



Relative Clauses

Relative clauses are a type of complex sentence in which the clause is subordinate to a main clause. They are introduced by a relative pronoun that refers back to an antecedent (a noun, a pronoun, or even an entire clause).

The choice of the appropriate relative pronoun depends primarily on the nature of the antecedent (human or non-human, animate or inanimate), the type of relative clause (defining or non-defining), and the grammatical function of the pronoun within the clause (subject, direct object, indirect object, or complement of a noun).

Defining relative clauses, which are written without commas, provide essential information that is necessary for the interpretation of the sentence. Non-defining relative clauses, written with commas, supply additional information, or a simple comment that is not required for the basic meaning.

It is important to note that the relative pronouns **that** and **Ø** (zero relative) must **never** be used in non-defining relative clauses.

Defining	Antecedents	Non- Defining
People who (that) know they are infected are 50 per cent less likely to transmit HIV than those who do not. (T1§2)	Human animate subject	Aids –Sufferers, who have to take many drugs every day, are desperately waiting for vaccine.
The device detects antibodies which (that) are produced in response to HIV. (T1§5)	Inanimate subject	The test, which is called OraQuick. Advance, is already being used in clinics in the US.(T1§2)
The anaesthetist Ø that/whom/who) I consulted for my operation asked me if I had any allergies.	Human animate object	An estimated 40 million people live with HIV throughout the world, many of whom will die from AIDS-related complications in the coming decade.
The trials which(that/ Ø) scientists at the Pasteur institute have conducted recently are very promising.	Inanimate object	The proposed warnings about possible adverse effects, which include liver failure from acetaminophen and gastrointestinal bleeding(...), follow alarms about the overuse of such medications.(T2§1)
The woman whose HIV test was negative has just had a baby.	Human animate genitive	Mr Locksmith, whose operation was cancelled, has decided to fly to France for his hip replacement.
The vaccine whose efficacy(the efficacy of which) has been proved on primates is now being tested on humans	Inanimate genitive	The new flu vaccine, whose side effects are quite unpleasant, has just been withdrawn from the market.

1. Omission of the Relative Pronoun in Defining Relative Clauses

When the relative pronoun functions as the object of the relative clause, it may be either retained or omitted.

Example:

- The dermatologist (*that / who / whom*) I saw yesterday told me that the spots on my face were due to measles.
- The dermatologist \emptyset I saw yesterday told me that the spots on my face were due to measles.

2. Specific Use of the Relative Pronoun *what* in Defining Clauses

The relative pronoun **what** introduces a relative clause that does **not** refer back to an antecedent. For this reason, it can appear at the beginning of a sentence. It corresponds to the French expressions **ce qui / ce que / ce dont**.

Example:

- What is important is to understand the reaction of people who test positive at home.

3. Specific Use of the Relative Pronoun *which*

The pronoun **which** may refer to an entire clause or a part of the main clause. In this case, it corresponds to French *ce qui / ce que*.

Example:

- The measles vaccine has long demonstrated its safety and effectiveness, which suggests that a recombinant measles vaccine should also be well accepted and effective.

4. Use of *when, where, and why* as Relative Pronouns

Although often used as interrogative words or subordinating conjunctions, **when, where, and why** can also function as relative pronouns referring respectively to a temporal, spatial, or causal antecedent.

Examples:

- At the Pasteur Institute, where HIV-1 was discovered in 1983, various research programs are underway.
- I will never forget the day when I learned that I had passed the first-year competitive exam.

5. Use and Translation of the Relative Pronoun *whose*

The pronoun **whose** may refer to either human or non-human antecedents and is always immediately followed by a noun phrase. It usually corresponds to the French relative pronoun *dont*.

Example:

- The lady whose ulcer was cured in a few months thanks to Professor Vabres's expertise has now left the hospital.

-When the antecedent is non-human, **of which** can also be used.

Example:

- These trials, the results of which (= whose results) are expected soon, may represent a major step forward in the search for a vaccine.

6. Other Structures Corresponding to the French *dont*

Certain other structures involving a relative pronoun are also translated by *dont* in French.

Examples:

- The injured, several of whom were unconscious, have been taken to hospital.

- The headaches Ø he was complaining about are getting worse.

7. Combination of a Relative Pronoun and a Preposition

7.1. Defining Relative Clauses

In defining relative clauses containing a prepositional verb (phrasal verb), and using **who**, **whom**, or **which**, the preposition may either precede the relative pronoun or be placed after the verb.

With **that** or the zero relative Ø, the preposition must be placed after the verb.

Examples:

- The patient to whom I spoke on the phone was English.

- The patient Ø / that / whom I spoke to on the phone was English.

7.2. Non-defining Relative Clauses

As noted earlier, **that** and Ø cannot be used in non-defining relative clauses. The preposition may appear before the relative pronoun or after the verb.

Example:

- Professor Brownie, with whom I worked for several years, has just been appointed Dean.
- Professor Brownie, whom I worked with for several years, has just been appointed Dean.

8. Exclusive Use of the Relative Pronouns *that* and \emptyset

In defining relative clauses in which the relative pronoun functions as an object, **that** or \emptyset must be used after a **superlative**.

Example:

- This is the most effective drug \emptyset / that I have ever prescribed.

After certain **indefinite pronouns** (all, any, anything, much, etc.), only **that** or \emptyset are acceptable.

Examples:

- All \emptyset / that the patient needs is a little bed rest.
- There isn't much \emptyset / that one can do to make the patient more comfortable.