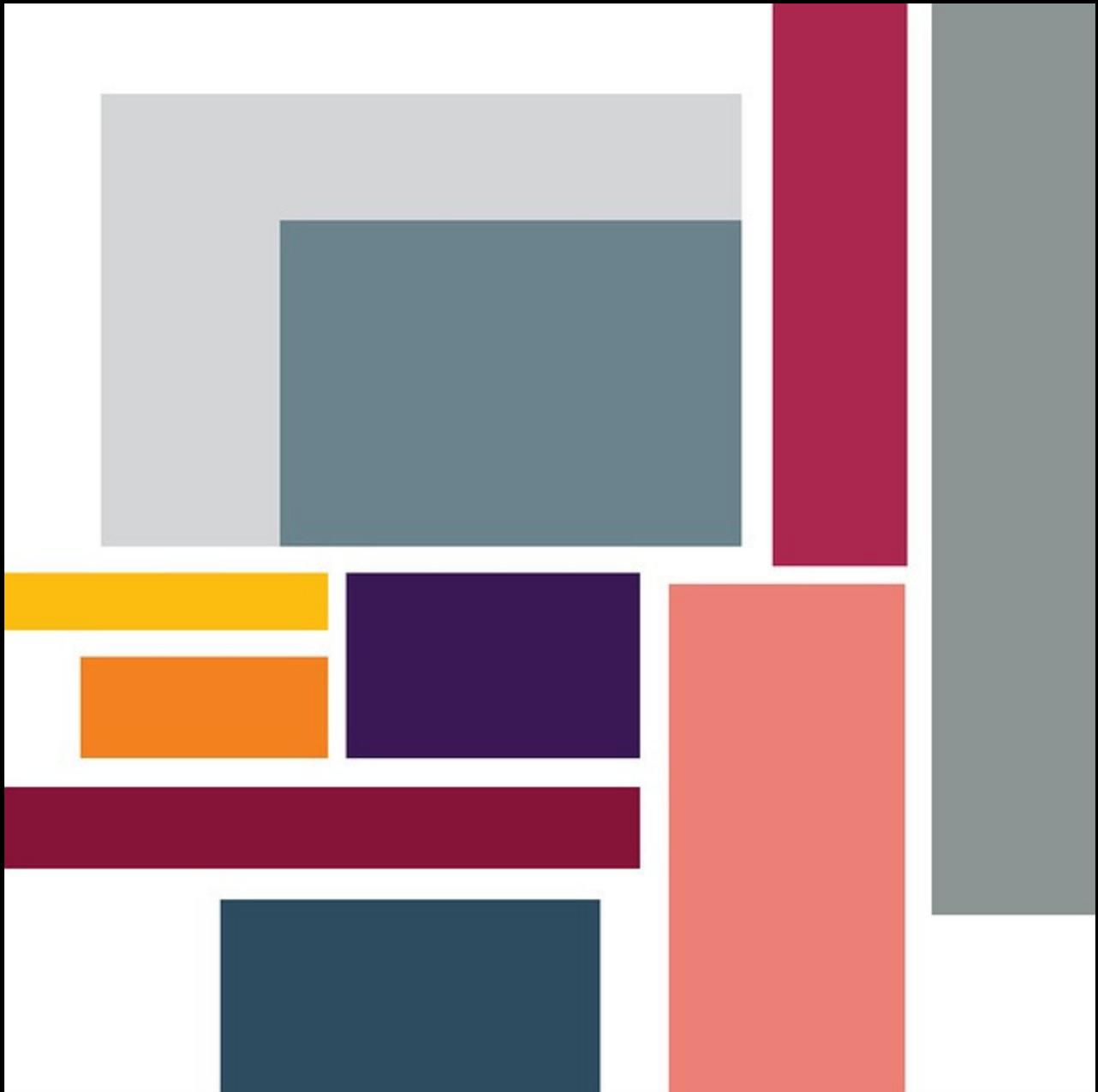


Relative Pronouns



Relative Pronouns

Lesson & Exercises

Relative pronouns refer back to the noun that immediately precedes them; they are used to join clauses smoothly. Most of these words begin with *w*, so you can also think of them as “w-words.”

They include:

- Who
- Whose
- Whom
- Which
- That
- Where
- When

In the examples below, notice how a pronoun from the first sentence becomes the relative pronoun in the second.

Which

Sentence 1: J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* novels are set in Middle-earth.

Sentence 2: **It** is an imaginary continent inhabited by a variety of mystical creatures.

Combined: J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* novels are set in Middle-earth, **which** is an imaginary continent inhabited by a variety of mystical creatures.

Who

Sentence 1: W.E.B. DuBois’ intellectual gifts were recognized by many of his high school teachers.

Sentence 2: **They** encouraged DuBois to further his education.

Combined: W.E.B. DuBois’ intellectual gifts were recognized by many of his high school teachers, **who** encouraged DuBois to further his education.

That

Sentence 1: ShapeShifter is a computer program.

Sentence 2: **It** offers users the opportunity to design animations without purchasing expensive software or licenses.

Combined: ShapeShifter is a computer program **that** offers users the opportunity to design animations without purchasing expensive software or licenses.

Note that relative clauses beginning with *that* are never set off by commas.

Where

- Sentence 1: William Faulkner's novels are set mostly in Mississippi.
- Sentence 2: Faulkner was born in Mississippi and spent his entire life **there**.
- Combined: William Faulkner's novels are set mostly in Mississippi, **where** Faulkner was born and spent his entire life.

When

- Sentence 1: Thomas Jefferson returned to the United States from Paris in 1820.
- Sentence 2: **At that time**, he finished serving as the American ambassador to France.
- Combined: Thomas Jefferson returned to the United States from Paris in 1820, **when** he finished serving as the American ambassador to France.

“Embedded” Clauses

Relative phrases and clauses can also appear in the middle of a sentence. Used this way, they allow you to “embed” one statement in another in order to make your writing smoother and more fluid.

Relative clauses that begin with *which* (and sometimes *who/whose*, *when*, and *where*) are non-essential, or non-restrictive. Typically inserted before the verb, they are surrounded by commas and can be crossed out of a sentence without affecting its basic meaning or structure.

They also allow you to indicate ideas' relative importance. By definition, non-essential information is less important than the main part of the sentence; it's more like an aside to the reader.

Which

- Sentence 1: Voltaire's novel *Candide* was one of the most scandalous works of the eighteenth century.
- Sentence 2: **It** was written sometime between 1757 and 1758.

To combine the two sentences, the subject pronoun *it* is replaced with the relative pronoun *which*, and the new clause is inserted into the first sentence, before the verb *was*.

- Combined: Voltaire's novel *Candide*, **which was written sometime between 1757 and 1758**, was one of the most scandalous works of the eighteenth century.

Who

- Sentence 1: The works of the French writer **Voltaire** are still widely read today.
- Sentence 2: **He** is considered one of the most important figures of the Enlightenment.
- Combined: The works of the French writer Voltaire, **who is considered one of the most important figures of the Enlightenment**, are still widely read today.