

Lesson 16. Adjective Clause

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Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define adjective clauses.
- Review relative pronouns and use them properly in sentences.
- Differentiate essential and non essential clauses.
- Punctuate sentences with adjective clauses properly.
- Combine sentences using relative pronouns.
- Make sentences with adjective clauses.

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Take a look at this sentence:

The **happy** woman danced across the street.

Happy is a word. It is an adjective modifying the woman. It is telling us which woman. (Which one is an adjective question.) Which woman? The happy woman.

Take a look at this sentence:

The woman, **who looked happy** danced across the street.

This time we have a whole clause doing the job of an adjective. The whole clause who looked happy is modifying the noun woman. It contains a subject (who) and a verb (looked) and answers the question Which one? Which woman? The woman who looked happy.

Now we can summarize what an adjective clause is:

An **adjective clause** is a dependent clause that functions as an adjective.

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An adjective clause—also called an adjectival or relative clause—will meet these three requirements:

- ✓ First, it will contain a **subject** and a **verb**.
- ✓ Next, it will begin with a **relative pronoun** (*who, whom, whose, that, or which*) or a **relative adverb** (*when, where, or why*).
- ✓ Finally, it will function as an **adjective**, answering the questions *What kind? How many? or Which one?*

An adjective clause will follow one of these two patterns:

RELATIVE PRONOUN OR ADVERB

+

SUBJECT

+

VERB

RELATIVE PRONOUN AS THE SUBJECT

+

VERB

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Here are some more examples:



Whose big, brown eyes pleaded for another cookie
Whose = relative pronoun; **eyes** = subject; **pleaded** = verb.



Why Fred cannot stand sitting across from his sister Melanie
Why = relative adverb; **Fred** = subject; **can stand** = verb (**not**, an **adverb**, is not officially part of the verb).



That bounced across the kitchen floor
That = relative pronoun (functioning as the subject); **bounced** = verb.



Who hiccupped for seven hours afterward
Who = relative pronoun (functioning as the subject); **hiccupped** = verb.

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Usage of relative pronouns for relative clauses:

1. **Who** is used exclusively for **persons/people**:

“The flight attendant who helped me was very nice.”

2. **Which** stands for **things** and **animals**:

“The book which I gave you is very interesting, isn’t it?”

3. **That** is used for **things, animals, and people**:

“The car that crashed into the house is completely damaged.”

4. **Whose** is a **possessive relative pronoun** and refers to **persons** as well as **things** and **animals**:

“My friend Sandra, whose brothers live in Australia, is going to visit me.”

5. **Whom** is the **object form** of the relative pronoun ‘who’ and is utilized almost only in **written** and **formal** English for **persons**. In spoken and informal English, the pronoun ‘**who**’ is preferred to ‘whom’:

“The girl whom Peter met the other day is 28 years old.”

➔ **In addition**, the three English relative adverbs (‘**when**, **where**’, and ‘**why**’) can also be employed in relative clauses.

“Six years ago, when my brother got married, I was working in China.”

“This is the place where we kissed for the first time.”

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Complete the sentences with relative pronouns from the box.

THAT – WHEN – WHERE - WHICH - WHO – WHOSE - WHY

1. The new movie is about a boy _____ has lost his parents in a car accident.
2. He is the young man, _____ wife left him for someone else.
3. The DVD recorder _____ I bought at this store a few days ago is not working.
4. That's the book _____ I recommended reading in class.
5. Is this the hotel _____ you are staying for the tournament?
6. My dad, _____ travels a lot on business, is in Australia at the moment.
7. It was midnight _____ the first rescue team arrived at the scene of the accident.
8. There are several reasons _____ I am not allowed to give you any information.
9. We stayed at the famous Rockstar hotel, _____ also had an indoor swimming pool.
10. Did you write back to the person _____ offered you a job?
11. The story is about a young woman _____ 5-year old son suddenly disappears.
12. The tennis court _____ they usually play is currently not available.
13. My sister was born at a time _____ my dad was out of work.
14. Where is the money _____ I gave you yesterday?
15. That's the man _____ I spoke to the other day.

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An essential (or restrictive) adjective clause provides information that is necessary for identifying the word it modifies.

The art class that Lucas takes focuses on design.

That Lucas takes is an essential adjective clause. It contains the subject *Lucas* and the verb *takes*. The clause modifies the noun *class*, providing necessary information about it.)

A nonessential (or nonrestrictive) adjective clause provides additional information about the word it modifies, but the word's meaning is already clear. Nonessential clauses are always set off with commas.

The house on the left, which belongs to Nicole, is up for sale.

(Which belongs to Nicole is a nonessential adjective clause. It contains the subject *which* and the verb *belongs*. The clause modifies the noun *house*, providing additional, nonessential information about it.)



When deciding whether to include the word *that* or *which* in an adjective clause, remember to use *that* for essential clauses and *which* for nonessential clauses. *Who* always refers to people, not objects or places and can be used as to offset essential and nonessential clauses

- ➔ Dr. Doright, who teaches Composition 1101, has a terrific sense of humor. (Non-essential)
- ➔ The man who backed his car into me drove away without stopping to give me his insurance information. (Essential)

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Punctuating adjective clauses can be tricky. For each sentence, you will have to decide if the adjective clause is essential or nonessential and then use commas accordingly.

Essential clauses do not require commas. An adjective clause is essential when you need the information it provides.



The vegetables **that people leave uneaten** are often the most nutritious.

Vegetables is nonspecific. To know which ones we are talking about, we must have the information in the adjective clause. Thus, the adjective clause is essential and requires no commas. If, however, we eliminate vegetables and choose a more specific noun instead, the adjective clause becomes nonessential and does require commas to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

Read this version:

Broccoli, **which people often leave uneaten**, is very nutritious.

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Identify the nonessential words, phrases, or clauses in the following sentences and add the appropriate punctuation.

1. Patterson Tower the recently completed office building is a monument to concrete ugliness.
2. The movie that I wanted to see is no longer playing.
3. Each person who enters the contest must send in two box tops.
4. John decided nonetheless not to buy the car.
5. The Mississippi River which once flowed north into Hudson Bay flows south into the Gulf of Mexico.
6. Your cat watching the dog intently walked carefully away.
7. The cat that was watching the dog most intently walked carefully away.
8. TV commercials sometimes the most entertaining parts of a program are essentially flashy corporate propaganda.
9. The dam project which many in the government consider to be a sign of national strength will destroy hundreds of villages and vast areas of wildlife habitat along the river banks.
10. The free-jazz musician Sun Ra claimed to be from Saturn.

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Consider the following sentences:

- A. I cannot find the man from the repair shop. He helped me fix my car yesterday.
- B. I cannot find the man from the repair shop that helped me fix my car yesterday.

In your own words, explain which writing is better, A or B

As you may have noticed, the sentences in A are short, choppy, and disconnected. On the other hand, the sentence in B, connects the ideas in those two sentences smoothly. Instead of using two sentences to convey the information about the man from the repair shop, the writer has combined the sentences using an adjective clause: that helped me fix my car yesterday.

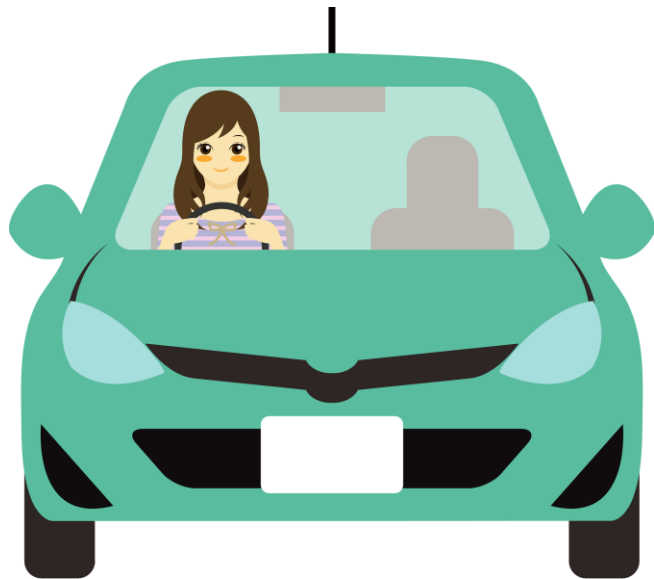
An adjective clause describes a noun in the same sentence. In this case, the adjective clause “that helped me fix my car yesterday” describes the man from the repair shop with extra, descriptive information without the writer having to create a new sentence.

To combine two separate sentences into a single sentence with an adjective clause, you must change the pronoun into a relative pronoun.

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Try combining the following sentences with the use of the correct relative pronoun.

- A. Lydia bought a used car. It gave her endless problem.
- B. Lydia bought a used car _____ gave her endless problems.



- A. Lydia took her car to a mechanic. He told her it would cost \$560 to fix it.
 - B. Lydia took her car to a mechanic _____ told her it would cost \$560 to fix it.
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- A. Lydia took her car to a mechanic. He told her it would cost \$560 to fix it.
 - B. Lydia took her car to a mechanic _____ told her it would cost \$560 to fix it.

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Combine the sentences given into one good sentence. Use the second sentence as an adjective clause.

1. The United States has had forty-three presidents. One of them was from New Jersey.
2. George W. Bush comes from Texas. He is the forty-third president of the United States.
3. 1986 was the year. Halley's Comet appeared then.
4. Elizabeth remembers the casino. She won \$25,000 there (in that casino).
5. Shirley Chisholm ran for president in 1972. She was a Congresswoman from New York.
6. Hillary Rodham Clinton is now one of the senators from New York. Her husband used to be the President of the United States.
7. Many people eat turkey on Thanksgiving. This is not surprising.
8. A boy won the national spelling contest. He lives in North Carolina.
9. Tom has had ten cars. Three of them were station wagons.
10. I know a woman. Her brother is famous.
11. North Carolina has beautiful mountains. I want to visit them some day.
12. He works at an electronics store. It has many sales.

The End