

# THE RELATIVE CLAUSE

## Recognize a relative clause when you find one.

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A relative clause—also called an *adjective* or *adjectival* clause—will meet three requirements.

- First, it will contain a **subject** and a **verb**.
- Next, it will begin with a **relative pronoun** (*who, whom, whose, that, or which*) or a **relative adverb** (*when, where, or why*).
- Finally, it will function as an **adjective**, answering the questions *What kind? How many? or Which one?*

The relative clause will follow one of these two patterns:

**RELATIVE PRONOUN OR ADVERB** + **SUBJECT** + **VERB**

**RELATIVE PRONOUN AS THE SUBJECT** + **VERB**

Here are some examples:

Which Francine did not accept

**Which** = relative pronoun; **Francine** = subject; **did accept** = verb (**not**, an **adverb**, is not officially part of the verb).

Where George found Amazing Spider-Man #96 in fair condition

**Where** = relative adverb; **George** = subject; **found** = verb.

That dangled from the one clean bathroom towel

**That** = relative pronoun (functioning as the subject); **dangled** = verb.

Who played video games until his eyes were blurry with fatigue

**Who** = relative pronoun (functioning as the subject); **played** = verb.

## Avoid creating a sentence fragment.

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A relative clause does not express a complete thought, so it cannot stand alone as a **sentence**. To avoid writing a **fragment**, you must connect each relative clause to a **main clause**.

Read the examples below. Notice that the relative clause *follows* the word that it describes.

To calm his angry girlfriend, Joey offered an apology, **which Francine did not accept**.

We tried our luck at the same flea market **where George found Amazing Spider-Man #96 in fair condition**.

Michelle screamed when she saw the spider **that dangled from the one clean bathroom towel**.

Brian said goodnight to his roommate Justin, **who continued to play video games until his eyes were blurry with fatigue**.

## Punctuate a relative clause correctly.

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Punctuating relative clauses can be tricky. For each sentence, you will have to decide if the relative clause is **essential** or **nonessential** and then use **commas** accordingly.

**Essential clauses** do *not* require commas. A relative clause is essential when you need the information it provides.

Read this example:

The children **who skateboard in the street** are especially noisy in the early evening.

**Children** is nonspecific. To know which ones we are talking about, we must have the information in the relative clause. Thus, the relative clause is essential and requires no commas.

If, however, we eliminate **children** and choose more specific nouns instead, the relative clause becomes **nonessential** and does require commas to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

Read this revision:

Matthew and his sister Loretta, **who skateboard in the street,** are especially noisy in the early evening.

