

# Using non-defining relative clauses

ADRIAN DOFF presents and explains this key point of grammar with notes on a short dialogue.

**MEDIUM PLUS**

## Dialogue

Chris is a guest on a chat show.

Host (Moderator(in)):

Today, we're going to meet some people **who have interesting stories about cats**<sup>1</sup>. My first guest is Chris Gray, **who has a story from his holiday in Switzerland**<sup>2</sup>.

Chris: Yes, I was staying in Gimmelwald, **which is a village in the Swiss Alps**<sup>3</sup>, **where I go walking every year**<sup>4</sup>. One day, I got lost. I couldn't find the path, and it was getting dark. Then I saw a black-and-white cat, **which I knew from the village**<sup>5</sup>. It was a cat called Susi, **whose owners lived in the village**<sup>6</sup>. The cat started walking along a narrow path, and it kept looking round at me, so I followed it. And it led me back to the village.

Host: The cat rescued you, then?

Chris: Yes, it rescued me, **which sounds incredible**<sup>7</sup>, but it's true.

## Explanations

- This is a **defining relative clause**, introduced by the **relative pronoun "who"** (to refer to a person). It defines which people the speaker means (= people who have interesting cat stories).
- This is a **non-defining relative clause** also introduced by **"who"**. Here, though, it doesn't define Chris Gray. It simply gives us **extra information** about him. (He has a story from his holiday.)
- Here we have another **non-defining relative clause**. It is introduced by the **relative pronoun "which"** and gives us more information about the village of Gimmelwald in Switzerland.
- This is a **non-defining relative clause**, introduced by the **relative pronoun "where"**. (= I go walking there.)
- In this **non-defining relative clause** with **"which"** (= the cat), the cat is the **object** of the clause. (= I knew the cat.)
- This **non-defining relative clause** is introduced by a **possessive pronoun, "whose"** (= the cat's owners).
- Here, **which** refers to a **complete idea** (= the fact that the cat rescued Chris).

## Remember

There are two types of relative clause:

- defining relative clauses**, which **define** the person or thing one is talking about. In defining relative clauses, no comma is used ("people who...", not "people, who..."):
  - non-defining relative clauses**, which add **extra information**. In non-defining relative clauses, a comma is used ("John, who..." not "John who..."):
- Kate likes people *who* laugh a lot. (This tells us which people she likes.)
  - She's married to John, who is a doctor.* (This tells us more about John.)

In non-defining relative clauses, use **who**, **which**, **where** or **whose**.

## Beyond the basics

Non-defining relative clauses are usually used in:

- more formal style. Compare:
  - This is Sue. *She's the new receptionist.* (informal)
  - I'd like to introduce you to Susan Phelps, *who is our new receptionist.* (more formal)
- longer explanations or stories (as in the chat show). These clauses help one to organize the information clearly.

## Exercise 1

M

Write the correct relative pronoun in each space (Lücke) below.

- This is the Tower of London, \_\_\_\_\_ was built in 1087.
- This is a picture of Heidelberg, \_\_\_\_\_ I went to university.
- I shouted at her, \_\_\_\_\_ wasn't a very good idea.
- I was talking to Richard, \_\_\_\_\_ you met at the party.
- My friend Moji, \_\_\_\_\_ real name is Mojnan, is from Iran.

## Answers

- A. which  
B. where  
C. which  
D. who(m)  
E. whose

## Non-defining relative clauses

This month, The Grammar Page (page 52) explores the use of **non-defining relative clauses**. Here, you can test your understanding.

### 1. Defining or non-defining?

E

Read the sentences below and decide whether defining (D) or non-defining relative clauses (N) are used in them.

- |  | D                        | N                        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. That's the woman who I saw in town yesterday.           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. That's the dog that bit me.                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. The door, which had been freshly painted, was open.     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Your e-mail, which I've just read, is full of mistakes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. That's the coat I want you to buy me for Christmas.     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| F. The artist, who died in 1950, was a brilliant man.      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Non-defining relative clauses and how to use them

- A non-defining relative clause does **not** define the person or thing you're talking about. Instead, it is used **to add extra information**.
- A non-defining relative clause is separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.
- In non-defining relative clauses, the relative pronouns **who**, **which**, **where** or **whose** are used. They **cannot** be left out.
- In a non-defining relative clause, **don't use** the relative pronoun **that**.

### 2. Put them together

M

Join each of the pairs of sentences below to create non-defining relative clauses. The first one has been done for you.

- A. The ginger biscuits are delicious. I made them this morning.  
*The ginger biscuits, which I made this morning, are delicious.*
- B. The kitchen has to be cleaned. It looks a real mess now.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- C. My great-aunt gave me a new biscuit tin. She is really lovely.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- D. The biscuit tin looks very Christmassy. It has reindeer on it.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- E. The decorations are on the tree now. They were up in the attic all year.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Father Christmas finally arrived. His beard was covered in snow.  
 \_\_\_\_\_



## Non-defining relative clauses

## 3. Add the pronoun

M

Choose the correct relative pronoun — **which**, **who** or **whose** — to complete each sentence below.

- A. The mechanic, \_\_\_\_\_ had worked at the garage for 20 years, said he'd never seen anything like it.
- B. The woman, \_\_\_\_\_ house had been broken into, said she didn't feel safe any more.
- C. The cat, \_\_\_\_\_ had been fast asleep, suddenly yawned and stretched.
- D. David, \_\_\_\_\_ books I bought in town yesterday, has been studying all weekend.
- E. The oven door, \_\_\_\_\_ had been hanging loose, fell off with a clatter.
- F. My teacher, \_\_\_\_\_ really doesn't like me, told me off again.

## 4. Complete the rules

A

Use the words from the list below to complete the rules for using relative clauses.

**defining | no | non-defining | relative pronouns | that | two | whose**

There are (A) \_\_\_\_\_ types of relative clause:

(B) \_\_\_\_\_ relative clauses are used to define the person or thing one is talking about. (C) \_\_\_\_\_ relative clauses are used to add extra information about a person or thing. In defining relative clauses, (D) \_\_\_\_\_ can mostly be left out. The exception is (E) "\_\_\_\_\_". In non-defining relative clauses, (F) \_\_\_\_\_ relative pronouns can be left out. The word (G) "\_\_\_\_\_" is never used in a non-defining relative clause.

On this page, you will find **more on non-defining relative clauses**, an area of language we discussed on pages 4–5.

1. What's wrong?



Correct one mistake in each sentence below.

- A. This is Mary who lives in the flat next to mine.
- B. Who's that woman, who's sitting next to John?
- C. What's the name of that hotel, where you stayed last week?
- D. There's something, that I have to tell you.

**Remember**

Sometimes the relative pronoun **which** refers to the entire previous clause:

- Trevor didn't say a word at the meeting, which made me really angry.

2. One out of two



Combine each pair of sentences below to make one sentence containing a relative clause.

- A. My boss speaks Mandarin. His wife is Chinese.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. Luke is often late for work. This really annoys me.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Penny has just had her fifth child. I went to school with her.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- D. He's the owner of the Dickens Inn. I often have lunch there.  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. And now in English



Translate these German sentences into English, adding commas where necessary.

- A. Mein Chef, dessen Tochter in Rom lebt, besitzt dort eine Wohnung.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- B. Tante Paula, die 1910 geboren ist, ist das älteste Mitglied meiner Familie.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- C. Er war viermal verheiratet, was ich nicht wusste.  
\_\_\_\_\_

### NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES (PP. 4-5)

#### 1. Defining or non-defining?

- A. D
- B. D
- C. N
- D. N
- E. D
- F. N

#### 2. Put them together

- B. The kitchen, which looks a real mess now, has to be cleaned.
- C. My great-aunt, who is really lovely, gave me a new biscuit tin.
- D. The biscuit tin, which has reindeer on it, looks very Christmassy.
- E. The decorations, which were up in the attic all year, are on the tree now.
- F. Father Christmas, whose beard was covered in snow, finally arrived.

#### 3. Add the pronoun

- A. who
- B. whose
- C. which
- D. whose
- E. which
- F. who

#### 4. Complete the rules

- A. two
- B. defining
- C. Non-defining
- D. relative pronouns
- E. whose
- F. no
- G. that

### MORE ON NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES (P. 6)

#### 1. What's wrong?

- A. This is Mary, who lives in the flat next to mine.
- B. Who's that woman who's sitting next to John?
- C. What's the name of that hotel where you stayed last week?
- D. There's something that I have to tell you.

#### 2. One out of two

- A. My boss, whose wife is Chinese, speaks Mandarin.
- B. Luke is often late for work, which really annoys me.
- C. Penny, who I went to school with, has just had her fifth child.
- D. He's the owner of the Dickens Inn, where I often have lunch.

#### 3. And now in English

- A. My boss, whose daughter lives in Rome, owns a flat there.
- B. Aunt Paula, who was born in 1910, is the oldest member of my family.
- C. He was married four times, which I didn't know.

### VERB SUFFIXES (P. 7)

#### 1. End it

- A. modernize / modernise
- B. shorten
- C. purify
- D. vaccinate
- E. sweeten

#### 2. Classify it

- verbs: A, B, E, F, H  
adjectives: C, D, G

#### 3. Clarify it

- A-4; B-5; C-2; D-1; E-3

### AT THE CIRCUS (PP. 8-9)

#### 1. Understand the terms

- A-6; B-1; C-5; D-2; E-3;  
F-7; G-4

#### 2. A little gossip

- A. hand
- B. crack
- C. whip
- D. muppet
- E. Don't get me wrong
- F. looked after
- G. petrified
- H. Right

#### 3. Phobias and that sort of thing

- A. get me wrong
- B. handed
- C. against
- D. phobia
- E. that sort of thing

#### 4. Matching

- A-2; B-4; C-1; D-3

#### 5. Spot the mistake

- A. What an awesome holiday! I wish we were still there.
- B. She got very angry and shouted at him to shut up.
- C. I haven't been to the circus since I was a child.
- D. Someone handed me a flyer in town yesterday. Look!

### LOGICAL ARGUMENTS (PP. 10-11)

#### 1. Cool connectors

- A. However
- B. Although
- C. Therefore
- D. Nevertheless
- E. According to

#### 2. Order the argument

- 1-G; 2-I; 3-B; 4-H;  
5-E; 6-A; 7-J; 8-C;  
9-D; 10-F

#### 3. Replace opinions with facts

- A. the figures show
- B. It could be argued
- C. it is debatable
- D. This is supported by

#### 4. In English, please!

- A. The question is, what should we do now?
- B. In reality, we need more staff.
- C. I think we should have a meeting every Friday.
- D. The figures show that we are doing well.  
(Other answers are possible.)

### NOCTURNAL ANIMALS (PP. 12-13)

#### 1. Creatures of the night

- Animals that are active at night: A, B, D, G, H

#### 2. Odd one out

- A. frog
- B. bee
- C. hedgehog
- D. badger