

Including or omitting

RELATIVE PRONOUNS



The most common relative pronouns in English are who, whom, whose, that and which. In certain situations the words *what, when and *where can also function as relative pronouns.

TIP: If there's a verb immediately after the relative pronoun, you know it's a subject, and you can't omit the relative pronoun. If there's no verb, you're good to go – you can create a contact clause!

THE RELATIVE PRONOUN CANNOT BE OMITTED WHEN IT IS THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE.		
Noun, subject of the mainclause	RELATIVE PRONOUN (cannot be omitted)	VERB + REST OF RELATIVE CLAUSE
The woman	who/that	spoke at the meeting was very knowledgeable.
What's the name of the girl	who/that	won the tennis tournament?
I work for a company	that/which	makes computers.
The picture	that/which	hangs on the wall is very old.
There's the dog	that/which	bit my brother.
This is the woman	who/that	cuts my hair.

THE RELATIVE PRONOUN CAN BE OMITTED WHEN IT IS THE OBJECT OF THE SENTENCE.		
Noun, subject of the mainclause	RELATIVE PRONOUN (can be omitted)	PRONOUN + VERB + REST OF RELATIVE CLAUSE
It was the best film	(that/which)	I've ever seen.
The professor,	(whom/that)	I respect, recently received an award.
Do you remember the time	(when/that)	we all went to a nightclub?
The water	(that/which)	I drank was very cold
The film	(that/which)	we saw last week was awful
The book	(that/which)	I read was very interesting.

THE RELATIVE PRONOUN CAN BE OMITTED If the relative clause contains the verb 'be' + any of the following :		
Noun, subject of the main clause	RELATIVE PRONOUN (can be omitted)	Pronoun + verb + rest of relativeclause
be + a past participle [a passive form]		
A person	(who/that has been)	tricked once is careful the next time.
The student	(who/that is)	chosen as winner will get a prize.
be + a present participle [a continuous form]		
The woman	(who/that is)	talking to my wife is from Ireland.
be + an adjective phrase		
The man	(who/that is)	interested in your car will telephone later.
be + a prepositional phrase		
The books	(that/which are)	on the table have been read.

* We use that instead of who, whom or which in relative clauses to refer to people, animals and things.

We use it to introduce defining clauses only. That is more informal than who, whom or which.

**We use which in relative clauses to refer to animals and to things, but not to refer to people.

*What and Where cannot be omitted. Exception : the phrase "the place (where)", e.g. "If we go back to the place (where)...we started