

Defining and non-defining relative clauses

Generally, there are two types of relative clauses: restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses. Restrictive relative clauses are also called defining relative clauses. Non-restrictive relative clauses are also called non-defining relative clauses.

In both restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, the relative pronoun can act as the subject or object. It can also act as a possessive pronoun (e.g. whose).

Relative pronouns in restrictive relative clauses

Relative pronouns used to introduce restrictive relative clauses are not separated from the main clause by a comma. A restrictive relative clause adds essential information which is crucial for understanding the meaning of the sentence. If the relative clause is removed from the sentence, it will have a different meaning.

Examples of restrictive relative clauses are given below.

I like people *who are honest about their intentions*.

Here the relative clause 'who are honest about their intentions' adds essential information.

Consider removing the relative clause from the sentence. Now we will have the simple sentence *I like people*.

Although this sentence still makes complete sense its meaning is different from that of the original sentence.

He *who works hard* will succeed.

Here again the relative clause adds essential information.

He will succeed does not mean the same *He who works hard will succeed*.

More examples of restrictive relative clauses are given below.

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This is the house *that my grandfather built*.

This is the boy *who won the first prize*.

The boy *who broke the window* was punished.

The girl *whose brother serves in the army* is my classmate.

The dish washer *that I bought for my wife* was really expensive.

The woman *whom you met on the train* is my colleague.