

# Non-Defining relative clauses

As the name suggests, **non-defining relative clauses tell us more about someone or something, but the information in these clauses does not help us to define what we are talking about.** Take for example the sentence: *Gorillas, which are large and originate in Africa, can sometimes be found in zoos.* In this sentence we are talking about all gorillas, not just some of them. The information in the non-defining relative clause tells us something more about gorillas in general. It does not define a small group of gorillas or an individual gorilla. **If the non-defining relative clause were removed from the sentence, the sentence would still be grammatically correct and the meaning would not have changed, although we would have less detail.**

**Non-defining relative clauses are composed of a relative pronoun, a verb, and optional other elements such as the subject or object of the verb. Commas or parentheses are always used to separate non-defining relative clauses from the rest of the sentence.**

*John's mother, who lives in Scotland, has 6 grandchildren*

*My friend John, who went to the same school as me, has just written a best-selling novel*

*My grandmother, who is dead now, came from the North of England*

*We stopped at the museum, which we had never visited before*

*I've just come back from London, where John lives*

*Yesterday I met a woman named Susan, whose husband works in London*

## Relative pronouns

The following relative pronouns are used in non-defining relative clauses. These relative pronouns appear at the start of the non-defining relative clause and refer to a noun that appears earlier in the sentence.

	Person	Thing	Place
Subject	who	which	
Object	who/whom	which	where
Possessive	whose		

## Differences with defining relative clauses

In defining relative clauses, the pronouns *who*, *whom*, and *which* are often replaced by that in spoken English. **In non-defining relative clauses, you cannot replace other pronouns with that. You also cannot leave out the relative pronoun in non-defining relative clauses**, in the way you sometimes can in defining relative clauses. **The pronoun is required, even when it is the object of the verb in the relative clause.** Finally, **non-defining relative clauses are always separated from the rest of the sentence by commas**, unlike defining relative clauses, which have no punctuation.

*He gave me the letter, which was in a blue envelope* (non-defining clause: There was only one letter, it happened to be blue. You must use *which*)

*He gave me the letter which/that was in a blue envelope* (defining clause: There were several letters of different colours and he gave me the blue one. *Which* may be replaced by *that*. The commas are removed)

*He gave me the letter, which I read immediately* (non-defining clause: There was only one letter. *which* is the object of *read*, but it still must be included in the sentence)

*Stratford-on-Avon, which many people have written about, is Shakespeare's birthplace* (Any preposition that appears is normally placed at the end of the clause)

*Stratford-on-Avon, about which many people have written, is Shakespeare's birthplace* (In formal written English, you can also put the preposition before the pronoun)

### Introductory expressions in non-defining clauses

Non-defining clauses can be introduced by expressions like ***all of*** or ***many of*** followed by the relative pronoun.

	Person	Thing
all of, any of, some of, a few of, both of, each of, either of, half of, many of, most of, much of, none of, one of, two of, etc.	whom	which

*There were a lot of people at the party, many of whom I had known for years.*

*There are 14 girls in my class, a few of whom are my friends.*

*He was carrying his belongings, many of which were broken.*

*He had thousands of books, most of which he had read.*

*He picked up a handful of stones, one of which was sharp.*

### Using "which" to refer to another clause

The relative pronoun which at the beginning of a non-defining relative clause can refer to all the information contained in the previous part of the sentence, rather than to just one word.

*Chris did really well in his exams, which is quite a surprise*

*My friends were all hiding in my apartment, which isn't what I'd expected*

*She's studying to become a doctor, which is difficult*