

## Restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

The relative pronouns who and which can be used to identify or define nouns. They tell us which person or thing we are talking about.

The man who had cheated me was arrested by the police.

Here the relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun who identifies the noun man. Which man?  
- the one who cheated me.

The book which you see on the table is my favorite. (Which book? - the one you see on the table)

Such a relative clause which defines or identifies its antecedent (the noun phrase) is called a defining or restrictive relative clause.

Restrictive relative clauses follow immediately after the noun that they modify. They are not separated by pauses in speech or commas in writing. Note that a restrictive relative clause cannot be left out without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

When a relative clause merely gives some additional information about the noun, it is called a non-defining or non-restrictive relative clause. Note that a non-restrictive relative clause is not necessary for the identification of the noun.

My brother, who is a doctor, lives abroad. (Here the relative clause who is a doctor doesn't identify the noun my brother. It merely gives some additional information.)

Ann, who works with my brother, is a post graduate in psychology. (Here the relative clause who works with my brother merely gives some additional information about Ann.)

Note that in writing a non-defining or non-restrictive relative clause is separated from the main clause by commas. A non-defining relative clause can be easily left out.

For example, the pair of sentences given below convey the same information. The second sentence just happens to give some additional information.

Ann is a postgraduate in psychology.

Ann, who was my senior at university, is a postgraduate in psychology.