

Communicative English Language Skills II

Lecture 15

Grammar Focus: Relative clauses

Biniam Atnafe Beyene

biniwaatnafe@gmail.com

About This Lecture

Lecture 15 explores how Relative Clauses help us:

- Combine short sentences into smoother, mature sentences.
- Add information about a noun without starting a new sentence.
- Speak and write with clarity, detail, and precision.

Move from simple "kindergarten" sentences to academic prose.

This is a grammar-focused lecture but it directly serves their speaking and writing. The textbook companion is Unit 5 (Cultural Heritage) where the grammar appears.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define a relative clause and recognise it in a sentence.
- Use the relative pronouns who, whom, which, that, whose, where, when, why correctly.
- Distinguish defining from non-defining relative clauses.
- Combine two short sentences using a relative clause.
- Apply relative clauses to expand and add precision to academic writing.

Why Relative Clauses Matter

Without relative clauses

- I have a friend.
- He lives in Addis Ababa.
- He studies medicine.
- He won a scholarship.
- — Choppy. Repetitive. Childish.

With relative clauses

- I have a friend who lives in Addis Ababa,
- where he studies medicine, and
- who recently won a scholarship.
- — Smooth. Mature. Academic.

Key Concepts in This Lecture

— The two concepts are the spine of our lecture today

Sentence Expansion

- Adding extra information to a noun.
- Linking ideas without new sentences.
- Building longer, balanced sentences.
- Avoiding repetition of nouns.

Precision

- Specifying which person or thing.
- Removing ambiguity from writing.
- Selecting the exact relative pronoun.
- Punctuating to signal meaning.

Lesson Roadmap

1. Warm-up & dialogue

2. Clauses revisited

3. Relative pronouns

4. Defining clauses

5. Non-defining clauses

6. Combining sentences

7. Precision & punctuation

8. Practice activities

9. Recap & writing task

Warm-up- Activity 5.3 (Dialogue)

In pairs, read the dialogue and underline the relative clauses. A: Jack! Welcome back! How was the trip? B: I am very exhausted. I was annoyed with the man who sat next to me on the plane. A: Oh, really? What did he talk about? B: He was talking about my friend, Grace. He was in love with my friend whom he met last year. A: Oh! What a small world.

Step Back- What is a Clause?

A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a verb.

Independent clause — can stand alone as a sentence. *e.g. The book is interesting.*

Dependent clause — cannot stand alone; needs a main clause. *e.g. ...that I bought yesterday.*

A relative clause is a type of dependent clause.

Independent vs Dependent

Independent

- Has subject + verb.
- Expresses a complete thought.
- Stands alone.
- "The girl smiled."
- "Heritage is the past made present."

Dependent (Relative)

- Has subject + verb.
- Begins with a relative pronoun.
- Cannot stand alone.
- "...who smiled at me."
- "...which is anything we value."

What Is a Relative Clause?

A relative clause gives more information about a noun in the main clause.

- It is introduced by a relative pronoun: who, whom, which, that, whose, where, when, why. It always sits next to the noun it describes.

Example: *The student [who studies hard] passes the exam.*

↑ noun

↑ relative clause

Function of a Relative Clause

A relative clause performs three jobs: (Identify, Inform, Integrate)

- Identifies — tells which one we mean.
- Describes — adds extra detail about it.

Connects — joins two ideas into one sentence.

Compare:

- The man is my uncle.
- The man is wearing a hat.
- *The man who is wearing a hat is my uncle.*

The Relative Pronouns

Pronoun	Used For	Example
who	people (subject)	The girl who called me.
whom	people (object) — formal	The friend whom I met.
which	things / animals	The book which I read.
that	people or things (defining)	The car that broke down.
whose	possession	The boy whose pen is lost.
where	place	The town where I was born.
when	time	The day when we met.
why	reason	The reason why she left.

who- for people (subject)

who

for people (subject)

Replaces a person doing the action.

Examples

- The teacher who explains clearly is loved by students.
- Anyone who is interested should sign up.
- Those who arrive late will miss the test.

whom- for people (object)- formal

whom

for people (object) — formal

Used as the object; replaces him/her/them.

Examples

- The friend whom I met yesterday is a doctor.
- The candidate whom we selected has accepted.
- To whom it may concern — formal letter opening.

Whom is formal. In speech "who" is common, but academic writing prefers "whom" for objects.

which- for things and animals

which

for things and animals

For non-human nouns; can be defining or non-defining.

Examples

- The book which I bought is excellent.
- His car, which cost 20,000 pounds, is broken.
- Bins in which waste paper is collected.

Which is for things. In non-defining clauses we always use which, never that.

that- for people or things (defining only)

that

for people or things (defining only)

Common in defining clauses. Never after a comma.

Examples

- The picture that cost two pounds is mine.
- The student that won the prize is humble.
- Children that are born first are often firstborns.

That is informal-friendly. Cannot follow a comma. Cannot be used in non-defining clauses.

whose- for possession

whose

for possession

Shows ownership; works for people, animals, things.

Examples

- The boy whose pen is lost is crying.
- A boss whose authority is absolute.
- The artist whose name I forgot was prolific.

Whose = of whom / of which. Useful for compressed possession.

where- for places

where
for places

Replaces "in / at / to which" for locations.

Examples

- This is the restaurant where you can find world cuisine.
- The town where I was born is small.
- Lalibela is the place where the rock churches stand.

Where = in which. Strongly tied to physical or abstract location.

when- for time

when

for time

Replaces "in / on / at which" for moments.

Examples

- The moment when I found the results was awful.
- The Bronze Age was a period when the climate was warmer.
- The day when we graduated was unforgettable.

When refers to a moment, day, era, or period.

why- for reason

why

for reason

Almost always follows the noun "reason".

Examples

- I want to know the reason why you left.
- The reason why most of us change is to adapt.
- Tell me the reason why this happened.

Why is restricted. Always after "the reason".

Quick Practice 1- Choose the Pronoun

Fill in: *who, which, whose, where, when, why*

1. This is the restaurant _____ you can find many cuisines.
2. Those _____ are eager to join the class should sign up.
3. The 19th-century artist, ___ name I forget, ___ was prolific.
4. The Bronze Age was a period _____ the climate was warmer.
5. I want to know the reason _____ you decided not to join us.
6. Los Angeles, _____ is a tourist hub, ___ is fascinating.

Quick Practice 1- Answers

- 1. where — refers to a place (restaurant).
- 2. who — refers to people (those).
- 3. whose — possession (the artist's name).
- 4. when — refers to a time period (Bronze Age).
- 5. why — refers to the reason.
- 6. which — non-defining, refers to a thing/place name.

In the case of non-defining relative clauses, "that" can replace "who"

Defining Relative Clauses

Specify exactly which noun we mean. Essential to meaning.

- No commas.
- Cannot be removed without losing meaning.

Use who, whom, which, that, whose.

Examples

- *I saw the girl who was outside our house.*
- *They wanted the picture that cost two pounds.*

Defining = identifying. Without it, we don't know which girl, which picture.

Defining- More Examples

Identifying People

- The man who lives next door is friendly.
- A boss whose style is harsh is hard to work with.
- Anyone who arrives late waits outside.

Identifying Things

- The shirt that I bought is blue.
- Bins in which paper is recycled.
- A website that is accessible helps everyone.

Notice no commas anywhere.

Omitting the Relative Pronoun

In informal English, the relative pronoun can be dropped if it is the **OBJECT** of the clause.

- This is the shirt that I bought.
- *This is the shirt I bought.* ✓
- The girl who I like isn't here.
- *The girl I like isn't here.* ✓

Never drop the pronoun if it is the **SUBJECT** of the clause.

Common Errors with Defining Clauses

- X The man which lives here... → ✓ who / that lives here.
- X The book who I read... → ✓ which / that I read.
- X The friend, who I met yesterday, is here. (no commas in defining)
- X The girl what came late. → ✓ who / that came late.
- X Double subject: The girl who she came late. → ✓ The girl who came late.

Remember: The double-subject error is very common. Take care of that.

Pair Practice- Defining Clauses

Underline the better pronoun (Activity 5.5): 1. Do you know anyone which / who can repair burns on clothes? 2. Children from poor backgrounds that / which cause the worst problems. 3. Address the reference 'to who / whom it may concern'. 4. There is a person in this hall who / whose ticket has won. 5. The film is set in the period where / when the rich-poor gap was larger. 6. You can put the photo whichever / wherever you think it looks best.

Non-Defining Relative Clauses

Add EXTRA information that is not essential to identify the noun.

- Always set off with commas.
- Can be removed without losing core meaning.

Use who, whom, which, whose, where, when — never that.

Examples • *My father, who is 65 now, still works.*

- *His car, which cost nearly 20,000 pounds, is broken.*

Non-defining clauses are like a parenthesis: pause-able, removable, descriptive.

Non-Defining- More Examples

- Lalibela, which is in northern Ethiopia, is a UNESCO heritage site.
- Alicia Keys, who has 2.5 million followers, stopped using Twitter.
- World AIDS Day, when the world unites against AIDS, is on December 1.
- Addis Ababa, where the African Union is based, hosts many summits.
- My grandmother, whose stories shaped me, lives in the countryside.

Note that removing the clause keeps the sentence grammatical and meaningful — that is the test for non-defining.

Defining vs Non-Defining

Feature	Defining	Non-Defining
Purpose	Identifies the noun	Adds extra info
Commas	No	Yes
Removable?	No	Yes
"that" allowed?	Yes	No
Pronoun droppable?	Yes (object)	No

This is the single most useful summary table.

Punctuation- The Comma Rule

Two commas signal "non-essential" information. • My brother who lives in Dubai is rich. (I have several brothers — defining.) • *My brother, who lives in Dubai, is rich. (I have one brother — extra info.)*
Same words. Different commas. Different meaning.

Note that English uses commas to encode meaning, not just rhythm.

Connective Relative Clauses

A special use of non-defining clauses: they continue the story rather than describe. • *I gave the letter to James, who sent it to London.* • *She passed me the salt, which fell on the floor.* Notice how "who" and "which" act like "and he / and it" — moving the action forward.

Useful in narrative writing and storytelling.

Key Concept- Sentence Expansion

Sentence expansion = growing a short sentence by adding clauses.

- Step 1: Start with a simple sentence.
- Step 2: Identify a noun that needs more detail.
- Step 3: Attach a relative clause to that noun.
- Step 4: Re-read to check flow and punctuation.

Sentence Expansion- Demonstration

Base: The student passed the exam. + who: The student who studied daily passed the exam.+ whose: The student whose notes were neat passed the exam.+ that: The student that arrived early passed the exam.+ when: The student passed the exam, when she least expected it.+ where: The student passed the exam at the hall where her friend was.

Same kernel sentence, six expansions.

Technique- Combining Two Sentences

1. Find the repeated noun.
2. Replace the repeated noun with the right pronoun.
3. Place the new clause directly after the noun in sentence 1. **Demo:**• Elias loves movies. + There is a new movie playing tonight. • *Elias, who loves movies, will watch the new film that is playing tonight.*

Activity 2.11 from module. Three-step recipe. Practice next slide.

Group Activity- Combine the Sentences

In groups of three, combine each pair using a relative clause:

1. The girl is my sister. She is wearing the red dress.
2. Lalibela is famous. It contains rock-hewn churches.
3. I met a teacher. Her lessons changed my life.
4. The book is on the table. I bought the book yesterday.
5. December 1 is World AIDS Day. The world unites that day.

Share with the class. Discuss commas.

Key Concept- Precision

Precision means saying exactly what you mean — no more, no less. Relative clauses give precision by:

- Specifying the exact person or thing (defining).
- Adding only the necessary detail (non-defining).
- Eliminating ambiguity in long sentences.
- Showing the relationship between ideas.

Precision is a hallmark of academic writing.

Precision- Before & After

Vague

- The teacher told the boy he was wrong.
- A heritage is something old.
- I bought a phone. It was expensive.
- Bring the file. It is important.

Precise

- The teacher who marked the test told the boy who failed that he was wrong.
- Heritage is anything that previous generations valued.
- I bought the phone whose camera I had been admiring.
- Bring the file that contains the budget.

Each "before" sentence is ambiguous. Each "after" pinpoints the exact noun. NB. Relative clauses are surgical instruments for clarity.

Activity 5.4- Choose the Pronoun (from the module)

Use: who, whom, which, that, whose, where, when, why

1. The Amazons, _____ warrior nature is stressed in mythology, are popular in films.
2. Anyone _____ is interested in mountaineering needs strength.
3. _____ Creating a website _____ is accessible to colour-blind users matters.
4. One reason _____ most of us _____ change is to adapt to life.
5. The 19th-century artist, _____ name I forget, was prolific.
6. Los Angeles, _____ is one of the most visited cities, is fascinating.

Activity 5.4- Answers

1. whose (possession of the Amazons' nature).
2. who (subject — for people).
3. which / that (defining — for a thing).
4. why (refers to the reason).
5. whose (possession — the artist's name).
6. which (non-defining; never "that").

Many students will write "that". Never "that" after a comma.

Activity 5.5-Underline the Better Pronoun

1. The Council provides bins in that / which waste paper can be deposited.
2. The town hall played a tune, which / what amused the locals.
3. Why don't you tell the police which / what you told me yesterday?
4. The film is set in the period where / when the divide was greater.
5. You can put the photo whichever / wherever you think best.
6. It's usually children that / which cause the worst problems.

Note difference between which and what (what is not a relative pronoun for a known noun).

Activity 5.5- Answers

1. which (after preposition; never "that" after a preposition).
2. which (non-defining, refers to the whole event).
3. what (introduces a noun clause — not a relative clause).
4. when (refers to a time period).
5. wherever (place — generalised).
6. that (defining clause — for people, that is acceptable).

Item 3 is the trick. Use it to distinguish noun clauses from relative clauses.

Activity 5.6- Birth Order Paragraph

Complete with *who, whom, that, or whose*:

Birth-order researchers have found information (1) _____ helps us understand colleagues. Do you have a boss (2) _____ authoritarian style is hard? Children (3) _____ are firstborn often dominate. A creative co-worker may be a middle child. People (4) _____ have many siblings learn to share. Youngest children (5) _____ you work with may be controlling but social. There are factors (6) _____ shape personality beyond birth order.

Activity 5.6- Answers

1. that / which (defining — refers to information).
2. whose (possession — boss's style).
3. who / that (people — firstborn children).
4. who / that (people — siblings).
5. whom / who (object — formal whom; informal who).
6. that / which (defining — for things, factors).

Tone (formal vs informal) decides "whom" vs "who". They are acceptable alternatives

Activity 5.7- Social Networks Paragraph

Fill the gaps with suitable relative pronouns:

For people (1) _____ lives revolve around social networks, this is a sacrifice. Alicia Keys, (2) _____ has 2.5 million followers, decided to stop using Twitter. It happened on 1 December, (3) _____ is World AIDS Day—a day (4) _____ the world remembers AIDS, a disease (5) _____ has killed millions. The fans, (6) _____ usually get news from the stars, donated 1 million dollars.

Answers: 1 whose 2 who 3 which 4 when 5 which/that 6 who

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- X Using "that" after a comma.
- X Forgetting commas in non-defining clauses.
- X Repeating the subject (the man who he came...).
- X Using "which" for people or "who" for things.
- X Dropping a subject pronoun (The man came is my uncle X).
- X Misplacing the clause far from its noun.

Note that these six errors cover most of the marks lost in essays.

Writing & Speaking Tips

- Place the relative clause directly after its noun.
- Choose "that" for defining clauses about things — it sounds natural.
- Use commas to test: would the sentence still make sense without it? Then add commas.
- Vary sentence length — relative clauses help avoid choppy writing.
- Read your sentence aloud — listen for an unnatural pause where commas may belong.

Recap- Key Takeaways

Form

- Subject + verb + relative pronoun.
- Pronouns: who, whom, which, that, whose, where, when, why.
- Always sits next to its noun.

Function

- Defining: identifies — no commas.
- Non-defining: extra info — commas.
- Connective: continues the story.
- Tools for expansion & precision.

Homework & Writing Task

Task 1 — Combine

Find five short sentences in your textbook and combine each pair using a relative clause.

Task 2 — Write

Write a 150-word paragraph titled "A Cultural Heritage I Value" using at least four relative clauses (mark each one).

Submit at the start of next class. Be ready to share with your group.

Individual Assignment – Relative Clauses (10 Marks)

Instructions: Complete the following tasks. Each carries **2 marks**. Write your answers clearly and check pronoun choice, punctuation, and clause type.

1. Fill in the blank with the correct relative pronoun:

The artist, ____ paintings I admire, lives in Addis Ababa.

2. Combine the sentences using a relative clause:

The girl is my sister. She is wearing the red dress.

3. Identify whether the clause is **defining** or **non-defining**:

My father, who is 65 now, still works.

4. Correct the error:

The man which lives here is my uncle.

5. Expand the sentence with a relative clause:

I bought a phone. It was expensive.

You are the master of your destiny.

Take ownership of your knowledge — or it will be left behind.

———— Thank You

Questions, ideas, and reflections are warmly welcomed.

CONTACT

biniwaatnafe@gmail.com · Office Hours: Mon, Wed, Fri mornings

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