

DEFINING AND  
NON-DEFINING  
RELATIVE CLAUSES

## Defining relative clauses

Defining relative clauses carry **essential information**, because they **identify which** thing or person we are talking about, and they are used **without commas**.

- *This is the music **which was used at the show**.*
- *Have they found the prisoner **who escaped last week**?*

## We can use 'that'

In defining relative clauses we can use **that** instead of **which** or **who**.

- *This is the music **that** was used at the show.*
- *Have they found the prisoner **that** escaped last week?*

## When can we omit **who/which/that**?

**Who/which/that**, can be **omitted** if they are followed by **subject + verb**

- *Can you pass me the box (**which/that**) I keep in the top drawer?*
- *You are not the man (**who/that**) I thought you were.*

## Non-defining relative clauses

Non-defining relative clauses are used **between commas**, and they add **extra information** which is **not necessary** to know who or what we are talking about.

- *This music, **which I really like**, was used at the show.*
- *My sister, **who I truly admire**, is coming for Thanksgiving.*

**We cannot use ~~that~~, and we cannot omit  
'who'/'which'**

In non-defining relative clauses (between  
commas) we cannot use **~~that~~**, and we cannot  
omit **who/which**.

- ~~*This music, **that I really like**, was used at  
the show.*~~
- ~~*My sister, **I truly admire**, is coming for  
Thanksgiving.*~~

## Defining vs non-defining relative clauses

In a defining relative clause the information is essential to identify who or what we are talking about, whereas in non-defining relative clauses we just add extra the information, which is not necessary. Compare:

- *My brother **who lives in Cardiff** is much older than me.* (=I have more than one brother and the relative clause helps identify which brother I am talking about)
- *My brother, **who lives in Cardiff**, is much older than me.* (=I have only one brother, so we don't need the relative clause to know who I am talking about)