hogwarts is the school **that** Harry Potter went to.

Finn

Very good. Last one: **Hermione - marry - Ron Weasley.**

Alice

Ooh. Hermione is the girl **who** married Ron Weasley.

Finn

Or as an object clause it's:

Alice

Hermione is the girl **who** Ron Weasley married.

Finn

Well done if you got those right. Now before we finish, there's just time to mention that, in everyday English, it's fine to leave out the pronoun completely when the relative pronoun is the **object** of the relative clause.

Alice

For example: **Hermione is the girl who Ron Weasley married** becomes:

Finn

Hermione is the girl Ron Weasley married.

Alice

Ahhh. Don't you think she should have married Harry?

Finn

Well, I really think it's Hermione's choice, Alice.

Alice

Fair enough.

Finn

So, that's the end of our brief look at defining relative clauses. They begin with a pronoun and go after the noun that you want to define.

Alice

Yes. There's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

Both

Bye.