

GRAMMAR

B2

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Defining and Non-Defining Relative Clauses



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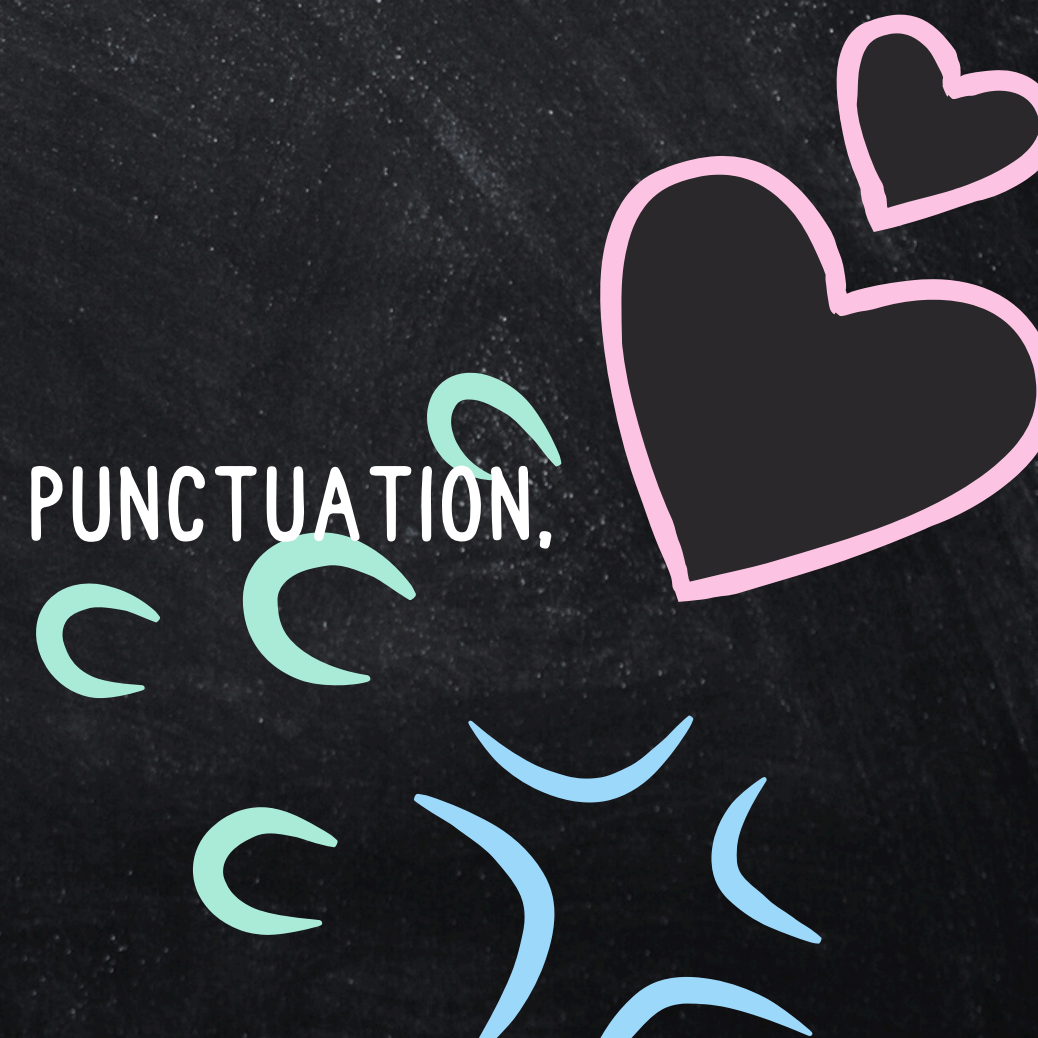
INTRODUCTION

IN SOPHISTICATED ENGLISH WRITING, FEW GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES CONTRIBUTE AS MUCH CLARITY AND ELEGANCE AS RELATIVE CLAUSES. THESE CLAUSES ENABLE US TO COMBINE IDEAS, SPECIFY WHICH PERSON OR THING WE MEAN, AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION WITHOUT CLUTTERING THE SENTENCE.

BROADLY, RELATIVE CLAUSES FALL INTO TWO CATEGORIES:

1. DEFINING (RESTRICTIVE) RELATIVE CLAUSES
2. NON-DEFINING (NON-RESTRICTIVE) RELATIVE CLAUSES
- 3.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE IS ESSENTIAL FOR ACCURATE MEANING, PUNCTUATION, AND STYLE—PARTICULARLY IN FORMAL BRITISH ENGLISH.



DEFINING RELATIVE
CLAUSES

A DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSE TELLS US EXACTLY WHICH PERSON OR THING WE ARE TALKING ABOUT.

WITHOUT IT, THE SENTENCE WOULD LOSE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION.
CHARACTERISTICS

- NO COMMAS ARE USED.
- THE CLAUSE IS ESSENTIAL TO THE MEANING OF THE SENTENCE.
- COMMON RELATIVE PRONOUNS: WHO, THAT, WHICH, WHERE, WHEN, WHOSE.

EXAMPLES

1. THE STUDENT WHO SITS IN THE FRONT ROW ALWAYS PARTICIPATES ACTIVELY.
2. → IDENTIFIES WHICH STUDENT.
3. THE BOOK THAT YOU LENT ME WAS FASCINATING.
4. → WITHOUT THE CLAUSE, WE WOULD NOT KNOW WHICH BOOK.
5. THE CAFÉ WHERE WE MET HAS CLOSED DOWN.
6. → SPECIFIES THE EXACT CAFÉ.



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DEFINING RELATIVE
CLAUSES

NOTES ON USAGE (BRITISH ENGLISH)

- BRITISH ENGLISH COMMONLY USES "WHICH" FOR THINGS, EVEN IN DEFINING CLAUSES.
 - THE LAPTOP WHICH I BOUGHT LAST WEEK HAS ALREADY BROKEN.
 - "THAT" IS ALSO ACCEPTABLE, PARTICULARLY IN INFORMAL CONTEXTS.
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NON-DEFINING
RELATIVE CLAUSES

A NON-DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSE ADDS EXTRA, NON-ESSENTIAL INFORMATION. THE SENTENCE WOULD REMAIN GRAMMATICALLY COMPLETE—AND RETAIN ITS CORE MEANING—WITHOUT IT.

CHARACTERISTICS

- THE CLAUSE IS SET OFF BY COMMAS (OR DASHES/PARENTHESES IN STYLISTIC WRITING).
- IT PROVIDES ADDITIONAL DETAILS, COMMENTS, OR BACKGROUND.
- "THAT" IS NEVER USED IN NON-DEFINING CLAUSES; USE WHO, WHICH, OR WHOSE.

EXAMPLES

1. MY SISTER, WHO LIVES IN OXFORD, IS VISITING TOMORROW.
2. → THE CLAUSE PROVIDES ADDITIONAL DETAIL; WE ALREADY KNOW WHO "MY SISTER" IS.
3. THE EIFFEL TOWER, WHICH WAS COMPLETED IN 1889, IS A MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION.
4. → THE CORE SUBJECT ("THE EIFFEL TOWER") IS UNAMBIGUOUS.
5. OUR HEADTEACHER, WHOSE PATIENCE IS REMARKABLE, SPOKE AT THE ASSEMBLY.
6. → ADDS DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION.



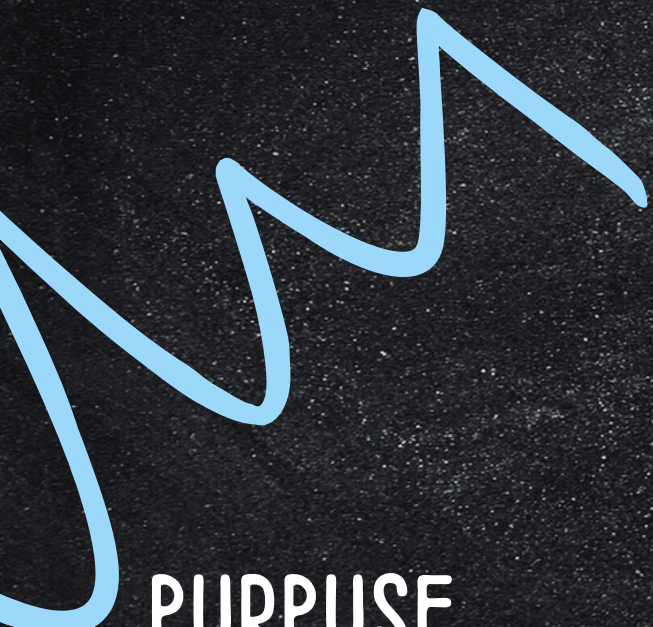
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NON-DEFINING
RELATIVE CLAUSES

IMPORTANT STYLE NOTES

- COMMAS ARE MANDATORY. OMITTING THEM CHANGES THE MEANING COMPLETELY.
- BECAUSE THE INFORMATION IS NOT ESSENTIAL, READERS TREAT IT AS AN ASIDE OR EMBELLISHMENT.





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CONTRASTING THE
TWO TYPES CLEARLY

PURPOSE
IS THE INFORMATION ESSENTIAL?
ARE COMMAS USED?
CAN YOU USE "THAT"?
DOES REMOVING THE CLAUSE CHANGE THE
CORE MEANING?

DEFINING.	NON-DEFINING
YES.	NO
NO.	YES
YES. (FOR THINGS/PEOPLE INFORMALLY)	NO
YES	NO



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DEFINING → NON-DEFINING

DEFINING: THE TEACHER WHO TAUGHT ME FRENCH HAS RETIRED.

NON-DEFINING: THE TEACHER, WHO TAUGHT ME FRENCH, HAS RETIRED.

MEANING DIFFERENCE:

DEFINING CLAUSE: IDENTIFIES WHICH TEACHER (PERHAPS THE SPEAKER HAD SEVERAL).

NON-DEFINING CLAUSE: ASSUMES THE LISTENER ALREADY KNOWS WHICH TEACHER IS MEANT.

NON-DEFINING → DEFINING

NON-DEFINING: MY CAR, WHICH I BOUGHT LAST YEAR, IS VERY EFFICIENT.

DEFINING: THE CAR THAT I BOUGHT LAST YEAR IS VERY EFFICIENT.

MEANING DIFFERENCE:

DEFINING VERSION: DISTINGUISHES THIS CAR FROM OTHER CARS.

NON-DEFINING VERSION: MERELY ADDS DETAIL ABOUT A KNOWN CAR.

TRANSFORMATION

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RELATIVE PRONOUNS INTRODUCE CLAUSES THAT DESCRIBE PEOPLE, THINGS, OR POSSESSION. EACH PRONOUN HAS A SPECIFIC MEANING AND SPECIFIC SITUATIONS IN WHICH IT IS APPROPRIATE.

RELATIVE PRONOUNS

A) "WHO"

"WHO" IS USED FOR PEOPLE AND REFERS TO THE SUBJECT OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE.

EXAMPLE:

THE GIRL WHO CALLED YOU IS WAITING OUTSIDE.

HERE, "WHO" REFERS TO "THE GIRL" AND PERFORMS THE ACTION IN THE CLAUSE ["CALLED"].

"WHO" IS THE MOST NATURAL AND COMMONLY USED RELATIVE PRONOUN FOR PEOPLE. IT IS USED IN BOTH DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING CLAUSES. IT IS NEVER USED FOR THINGS OR ANIMALS. IN BRITISH ENGLISH, "WHO" IS PREFERRED OVER "THAT" WHEN REFERRING TO PEOPLE IN FORMAL WRITING.

RELATIVE
PRONOUNS

B) "WHOM"

"WHOM" IS ALSO USED FOR PEOPLE, BUT IT REFERS TO THE OBJECT OF THE VERB, NOT THE SUBJECT.

EXAMPLE:

THE TEACHER WHOM YOU MET YESTERDAY IS RETIRING.

"WHOM" IS CONSIDERED MORE FORMAL AND IS USED MAINLY IN CAREFUL WRITING. MANY SPEAKERS AVOID IT IN EVERYDAY CONVERSATION AND SIMPLY USE "WHO". HOWEVER, IN ACADEMIC OR FORMAL ENGLISH, "WHOM" REMAINS IMPORTANT,

ESPECIALLY WHEN FOLLOWING A PREPOSITION:

THE COLLEAGUE WITH WHOM I WORK IS VERY EXPERIENCED.
"WHOM" NEVER REFERS TO THINGS.

RELATIVE
PRONOUNS

C) "WHOSE"

"WHOSE" EXPRESSES POSSESSION FOR PEOPLE, ANIMALS, AND THINGS.

EXAMPLE:

THE WRITER WHOSE BOOK YOU BOUGHT WILL BE SPEAKING TONIGHT.

"WHOSE" IS EXTREMELY VERSATILE AND WORKS FOR BOTH LIVING BEINGS AND OBJECTS. IN FORMAL ENGLISH, THIS IS PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE:

THE TREE WHOSE BRANCHES ARE BROKEN NEEDS TRIMMING.

"WHOSE" IS USED IN BOTH DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING CLAUSES AND IS THE ONLY RELATIVE PRONOUN EXPRESSING OWNERSHIP.



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D) "WHICH"

"WHICH" REFERS TO THINGS OR ANIMALS.

EXAMPLE:

THE COMPUTER WHICH I BOUGHT LAST WEEK IS ALREADY BROKEN.

IN BRITISH ENGLISH, "WHICH" IS USED VERY WIDELY. IT CAN INTRODUCE BOTH DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING CLAUSES. IT NEVER REFERS TO PEOPLE. IT CAN ALSO REFER BACK TO AN ENTIRE PREVIOUS IDEA:

SHE MISSED THE BUS, WHICH MADE HER LATE.

THIS USE IS COMMON AND CONSIDERED GOOD STYLE.

RELATIVE
PRONOUNS



RELATIVE
PRONOUNS

E) "THAT"

"THAT" CAN REFER TO PEOPLE, THINGS, OR ANIMALS, BUT ONLY IN DEFINING CLAUSES.

EXAMPLE:

THE BOOK THAT YOU RECOMMENDED WAS EXCELLENT.

"THAT" IS THE MOST FLEXIBLE RELATIVE PRONOUN IN SPEECH. HOWEVER, IT IS NEVER USED IN NON-DEFINING CLAUSES. IT IS OFTEN PREFERRED TO "WHICH" IN SPOKEN ENGLISH FOR OBJECTS, AND IT CAN REPLACE "WHO" WHEN REFERRING TO PEOPLE, ALTHOUGH THIS IS SLIGHTLY LESS FORMAL.



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RELATIVE
ADVERBS

RELATIVE ADVERBS INTRODUCE CLAUSES THAT DESCRIBE TIME, PLACE, OR REASON. THEY FUNCTION LIKE PRONOUNS BUT POINT TO CIRCUMSTANCES RATHER THAN PEOPLE OR THINGS.

A) "WHERE"

"WHERE" REFERS TO A PLACE.

EXAMPLE:

THIS IS THE HOUSE WHERE I GREW UP.

"WHERE" REPLACES EXPRESSIONS SUCH AS "IN WHICH", "AT WHICH", OR "TO WHICH".

IT CAN BE USED IN DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING CLAUSES. IT ADDS CLARITY WHEN REFERRING TO LOCATIONS, INCLUDING PHYSICAL PLACES AND METAPHORICAL ONES.

THIS IS THE SITUATION WHERE WE MUST BE CAREFUL.





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RELATIVE
ADVERBS

B) "WHEN"

"WHEN" REFERS TO A TIME.

EXAMPLE:

THE DAY WHEN WE MET WAS UNFORGETTABLE.

"WHEN" OFTEN REPLACES THE PHRASE "ON WHICH". IT IS USEFUL FOR DATES, PERIODS, MONTHS, SEASONS, AND ANY TIME EXPRESSION.

IT WORKS IN BOTH DEFINING AND NON-DEFINING CLAUSES:

LAST SUMMER, WHEN THE WEATHER WAS PERFECT, WE TRAVELLED NORTH.



RELATIVE
ADVERBS

C) "WHY"

"WHY" REFERS TO A REASON.

EXAMPLE:

THE REASON WHY HE LEFT IS STILL UNCLEAR.

"WHY" IS USED ONLY AFTER THE NOUN "REASON". MANY SPEAKERS SIMPLY SAY "THE REASON HE LEFT...", OMITTING "WHY".

IN STRICT BRITISH ENGLISH GRAMMAR, "WHY" IS ACCEPTED IN DEFINING CLAUSES BUT NOT IN NON-DEFINING ONES. IT CANNOT BE USED AFTER OTHER NOUNS—ONLY "REASON".





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SUMMARY

- WHO → PEOPLE (SUBJECT)
- WHOM → PEOPLE (OBJECT, FORMAL)
- WHOSE → POSSESSION (PEOPLE, ANIMALS, THINGS)
- WHICH → THINGS AND ANIMALS
- THAT → PEOPLE, ANIMALS, AND THINGS (DEFINING ONLY)
- WHERE → PLACES
- WHEN → TIMES
- WHY → REASON ("THE REASON WHY...")
-

EACH ONE HAS A PRECISE ROLE THAT CANNOT BE REPLACED WITHOUT CHANGING THE STRUCTURE OR CLARITY OF THE SENTENCE.



COMMON ERRORS

COMMON ERRORS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

✗ USING "THAT" IN A NON-DEFINING CLAUSE

CORRECT: THE MUSEUM, WHICH WAS RENOVATED RECENTLY, IS NOW OPEN.

✗ FORGETTING THE COMMAS

CORRECT: MY BROTHER, WHO LIVES ABROAD, IS COMING HOME.

WITHOUT COMMAS, THE MEANING INCORRECTLY SUGGESTS YOU HAVE MULTIPLE BROTHERS.

✗ COMMA BEFORE A DEFINING CLAUSE

INCORRECT: THE HOUSE, THAT WAS PAINTED BLUE, IS FOR SALE.

CORRECT: THE HOUSE THAT WAS PAINTED BLUE IS FOR SALE.

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PRACTICE

FILL IN THE BLANK WITH WHO, WHOM, WHOSE, WHICH, THAT, WHERE, WHEN, OR WHY.

1. THE TEACHER _____ EXPLAINED THE LESSON YESTERDAY IS VERY KIND.
2. THE RESTAURANT _____ WE ATE LAST NIGHT WAS AMAZING.
3. THE STUDENT _____ HOMEWORK WAS EXCELLENT WON THE PRIZE.
4. THIS IS THE PARK _____ I PLAYED AS A CHILD.
5. I REMEMBER THE DAY _____ WE FIRST MET.
6. THE REASON _____ SHE LEFT EARLY IS STILL UNKNOWN.
7. THE MOVIE _____ YOU RECOMMENDED WAS FANTASTIC.
8. MY UNCLE, _____ LIVES IN EDINBURGH, IS VISITING NEXT WEEK.



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ANSWER KEY

- WHO → "THE TEACHER WHO EXPLAINED THE LESSON YESTERDAY IS VERY KIND."
 - "WHO" IS USED FOR A PERSON AS THE SUBJECT OF THE CLAUSE.
 - WHERE → "THE RESTAURANT WHERE WE ATE LAST NIGHT WAS AMAZING."
 - "WHERE" REFERS TO A PLACE.
 - WHOSE → "THE STUDENT WHOSE HOMEWORK WAS EXCELLENT WON THE PRIZE."
 - "WHOSE" SHOWS POSSESSION.
 - WHERE → "THIS IS THE PARK WHERE I PLAYED AS A CHILD."
 - "WHERE" REFERS TO A PLACE.
 - WHEN → "I REMEMBER THE DAY WHEN WE FIRST MET."
 - "WHEN" REFERS TO TIME.
 - WHY → "THE REASON WHY SHE LEFT EARLY IS STILL UNKNOWN."
 - "WHY" REFERS TO REASON (AFTER "THE REASON").
 - WHICH → "THE MOVIE WHICH YOU RECOMMENDED WAS FANTASTIC."
 - "WHICH" REFERS TO A THING. COULD ALSO USE "THAT" IN DEFINING CLAUSE: "THE MOVIE THAT YOU RECOMMENDED..."
 - WHO → "MY UNCLE, WHO LIVES IN EDINBURGH, IS VISITING NEXT WEEK."
 - "WHO" REFERS TO A PERSON IN A NON-DEFINING CLAUSE (COMMAS REQUIRED).
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PRACTICE

READ THE SENTENCE AND WRITE DEFINING OR NON-DEFINING.

1. THE WOMAN WHO TEACHES FRENCH IS VERY STRICT.
2. MR SMITH, WHO IS OUR HEADTEACHER, GAVE AN EXCELLENT SPEECH.
3. THE LIBRARY WHERE I STUDY IS ALWAYS QUIET.
4. THE CAR, WHICH WAS PARKED OUTSIDE, BELONGS TO MY NEIGHBOUR.
5. THE REASON WHY HE WAS LATE SURPRISED EVERYONE.



ANSWER KEY

- DEFINING → "THE WOMAN WHO TEACHES FRENCH IS VERY STRICT."
 - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION TO IDENTIFY THE WOMAN.
 - NON-DEFINING → "MR SMITH, WHO IS OUR HEADTEACHER, GAVE AN EXCELLENT SPEECH."
 - EXTRA INFORMATION; WE ALREADY KNOW WHO MR SMITH IS.
 - DEFINING → "THE LIBRARY WHERE I STUDY IS ALWAYS QUIET."
 - ESSENTIAL TO IDENTIFY WHICH LIBRARY.
 - NON-DEFINING → "THE CAR, WHICH WAS PARKED OUTSIDE, BELONGS TO MY NEIGHBOUR."
 - EXTRA INFORMATION; COMMAS INDICATE NON-DEFINING.
 - DEFINING → "THE REASON WHY HE WAS LATE SURPRISED EVERYONE."
 - "WHY" GIVES ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE REASON.
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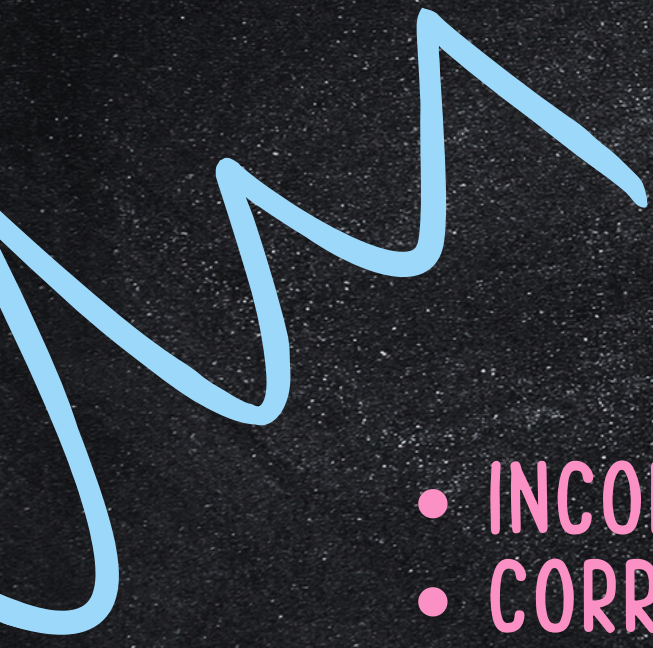
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PRACTICE

SOME SENTENCES HAVE ERRORS WITH RELATIVE CLAUSES. REWRITE THEM CORRECTLY.

1. THE MAN, THAT SPOKE TO ME, IS A DOCTOR.
 2. MY SISTER WHO LIVES IN LONDON, IS VERY TALENTED.
 3. THE FILM WHICH I WATCHED LAST NIGHT, WAS BORING.
 4. THE CITY THAT I GREW UP IN, IS BEAUTIFUL.
 5. THE REASON HE LEFT, WHY IS UNCLEAR.
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ANSWER KEY

- INCORRECT: "THE MAN, THAT SPOKE TO ME, IS A DOCTOR."
 - CORRECT: "THE MAN WHO SPOKE TO ME IS A DOCTOR."
 - NON-DEFINING CANNOT USE "THAT" IN COMMAS; "WHO" IS CORRECT.
 - INCORRECT: "MY SISTER WHO LIVES IN LONDON, IS VERY TALENTED."
 - CORRECT: "MY SISTER, WHO LIVES IN LONDON, IS VERY TALENTED."
 - COMMAS ARE NEEDED FOR A NON-DEFINING CLAUSE.
 - INCORRECT: "THE FILM WHICH I WATCHED LAST NIGHT, WAS BORING."
 - CORRECT: "THE FILM WHICH I WATCHED LAST NIGHT WAS BORING."
 - DEFINING CLAUSE DOES NOT USE COMMAS.
 - INCORRECT: "THE CITY THAT I GREW UP IN, IS BEAUTIFUL."
 - CORRECT: "THE CITY THAT I GREW UP IN IS BEAUTIFUL."
 - DEFINING CLAUSE, NO COMMAS.
 - INCORRECT: "THE REASON HE LEFT, WHY IS UNCLEAR."
 - CORRECT: "THE REASON WHY HE LEFT IS UNCLEAR."
 - "WHY" MUST FOLLOW "THE REASON", NO EXTRA COMMA.
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PRACTICE

COMBINE THE TWO SENTENCES USING A RELATIVE PRONOUN OR ADVERB.
INDICATE IF IT IS DEFINING OR NON-DEFINING.

1. I MET A WRITER YESTERDAY. HE WROTE MY FAVOURITE BOOK.
2. THIS IS THE SCHOOL. I STUDIED THERE FOR FIVE YEARS.
3. THE PROFESSOR GAVE A LECTURE. EVERYONE ADMIRERD HIM.
4. THE HOUSE IS BEAUTIFUL. IT BELONGS TO MY AUNT.
5. THE FESTIVAL WAS INCREDIBLE. IT HAPPENED LAST SUMMER.





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ANSWER KEY

- I MET A WRITER YESTERDAY. HE WROTE MY FAVOURITE BOOK.
 - ANSWER: "I MET A WRITER WHO WROTE MY FAVOURITE BOOK." - DEFINING
 - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION TO IDENTIFY THE WRITER.
 - THIS IS THE SCHOOL. I STUDIED THERE FOR FIVE YEARS.
 - ANSWER: "THIS IS THE SCHOOL WHERE I STUDIED FOR FIVE YEARS." - DEFINING
 - ESSENTIAL TO IDENTIFY THE SCHOOL.
 - THE PROFESSOR GAVE A LECTURE. EVERYONE ADMIRER HIM.
 - ANSWER: "THE PROFESSOR, WHOM EVERYONE ADMIRER, GAVE A LECTURE." - NON-DEFINING
 - EXTRA INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROFESSOR; COMMAS REQUIRED.
 - THE HOUSE IS BEAUTIFUL. IT BELONGS TO MY AUNT.
 - ANSWER: "THE HOUSE, WHICH BELONGS TO MY AUNT, IS BEAUTIFUL." - NON-DEFINING
 - EXTRA INFORMATION; COMMAS INDICATE NON-DEFINING.
 - THE FESTIVAL WAS INCREDIBLE. IT HAPPENED LAST SUMMER.
 - ANSWER: "THE FESTIVAL, WHICH HAPPENED LAST SUMMER, WAS INCREDIBLE." - NON-DEFINING
 - EXTRA INFORMATION ABOUT THE FESTIVAL.
- 