

Students as “Grammarians”: Discovering Grammatical Rules Lesson on Punctuating Defining and Non-Defining Adjective Clauses

Lead-in

In pairs, read the following sentences and do the tasks listed below.

- a. I bought a warm sweater.
- b. I bought a sweater which is warm.

Underline the adjective in sentence a.

Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

- a. Jason was nervous.
- b. Jason spoke to the store manager, who turned out to be quite nice.

Underline the adjective in sentence a.

Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

- a. She recommended a great movie.
- b. I rented the movie that she recommended.

Underline the adjective in sentence a.

Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

- a. My mother would like to open a small gallery.
- b. My mother, whose photographs have won a few awards, would like to open a small gallery.

Underline the adjective in sentence a.

Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

Presentation: Discovering the Topic

Some of the following sentences are missing commas. Punctuate them correctly. Refer to the sentences from the previous exercise.

I bought a sweater which is warm.

Jason spoke to the store manager who turned out to be quite nice.

I rented the movie that she recommended.

My mother whose photographs have won a few awards would like to open a small gallery.

Have you noticed any differences in punctuation?

Presentation: Discovering the Rule

In pairs, read the sentences again and answer the questions.

Exercise 1

a. I bought a **sweater** which is warm.

- Does the clause “*which is warm*” **define** the word “sweater”?
*In other words, is it **necessary** or does it provide **extra information** about the sweater?*
- *If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know what kind of sweater someone bought?*
- *Does the sentence have a comma?*

b. Jason spoke to **the store manager**, who turned out to be quite nice.

- Does the clause “*who turned out to be quite nice*” **define** the word “manager”?
*In other words, is the clause “*who turned out to be quite nice*” **necessary** or does it provide **extra information** about the manager?*
- *If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know whom Jason spoke to?*
- *Does the sentence have a comma?*

c. I rented **the movie** that she recommended.

- Does the clause “that she recommended” **define** the word “movie”?

*In other words, is the clause “that she recommended” **necessary** or does it provide **extra information** about the movie?*

- If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know what movie I rented?
- Does the sentence have a comma?

d. **My mother**, whose photographs have won a few awards, would like to open a small gallery.

- Does the clause “whose photographs have won a few awards” **define** the word “mother”?

*In other words, is the clause “whose photographs have won a few awards” **necessary** or does it provide **extra information** about my mother?*

- If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know who wants to open a small gallery?
- Does the sentence have commas?

Exercise 2

Think about your answers to the questions from the previous exercise. Summarize your findings by circling the right answer.

a. I bought **a sweater** which is warm.

EXTRA INFORMATION	NO COMMA	NON-DEFINING
NECESSARY INFORMATION	COMMA	DEFINING

b. Jason spoke to **the store manager**, who turned out to be quite nice.

EXTRA INFORMATION	NO COMMA	NON-DEFINING
NECESSARY INFORMATION	COMMA	DEFINING

c. I rented **the movie** that she recommended.

EXTRA INFORMATION	NO COMMA	NON-DEFINING
NECESSARY INFORMATION	COMMA	DEFINING

d. **My mother**, whose photographs have won a few awards, would like to open a small gallery.

EXTRA INFORMATION	NO COMMAS	NON-DEFINING
NECESSARY INFORMATION	COMMAS	DEFINING

Exercise 3

Now you are ready to formulate the rule about punctuating defining and non-defining adjective clauses.

To punctuate _____ clauses correctly, we need to decide if they provide _____ or _____ information about the noun which precedes them. If the information is **essential**, the clause is then **defining** and it _____ **a comma**. If, however, the information is _____, the clause is **non-defining** and it _____ **a comma**.

Practice

Underline adjective clauses. Insert commas where necessary.

- Her youngest daughter who has just graduated from college decided to join the Peace Corps.
- This blanket is much too big. Why don't we take the one that Mary gave us for Christmas?
- The tourists whose luggage was lost should leave their phone numbers at this desk.

- d. My hometown which is surrounded by lakes gets quite cold in the winter.
- e. Have you spoken to the neighbor whose cat scratched our door?
- f. I'm not very proud of the paper which I wrote for my history class.
- g. Their house which has just been renovated may be worth a million dollars now.

Production

Write answers to the following questions using adjective clauses. Use the relative pronouns given in parentheses. Punctuate your sentences correctly. Share them with your partner.

- a. *What movies do you dislike most? (that)*

_____ *that* _____

- b. *What kind of person makes the best friend? (who)*

_____ *who* _____

- c. *What does your favorite sport involve? Is it very popular in your country? (which)*

_____ *which* _____

- d. *What kind of person is your mother (father, boss, favorite teacher)? What does he or she do that makes you think so?*

_____ *who* _____
