Relative Clauses

A relative clause adds information about a noun. Some tell us which one we mean; others just add an extra detail between commas.

A2–C1 · Philo & Sophia, Lesson 24

The horse that we bought · Bella, which we bought

DEFINING

The farmer (NOUN) | who sold us the horse (WHICH FARMER? ESSENTIAL) | lives nearby. (REST OF THE SENTENCE)

NON-DEFINING

Mr Reyes (NOUN) , | who sold us the horse (EXTRA DETAIL) , | lives nearby. (REST OF THE SENTENCE)

Defining: tells us which one. No commas. **that** is fine.
Non-defining: extra detail. Commas. Never **that**.
Test: take the clause out. Does the sentence still say who or what?

The relative words

who, which, that and the rest

WORD	USED FOR	EXAMPLE	WITH COMMAS?
who	people	The vet **who** came yesterday was kind.	yes
which	things, animals	The tractor **which** broke down is old.	yes
that	people or things	The cheese **that** she makes is famous.	no
whose	possession	The boy **whose** dog ran off is crying.	yes
whom	people, as object (formal)	The man **to whom** I wrote replied.	yes
where	places	That's the barn **where** we keep the hay.	yes
when	times	I remember the day **when** the foal was born.	yes
why	reasons, after *the reason*	That's the reason **why** we sold it.	no
what	the thing that	**What** we need is rain.	no

what has no noun before it: not "the thing what", but "the thing that" or just "what"

One comma, new meaning

defining or not?

*My sister **who lives in Seville** is a nurse.*
I have more than one sister.

*My sister, **who lives in Seville**, is a nurse.*
I have one sister; Seville is extra.

Names take commas: Toledo, which...

Leave it out

only if it's the object

*The horse **(that)** we bought is lame.*
we is the subject, so **that** can go.

*The horse **that** won is ours.*
that is the subject, so it must stay.

Only in defining clauses, never with commas

With prepositions

everyday or formal

Everyday: *the barn **(that)** we sleep **in***

Formal: *the barn **in which** we sleep*

*the man **to whom** I spoke*

Not ~~in that~~, not ~~to who~~.

After a preposition, use which or whom

which for a whole idea

always with a comma

*He sold the farm, **which** surprised everyone.*

*It rained all week, **which** was good for the crops.*

which refers to everything before it.

Not "what surprised everyone" here

Shorter relative clauses

- *The man **standing** by the gate* = who is standing
- *Eggs **collected** today* = that were collected
- *the first person **to arrive*** = who arrived

Quantity + of whom / of which

- *We have forty sheep, **most of which** are Merinos.*
- *She has three sons, **all of whom** farm.*
- Also: *some of, none of, both of, many of*

Spanish speakers, watch out

- *que* = **who / which / that**: choose by person or thing.
- *lo que necesito* = **what** I need.
- *cuyo perro* = **whose** dog.
- No extra pronoun: *the man who I saw*, not ~~who I saw him~~.

Want more?

Sophia explains **Which Is Essential, and Which Isn't** (Philo & Sophia, Lesson 24).

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