

## Relative Pronouns and Relative Clauses

The relative pronouns are *who*, *which*, *that*, *whose*, and *whom*. We use them when we want to add information about a person, thing, or idea in a sentence. Which pronoun we use depends purely on the grammar.

There are two types of relative clause.

A. A clause that gives information needed to understand the word it refers to. This is traditionally called a **defining relative clause**.

ex. Last night I saw a film that scared me to death.

The clause "that scared me to death" gives information that makes the word "film" more specific.

ex. Last night I saw the film that you told me about.

Again, the clause "that you told me about" specifies, or defines, which film I am talking about.

These two examples also show us that the relative pronoun has two characteristics:

- it refers to a noun in the main clause (film);
- it can be either the grammatical subject or the grammatical object of the relative clause.

Last night I saw a film that scared me to death.

In this sentence, "that scared me to death" is the relative clause. "scared" is the verb of the clause, and "that" is its grammatical subject.

In defining relative clauses, we must always express the relative pronoun when it is the subject of the relative clause.

Last night I saw the film that you told me about.

In this sentence, "that you told me about" is the relative clause. "told" is the verb of the clause, and "that" is its grammatical object.

In defining relative clauses, the relative pronoun is optional if it is the object of the relative clause.

I saw the film that you told me about. = I saw the film you told me about.

B. A clause that gives extra information, but which is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, is called a non-defining relative clause.

The film, which was a box-office hit, had an all-star cast.  
Steve, who we had never met, turned out to be a very funny person.

The clauses "which was a box-office hit" and "who we had never met" add extra information to the sentence, but they are not essential to their respective sentence's meaning.

Non-defining relative clauses must always be separated from the main sentence by commas, and they never use the word "that".