

USING ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

Sample dialogue

Salesclerk: Can I help you?
 Customer: I'd like an IPOD, please.
 Salesclerk: **Which one** of these would you like?
 Customer: I'm looking for **an IPOD that contains** a cellular phone.

Sample dialogue

Salesclerk: Can I help you?
 Customer: I'd like to see some video games, please.
 Salesclerk: **What kind of** games are you interested in?
 Customer: I'm interested in **some games that my kids can use** to help them with their English.

In each of the above dialogues, the customer is **describing**¹ a thing (a noun).

- In the first dialogue, the thing is a **palm pilot**.
- In the second dialogue, the thing is some **games**.

In each dialogue, the salesclerk asks the customer to describe the things he/she wants in greater detail.

Function

The **adjective clause functions like an adjective**.

- The adjective clause **describes** (gives further information about) a noun.²

Like all adjectives, the adjective clause **answers the questions**:

- **what kind of ?**
 - *What kind of* video games are you interested in?
 - Games *that my kids can play*. (that my kids can play = adjective clause)
- **which one ?**
 - *Which* palm pilot?
 - A palm pilot that contains a cellular phone.

An **adjective** is typically one word, and precedes the noun it describes.

- An **adjective clause** describes a noun by means of a clause.³
- An **adjective clause** follows the noun it describes.

¹ giving further information about

² Person, place or thing

³ Clause = subject + verb

You can **use adjective clauses to**:

- Give definitions
- State the existence of a person, place, or thing

Giving Definitions

An opinion letter is a document **that sets forth** the client's legal situation under specific facts.

 | |
(noun) (adjective clause)

Management is a discipline **that incorporates** theory and art.

 | |
(noun) (adjective clause)

I'd like a secretary **who can make** office decisions intelligently.

 | |
(noun) (adjective clause)

Stating the Existence of a Noun

I know someone **who used to work there.** person

Do you know of a country **that would offer favorable tax treatment** on an investment like this? place

I have some information **that might be useful.** thing

Form

An **adjective clause** is sometimes called a **relative clause**.

- The word **relative** refers to the **pronoun** that must **introduce** the adjective/relative **clause**.

For example:

I have some **information that** might be useful.

She has **a good friend who** used to work there.

In the above examples, **that** and **who** are pronouns *introducing* the adjective clauses.

Note that these pronouns immediately follow the nouns *information* and *friend*.

These pronouns are **related to** the nouns (*information* and *friend*) that precede them.

A relative clause must be **introduced** by one of the following relative pronouns:

- who
- that
- which
- whom
- whose

The relative pronoun must represent (be the same as) the noun it is about to describe.

- In the example above, **information** (noun) and **that** (relative pronoun) are the **same thing**.
- **Friend** (noun) and **who** (relative pronoun introducing the descriptive clause) are the **same person**.

Examples:

- I know **a man who** works there.
I know **a man that** works there.
- I know **a man who** you should meet.
I know **a man that** you should meet.
I know **a man whom** you should meet.
- I know **a man who** you should talk to.
I know **a man that** you should talk to.
I know **a man to whom** you should speak.

- I know **a man whose** client was in on that deal.⁴
We have several **clients whose** companies are expanding.

Note: **What** is **NOT** a relative pronoun.

I have some clients what never pay on time. (INCORRECT)⁵

I have **some clients who** never pay on time. (correct)

I have **some clients that** never pay on time. (correct)⁶

Summary

- **Who** can only refer to **people**.
- **Which** can only refer to **things**.
- **That** can refer to **people or things**.

⁴ **Do not say:** I know a man “*that his client*” Merge “*that his*” into whose.

Do not say: We have several clients “*that their companies*” Merge “*that their*” into whose.

⁵ What is **not** a relative pronoun. Do not use what in adjectival clauses.

⁶ **Do not say:** I have some clients “*that they never pay*. . . .” The pronoun **that** already links *clients* and *pay*.

Function

A relative pronoun can serve any function within the relative clause.

Subject

I know the person who handles that account.	(who ↘	<i>subject</i> ⁷
I know the person that handles that account.	(that ↗	

Object

I know a person whom you should meet .	(whom ↘	<i>object</i> ⁸
I know a person that you should meet .	(that ↗	
I have the information that you requested .	(that ↘	<i>object</i> ⁹
I have the information which you requested .	(which ↗	
Clark is the banker to whom we spoke . ¹⁰	(whom - <i>object</i> ¹¹)	

* **Whom** takes “m” like **him** or **them** in the objective case.

Hint -- You may want to use **that** as your key relative pronoun. It works as both a subject and an object, and is correct with persons and things.

Possessive

I know **a man whose wife** is a judge on that court.
I know **a man whose company is** on the brink of bankruptcy.

- **Whose** connects the referential noun (*a man*) to the second noun – the one being possessed (*wife, company*).

⁷ Subject of the verb *handles*.

⁸ Object of the verb *meet*. Here, *you* functions as *subject* of the verb *meet*. The verb *meet* is the *relative clause verb*. All clauses consist of (i) a subject; and (ii) a verb.

⁹ Object of the verb *requested*.

¹⁰ Natives will typically say: “Clark is the banker that we spoke to.”

¹¹ *Whom* is the *object* of the preposition *to*.

For example:

I have a client that his records are never in order or up to date.

incorrect

I have **a client whose records** are never in order or up to date.

correct

- **Whose** is placed **immediately after** the noun it describes (**a client whose**)
- **Whose** is placed **immediately before** the noun it possesses (a client **whose books**)
- Pronounce the /s/ in **whose** like the /s/ in **his** or in the 's' possessive: **/z/**
 - John's company
 - his company
 - the man whose company
- The e in **whose** is silent. ¹²

¹² Pronounce "whose" exactly like "who's?" – the short form of "who is?"

EXERCISES

Directions: Change the following pairs of sentences into one sentence by connecting the two nouns.

Example: I'm sure it's Mary. Her clients are all Canadians.

I'm sure it's **Mary whose clients** are all Canadians.

1. I have a neighbor. His wife is a judge.
2. Joe hired three new attorneys. Their job is to develop a trademark practice in the firm.
3. I have a good friend. His job is much more demanding than mine.

Directions: Combine the following sentences into one sentence that describes a person or an object by means of an adjective clause. Study the example.

Example: They have a client. He always calls on Monday morning.

They have a client who always calls on Monday morning.

1. I have a brother. He's ten years older than I am.
2. They gave me the information. It was incorrect.
3. I'd like to buy some English-language law dictionaries. I saw them at a bookstore down the street.
4. I have several neighbors. They travel to work over an hour each way.
5. I have a colleague. His kids go to school there.

6. Have you met my new colleague? She speaks English fluently.

7. The man used to be Chief Justice. You met the man the other day.

8. I'm interested in a video scanner. I can bring it back home with me.

9. Do you sell disks? Can I use them with this computer?

10. I have a new job. It's very fulfilling.

ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

NOTE Where there is more than one correct way to construct the adjectival clause, I have indicated the options. Do *not* worry about knowing more than one way!! As long as you can use one of them correctly, you are in good shape!!

Directions: Change the following pairs of sentences into one sentence by connecting the two nouns.

Example: I'm sure it's Mary. Her clients are all Americans.

I'm sure it's **Mary whose clients** are all Americans.

1. I have a neighbor. His wife is a judge.

I have a neighbor whose wife is a judge.

2. Joe hired three new attorneys. Their job is to develop a trademark practice in the firm.

Joe hired three new attorneys whose job is to develop a trademark practice in the firm.

3. I have a good friend. His job is much more demanding than mine.

I have a good friend whose job is much more demanding than mine.

Directions: Combine the following sentences into one sentence that describes a person or an object by means of an adjective clause. Study the example.

Example: They have a client. He always calls on Monday morning.

They have a client who always calls on Monday morning.

1. I have a brother. He's ten years older than I am.

I have a brother who's ¹³ ten years older than I am.

2. They gave me the information. It was incorrect.

**The information that they gave me was incorrect.
The information which they gave me was incorrect.**

¹³ Or: who is

3. I'd like to buy some English-language dictionaries. I saw them at a bookstore down the street.

I'd like to buy some English-language law dictionaries that I saw at a bookstore down the street.

I'd like to buy some English-language law dictionaries which ¹⁴ I saw at a bookstore down the street.

4. I have several neighbors. They travel to work over an hour each way.

**I have several neighbors who travel to work over an hour each way.
I have several neighbors that ¹⁵ travel to work over an hour each way.**

5. I have a colleague. His kids go to school there.

I have a colleague whose kids go to school there.

6. Have you met my new colleague? She speaks English fluently.

Have you met my new colleague who speaks English fluently?

7. The man used to be Chief Justice. You met the man the other day.

**The man that you met the other day used to be Chief Justice.
The man whom you met the other day used to be Chief Justice.
The man you met the other day used to be Chief Justice. ¹⁶**

8. I'm interested in a video scanner. I can bring it back home with me.

**I'm interested in a video scanner that I can bring back home with me.
I'm interested in a video scanner I can bring back home with me.**

9. Do you sell disks? Can I use them with this computer?

**Do you sell disks that I can use with this computer?
Do you sell disks I can use with this computer?**

10. I have a new job. It's very fulfilling.

I have a new job that's very fulfilling.

¹⁴ *Which* is always correct for *things*.

¹⁵ *That* can be used for *people* or *things*.

¹⁶ In everyday conversation, natives often omit the relative pronoun when it is the *object* of the relative clause. *Whom* is the *object* of the verb *met*. Similar examples include:

- The information they gave me was really out of date.
- The direction they're taking is toward arbitration.

If you are not sure whether to omit the relative pronoun – do not do so. **Include it.** I have only added this information so you are not surprised or confused if a native speaker uses this option.

I have a new job that is very fulfilling.
I have a new job which is very fulfilling.