

Defining Relative Clauses: Essential Descriptions

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: who, that vs which, omitting pronouns, prepositions, whose, where, when, why

In English, **Defining Relative Clauses** give us essential information about a person, thing, place, or time. Without this clause, the sentence does not make complete sense or we don't know exactly which one is being talked about.

1. People and Things

We use relative pronouns to link the clause to the noun it describes.

Noun Type	Subject Pronoun	Object Pronoun (can be omitted)
People	who or that	who, that (or whom in formal English)
Things	which or that	which or that

- *Subject Example:* The man **who** lives next door is a doctor. (We cannot omit 'who' because it is the subject of 'lives').
- *Object Example:* The book (**that**) I bought is interesting. (We can omit 'that' because 'I' is the subject).

2. Possession (whose)

We use **whose** instead of *his, her, their, or its*. It is used for people and sometimes for things/organizations.

- *Example:* That is the girl **whose** brother is famous.

3. Places, Times, and Reasons

- **Where** (for places): The city **where** I was born is small.
 - *Note:* If there is a preposition (in, at, to) without *where*, use *which/that*. (e.g., The city **that** I live **in**).
- **When** (for times): I remember the day **when** we met. (You can also use *that* or omit it: The day we met).
- **Why** (for reasons): That is the reason **why** she was late. (You can also use *that* or omit it).

4. Prepositions at the End

In formal English, the preposition goes before the relative pronoun (usually *which* or *whom*). In everyday B1 English, we usually put the preposition at the **end** of the clause.

- *Formal:* The house **in which** I live...
- *Everyday:* The house (**that/which**) I live **in**...
- *Example:* He is the man **who** I was talking **to**.

Practice Exercises

Instruction: Complete the sentences with the correct relative pronoun (**who**, **which**, **that**, **whose**, **where**, **when**, **why**). If the pronoun can be omitted, write (-).

1. The new smartphone _____ I bought last week has a fantastic camera.
2. Do you know the student _____ bag was stolen from the classroom?
3. This is the restaurant _____ we usually eat lunch on Fridays.
4. The woman _____ called you earlier didn't leave a message.
5. Is this the book _____ you were looking for?
6. I don't understand the reason _____ they cancelled the meeting so suddenly.
7. The hotel _____ we stayed at was extremely expensive.
8. My neighbor, _____ dog is always barking, is actually very friendly.
9. That is the specific time _____ the train usually arrives.
10. He is the only person _____ I can trust with this secret.
11. Did you find the keys _____ you lost yesterday?
12. Stratford-upon-Avon is the town _____ Shakespeare was born.
13. The customer _____ complained about the service got a free meal.
14. Is there a shop nearby _____ sells gluten-free bread?
15. The project _____ I am working on is very complicated.

Answer Key

1. (-) / that / which (Object pronoun can be omitted)
2. whose
3. where
4. who / that
5. (-) / that / which (Object pronoun can be omitted)
6. why / that / (-)
7. (-) / that / which (Note: preposition 'at' is at the end)
8. whose
9. when / that
10. (-) / who / that (Object pronoun can be omitted)
11. (-) / that / which (Object pronoun can be omitted)
12. where
13. who / that
14. that / which (Subject pronoun cannot be omitted)
15. (-) / that / which (Note: preposition 'on' is at the end)