



Palm Beach Atlantic University
Center for Writing Excellence

RELATIVE CLAUSES AND PRONOUNS

What is a relative clause?

A relative (or adjectival) clause is a clause that functions as an adjective. It gives more information about the noun.

Examples:

The chair, **which I placed in the corner**, is comfortable.

The roommate **that majors in Biology** loves bears.

In the first sentence, “which I placed in the corner” gives more information about the chair. The second sentence contains the clause “that majors in Biology,” which gives more information about the roommate. These relative clauses give us more information about the nouns to which they relate.

What is a relative pronoun?

A relative clause is introduced by one of three different pronouns. The pronouns **who**, **which**, and **that** are the relative pronouns, and they are used to introduce different relative clauses depending on the circumstances.

A relative clause begins with the pronoun **who** when the relative clause is giving information about a person, such as a roommate. It can be used with or without commas, depending on whether they are appropriate to the sentence.

Which and **that** are both used when the relative clause is giving information about a thing or object, such as a chair or a clause (as in the examples above). The difference between the two is that when **which** is used, the clause must be set off by commas, because it provides information less vital to the sentence. **That** is used without commas and allows the sentence to run more smoothly.

Remember that these pronouns can be used without necessarily being relative pronouns, but one of them is always needed for a relative clause.