Relative Clauses

Introduction



TASK

Look at the example sentences. Do you notice any differences between a and b?

1. Example
    1. There was a bird which flew past my window.
    2. The bird, which was about 2 metres long, scared me a lot.
2. Example
    1. At the bus stop there was a man who was singing loudly.
    2. This man, who also didn't wear any trousers, annoyed many of the people there.

In the two **a-sentences** the information in the relative clauses is necessary for a complete understanding of the sentences.

In the **b-sentences** the relative clauses add extra information that is not necessary to understand the rest of the sentence.

- a: defining relative clauses
- b: non-defining relative clauses

Defining and non-defining relative clauses

A **defining relative clause** adds necessary information to the main clause. Without it, the main clause would be incomplete. There are no commas.

A **non-defining relative** clause adds extra (zusätzlich) information to the main clause. It is not necessary and the main clause is complete without it. There are commas between the main clause and the relative clause.

Practice



Here are some more sentences. Try to figure out which ones contain defining and which ones are non-defining relative clauses.

1. John Muir was one of the people who fought against the dam project.
2. John Muir, who was born in Scotland, fought to make Yosemite a national park.
3. One out of 25 people who live in the USA are there illegally.
4. Mexicans, who usually do unskilled work, make up a large part of the illegal immigrants.
5. Some people want to get tough on illegal immigrants, who they think should be arrested.
6. Most immigrants who want to cross the border manage to do it.

1. “who fought against the dam project”: **defining** relative clause
2. “who was born in Scotland”: **non-defining** relative clause
3. “who live in the USA”: **defining** relative clause
4. “who usually do unskilled work”: **non-defining** relative clause
5. “who they think should be arrested”: **non-defining** relative clause
6. “who want to cross the border”: **defining** relative clause

Contact clauses

There’s a special type of relative clause that is used very often especially in spoken English. Compare the following sentences:

1. Example
    1. This is the city (that) **I** love.
    2. This is the city that is 500 years old
2. Example
    1. The new power station (which) **I**’m working at is in the mountains.
    2. This is the new power station which works with water.
3. Example
    1. The music (that) **they** had was great, too.
    2. The music that went on for hours.

In the a-example sentences, the relative clause has its own **subject**. In this case, the relative pronoun (who, which, that) can be omitted [weglassen].

So the a-examples could also read:

1. This is the city I love.
2. The new power station I’m working at is in the mountains.
3. The music they had was great, too.

Here are some more examples

1. This is a picture of the place (which) I now call home.
2. I look forward to the long holidays (that) we also get.
3. It’s the type of big job (that) I like.
4. It’s lovely here with … friendly people (who) I’ve really learned to love.

This type of defining relative clause is called a **contact clause**.

Contact clauses in contrast to regular [normal] relative clauses

		object[1)]	**subject**[2)]		
contact clause	**The castle**	**(which)**	**you**	**can visit**	**is on the hill**
normal relative clause	The castle		which	stands	on the hill is nice.
contact clause	**The city**	**(that)**	**I**	**love**	**is Edinburgh.**
normal relative clause	The city		that	is	500 years old has many houses.
contact clause	**The power station**	**(which)**	**I**	**am working on**	**will be finished soon.**
normal relative clause	The power station		which	works	with water is very new.

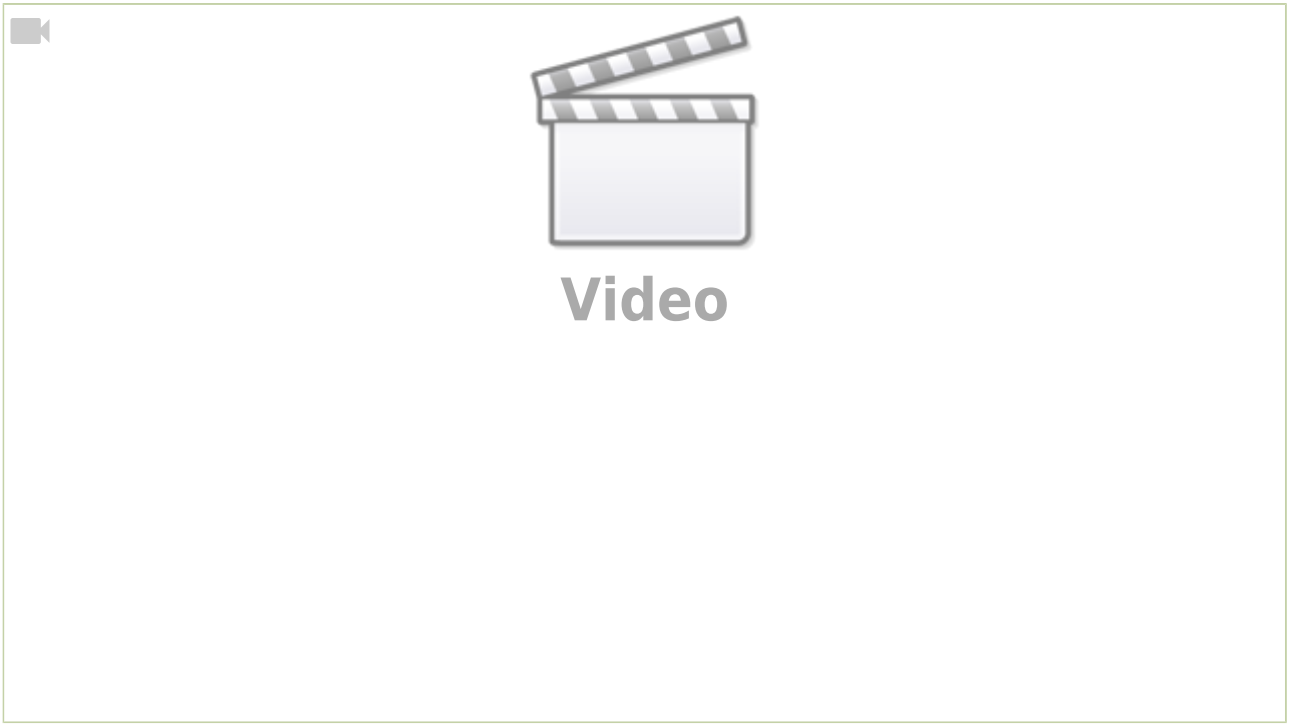
Rule for the use of the contact clause

If the **relative clause has its own subject**, we can leave out the relative pronoun (who, which, that).

You can also say this in a different way:

When the **relative pronoun is the object of the relative clause**, you can leave it out.)

Videos

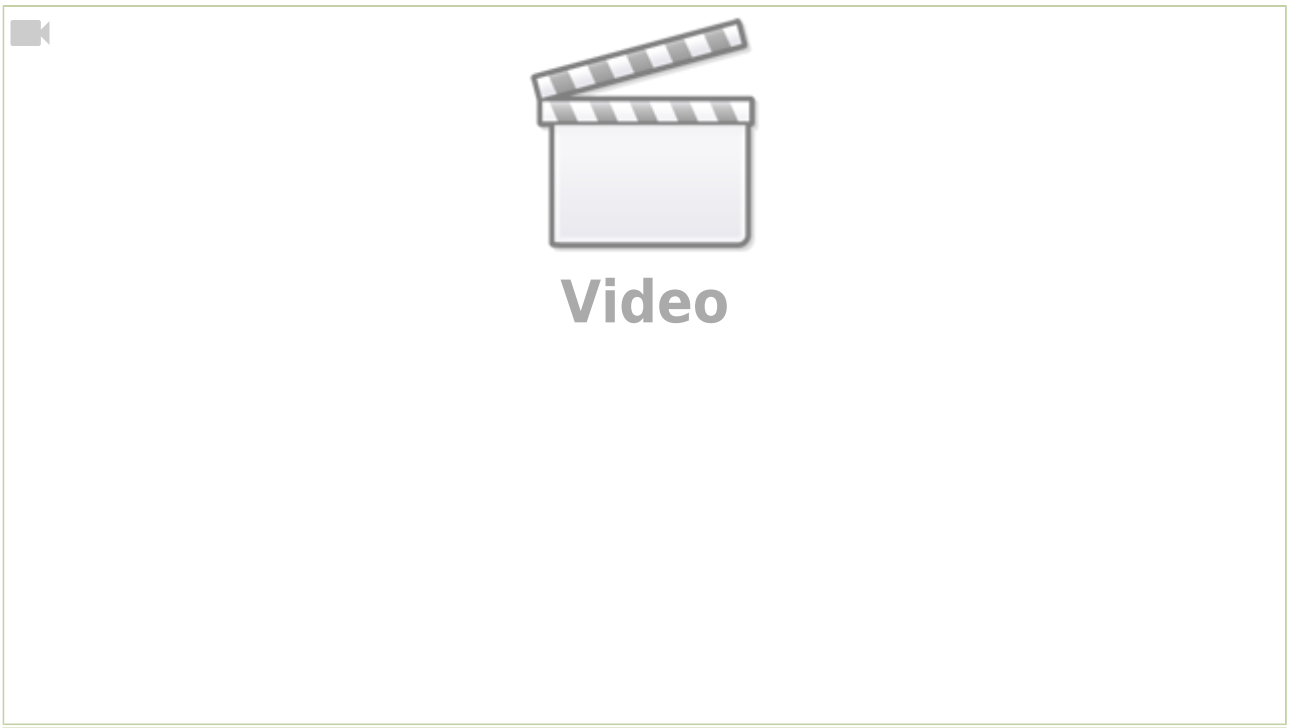


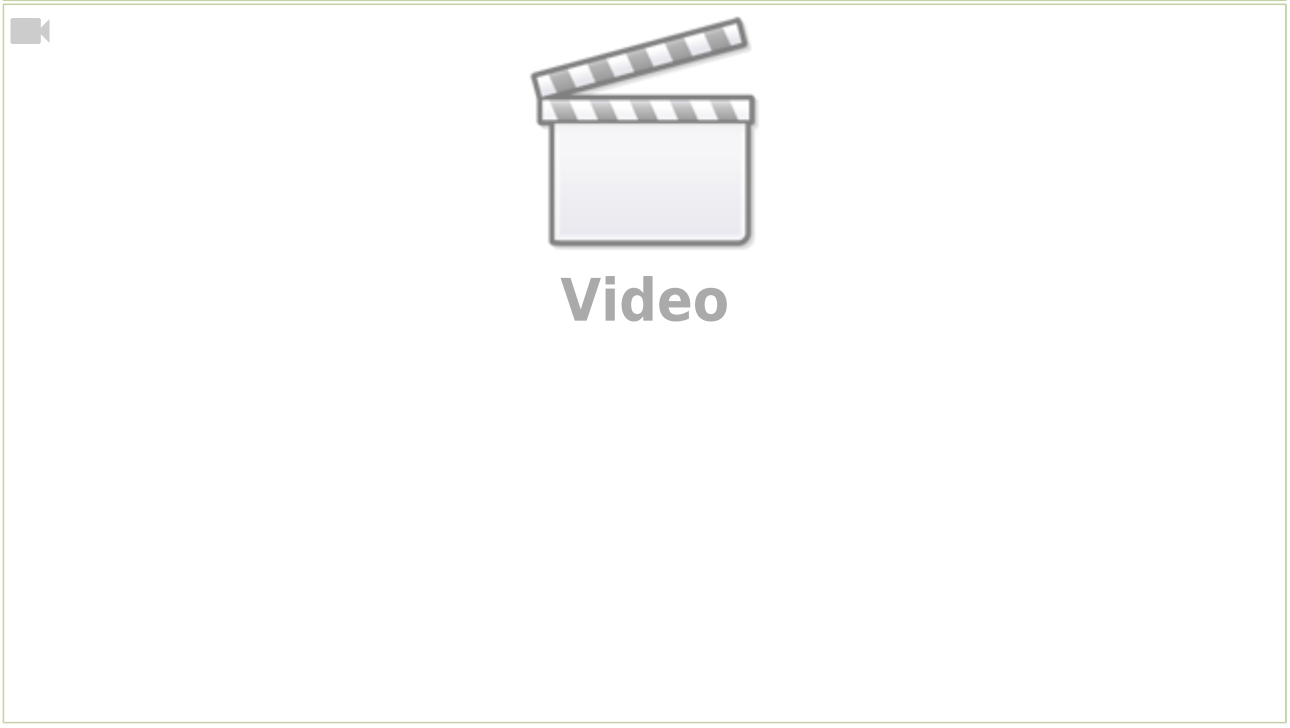


Video



Video





Exercises

- Bestimmende und nicht bestimmende Relativsätze
- Relativpronomen who, which, whose und that

- Relative Clauses (Relativsätze) – Explanation and exercises
- Relative clauses – Explanation and exercises

Contact Clauses

- Contact clauses – Relativsätze ohne Relativpronomen
- Bildung von Contact Clauses

[1] [2]
,
of the relative clause