Relative clauses: defining and non-defining

Relative clauses are clauses that provide additional information about a noun in a sentence. They are used to add details and help clarify or describe the noun. There are two main types of relative clauses: **defining** (restrictive) and **non-defining** (non-restrictive).
Let's explore each type:

Defining (Restrictive) Relative Clauses: Defining relative clauses provide **essential information** about the noun they modify. They help specify which noun we are referring to within a larger group. **Defining clauses are not separated by commas** and are crucial to the meaning of the sentence. If you remove a defining clause, the sentence's core meaning is affected.
Example:

- The book that is on the shelf is mine.

Structure: Relative pronoun (who, whom, whose, which, that) + subject + verb

In this sentence, the defining relative clause "that is on the shelf" specifies which book we are talking about. If you remove the relative clause, the sentence becomes "The book is mine," which is less specific.
In defining relative clauses, ‘who’ and ‘which’ can be replaced with ‘that’. This makes the sentence slightly less formal.
The relative pronoun can often be omitted if it is followed by a subject, not a verb.

Non-Defining (Non-Restrictive) Relative Clauses: Non-defining relative clauses provide **additional information** that is not essential to the core meaning of the sentence. **They are separated by commas** from the main sentence. Non-defining clauses can be removed from the sentence without changing the main point.
Example:

- My favourite author, who is known for her vivid descriptions, has just released a new novel.

Structure: Relative pronoun (who, whom, whose, which) + subject + verb

In this sentence, the non-defining relative clause "who is known for her vivid descriptions" adds extra information about the favourite author, but removing it does not change the essential meaning of the sentence.

Key Differences:

- **Commas:** Non-defining clauses are set off by commas, while defining clauses are not.
- **Essential vs. Extra Information:** Defining clauses provide essential information that is necessary to identify the noun, while non-defining clauses provide extra, non-essential information.
- **Removability:** Removing a non-defining clause doesn't change the core meaning of the sentence, whereas removing a defining clause affects the sentence's essential meaning.
- **Pronouns:** In defining clauses, "who," "whom," "which," "that," and "whose" are commonly used. In non-defining clauses, "who," "whom," "which," and "whose" are used, but "that" is not used.

Examples to differentiate:

- **Defining Relative Clause:** The man who is wearing a hat is my uncle. (The clause "who is wearing a hat" is necessary to identify the specific man.)
- **Non-Defining Relative Clause:** My uncle, who is a doctor, lives in London. (The clause "who is a doctor" adds extra information about my uncle, but it's not necessary to identify him.)

Relative clauses: defining and non-defining exercise 1:

Choose the correct answer

1. Defining relative clauses are used to:
a) Add extra information to a sentence.
b) Provide non-essential details.
c) Specify which person or thing is meant.

2. Non-defining relative clauses are separated from the main clause by:
a) A semicolon.
b) A comma.
c) A colon.

3. A defining relative clause cannot be removed from a sentence without affecting its core meaning.
a) True
b) False

4. Which of the following sentences contains a non-defining relative clause?
a) The book that I borrowed from the library is interesting.
b) My friend, who is a talented artist, won the competition.
c) The city where I was born is bustling.

5. In "The house where I grew up," the relative pronoun "where" refers to:
a) a specific house
b) the act of growing up
c) a person

6. In defining relative clauses, the relative pronoun can often be omitted.
a) True
b) False

7. "That" can be used in non-defining relative clauses.
a) True
b) False

8. In the sentence "My cousin, who is a chef, cooked dinner," what does the relative clause "who is a chef" add to the sentence?
a) Essential information.
b) Non-essential information.
c) Information about the main verb.

9. Which of the following sentences contains a defining relative clause?
a) The dress, which was red, looked beautiful.
b) The dress that I bought is red.
c) The dress, whose designer is famous, is red.

10. In the sentence "The song that we sang was a hit," what does the relative clause "that we sang" modify?
a) The verb "was."
b) The subject "we."
c) The word "song."

Relative clauses: defining and non-defining exercise 2:

Complete the newspaper article with the correct relative pronouns.

A new art exhibition, **(1)_____(which/that)** opened yesterday at the downtown gallery, is generating a lot of excitement among art enthusiasts. The exhibition features works by local artists **(2)_____(which/who)** have gained recognition for their unique styles. Visitors are amazed by the diversity of pieces **(3)_____(who/that)** range from abstract paintings to intricate sculptures.
One of the highlights of the exhibition is a series of portraits **(4)_____(which/who)** capture the essence of human emotions. The curator, Sarah Rodriguez, mentioned that the artists **(5)_____(who/where)** contributed to the exhibition have a deep connection to the city, **(6)_____(where/that)** they draw inspiration for their creations.
The exhibition, **(7)_____(that/which)** will run for a month, is an opportunity for the community to appreciate the talent **(8)_____(that/where)** exists within their own neighborhood. Visitors are encouraged to explore the different art forms **(9)_____(where/that)** are on display and engage with the artists **(10)_____(who/whose)** are present during gallery hours.



Relative clauses: defining and non-defining: answer key

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Where two or more answers are given, any of them is correct.

Exercise 1

1. c) Specify which person or thing is meant.
2. b) A comma.
3. a) True
4. b) My friend, who is a talented artist, won the competition.
5. a) a specific house
6. a) True
7. b) False
8. b) Non-essential information.
9. b) The dress that I bought is red.
10. c) The word "song."

Exercise 2

(1) which
(2) who
(3) that
(4) which
(5) who
(6) where
(7) which
(8) that
(9) that
(10) who