

THE RELATIVE CLAUSE

Recognize a relative clause when you find one.

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.

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.

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.

