

# An Introduction to Complex Syntactic Structures

## I. Adjective/Relative Clauses

- Restrictive and Non-restrictive Adjective Clauses
- THAT in Noun and Adjective Clauses

### Adjective Clauses

1. An **adjective clause** is a dependent clause, which takes the place of an adjective in another clause or phrase. Like an adjective, an adjective clause modifies a noun or pronoun, answering questions like "which?" or "what kind of?"

When a subordinate clause modifies a noun or a pronoun, it is called an **adjective clause**. Often, an adjective clause begins with a relative pronoun. An adjective clause can also begin with *where* or *when*.

Ms. Parker, **who is from Canada**, is coming for dinner.

She has written a book **that tells the history of the Rocky Mountains**.

### RELATIVE PRONOUNS

That who whose

Which whom whomever

**Consider the following examples:**

The **red** coat is expensive.

The coat, **which I bought yesterday**, is expensive

Like the word "red" in the first example, the dependent clause "which I bought yesterday" in the second example modifies the noun "coat." Note that an adjective clause usually comes *after* what it modifies, while an adjective usually comes *before*.

- In formal writing, an adjective clause begins with the relative pronouns "who(m)," "that," or "which."
- In informal writing or speech, you may leave out the relative pronoun when it is not the subject of the adjective clause, but you should usually include the relative pronoun in formal, academic writing:

In formal, academic English in adjective clauses with object relative pronouns, for people, we use **whom**. In adjective clauses with an object of a preposition, bring the preposition forward and use **whom** or **which**.

Here are some more examples of adjective clauses:

The meat **which they ate** was tasty.

This clause modifies the noun "meat" and answers the question "which meat?"

They talked about the movie **which made him cry**.

This clause modifies the noun "movie" and answers the question "which movie?"

They are searching for the one **who borrowed the book**.

The clause modifies the pronoun "one" and answers the question "which one?"

Did I tell you about the author **whom I met**?

The clause modifies the noun "author" and answers the question "which author?"

### Restrictive Vs Non-Restrictive Adjective Clauses

- You must understand whether or not the dependent clause is **essential** information or **extra** information in the understanding of the noun. This impacts the meaning and the punctuation.
- Restrictive clauses are also called **identifying or essential clauses**. We DO NOT use commas with these clauses.

**Restrictive clauses** are necessary to make the meaning of a sentence clear. A clause beginning with *that* is essential.

- Extra clauses are also called **non-identifying or non-restrictive**. WE MUST use commas with these clauses. We cannot use the relative pronoun **that**.

The sweater **that you knitted for me** fits perfectly. (Essential clause)

**Nonrestrictive clauses** add interesting information but are not necessary for the meaning of a sentence. A clause beginning with *which* is usually nonessential. Use commas to set off nonessential clauses from the rest of the sentence.

Dr. Chomsky, **whose train arrives today**, is a well-known researcher. (Nonessential clause)

### **Things to Remember**

#### ***Identifying vs. Non-Identifying***

– My sister, who lives in China, has two kids.

– My sister who lives in China has two kids.

Question:

- In which sentence is it clear that I have more than one sister?

Answer:

- The second sentence tells me that I have more than one sister. In the first sentence, I am giving extra information about my sister. It is clear from the use of commas which demonstrate that I am giving EXTRA information about my sister whereas in the second sentence, the information is necessary as it identifies which sister I am talking about.

- He is the man who works at the grocery store.

This is essential (identifying) information. Think about it as two sentences.

He is a man.

He works at the grocery store.

Without the second sentence, you couldn't identify him.

Notice that **a** becomes **the** because the noun changes from indefinite to definite because of the identification.

- Think about if a listener or reader would be able to identify the noun without the adjective clause.

Example:

Maria, who works as a physician's assistant, enjoys her job.

This is extra (non-identifying) information. Think about it as two sentences.

Maria enjoys her job.

Maria works as a physician's assistant.

You know her name from the first sentence. This is enough to identify her.

### **THAT in noun and adjective clauses**

Like the nominal clause, the relative clause can be introduced by the pronoun "that." However, there is a difference between the two uses of "that." Notice how, in the example of a nominal clause below, "that" has no grammatical function within the clause: it is neither subject nor verb; it exists only to indicate to the reader when a nominal clause is beginning. In the relative clause example that follows, "that" has a definite grammatical function: it serves as the subject of the clause.

**Example (Nominal):** The kid admitted that he had stolen from the store.

**Example (relative):** She bought her son a car that got high speed quality.

Also note that the noun/pronoun substitution test only works when the "that" clause is functioning as noun clause. (The kid admitted it.)

### **Difference between an adjective clause and a noun clause**

It may seem difficult to differentiate between nominal and relative clauses, especially because both tend to begin with the same pronouns ("which," "who," "when," etc.); however, you can perform a simple test to determine what kind of clause you have. First, identify the boundaries of a clause that begins with a pronoun; notice where it begins and where it ends. Then, substitute the entire clause with "it" or any other

noun. If the substitution test works, then you have a nominal clause; if the sentence sounds odd or broken, then you have a relative clause.

**Example (Nominal):** The kid admitted that he had stolen from the store. (The kid admitted it.)

**Example (relative):** She bought her son a car that got high speed quality. She bought her son a car .....

Furthermore, adjective clause gives more information about a noun or noun phrase, whereas, noun clause acts as a subject, direct object, or object of the preposition observe the following sentence with adjective ( A) and nominal clauses (N )

1. [Whose book this is] may remain a mystery. N
2. *He is the teacher [whose student won the scholarship]. A*
3. *I wonder [whose book this is]. N*
4. *He is the person [under whose direction we completed the special project]. A*

## Practice

### Exercise 01

**Underline each adjective clause. Write *e* (essential) or *non*. (nonessential) in the blank to identify the type of clause. Add commas as needed.**

*Wingless Flight*, which I saw yesterday, depicted space travel. Non

1. The explorers whom I most admire are astronauts.
1. The man who had the handlebar mustache pressed Adam for an answer.
2. Mr. Hoffer whose family lives in Germany will be our guest this weekend.
3. The explanation that she had given them seemed too horrible to be true.
4. Mr. Johnson whose son attends the University is our friend.
5. Thomas Jefferson who was born on the frontier became President.
6. A person who loves to read will never be lonely.
7. My father who was a country boy has lived in the city for years.
8. The girl by whom I sat in class is an honor student.
9. Jet pilots who are not in excellent physical condition should not be allowed to fly.
10. She is a woman who is respected by everyone.

### Exercise 2

**Draw one line under each adjective clause. Draw two lines under the noun or pronoun that it modifies.**

The student who won the spelling bee donated her prize to the class.

1. The days when thousands of buffalo roamed the plains must have been long ago.
2. Is this the documentary that you wanted?
3. The flood happened at a time when everyone was away from home.
4. King, who smelled the smoke, woke us up by barking.
5. I have seen the movie that you are discussing.
6. My favorite class is the one that Mr. Clark teaches.
7. Simone met our new neighbor who lives down the street.
8. Anyone who disagrees with the proposal should vote no.
9. The crystal vase, which was a present from Aunt Sandra, is filled with roses.
10. Is Ralph the neighbor whom you invited to the party?
11. Boris knows the captain whose team won the tournament.
12. Have you talked to the artist who painted this picture?
13. Uncle Vincent bought the biggest refrigerator that he could find.
14. Bridalveil Falls, which is in Yosemite National Park, is lovely.

15. The person whose place I held wants to get back in line.

**Excercise 02**

Complete each relative clause with **who** or **that**. If both **who** or **that** can be used, write **who or that**

1. That's the man \_\_\_\_\_ stole my purse!
2. That's the jacket \_\_\_\_\_ I want to buy.
3. That's the girl \_\_\_\_\_ won the race.
4. The students \_\_\_\_\_ do well on the exam will be allowed to leave early.
5. We saw the cat \_\_\_\_\_ lives in the house next door.
6. The airport \_\_\_\_\_ is being built will be the largest in the country.
7. The woman \_\_\_\_\_ sang that song is very beautiful.
8. People \_\_\_\_\_ use this site will learn English very quickly.
9. The computer \_\_\_\_\_ I want to buy costs \$1,000.
10. The dinner \_\_\_\_\_ your mother prepared was delicious.