



# Academic Center

Tutoring and Testing at UHV.

## Relative Clauses

This handout will allow you to see how important ideas can be combined with relative clauses to help you subordinate less important ideas and add variety to your sentences. First, it's important to know that a relative clause is a special type of dependent clause that usually functions as an adjective modifying a noun or pronoun within the main clause. Sometimes it can serve as an adverb when it begins with when or where.

### Subordinators for Relative Clauses

There are eight subordinators for relative clauses: *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, *that*, *where*, *why*, and *when*. These subordinators (called **relatives** and shown below in square brackets) are unique. They do two things at one time. They connect the dependent clause (in parentheses in the examples below) to the main clause. At the same time each functions as a subject, object, adjective, or adverb within the dependent clause.

An object ([that] weighs five pounds on earth) would weigh two pounds on the planet Mercury.

The relative clause modifies object.

---

All men ([whom] citizens of the United States have elected as president) have been native-born.

The relative clause modifies men.

---

Mark Twain, ([whose] real name was Samuel Clemens), grew up in Hannibal, Missouri.

The relative clause modifies Mark Twain.

---

Airplane-passenger service was begun on May 3, 1919, ([when] a pilot flew two women to New Jersey).

The relative clause modifies was begun.

---

At the common meeting point of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico is a spot ([where] a house could be built with each of its corners in a different state).

The relative clause modifies spot.



Visit us on the web at [www.uhv.edu/ac](http://www.uhv.edu/ac)

Email at [tutor@uhv.edu](mailto:tutor@uhv.edu) University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

## Practice Exercises 1

In the following sentences, set off relative pronouns with brackets, put parentheses around the relative clause, and circle the noun that is being modified. (For answer key to this exercise, please see the final pages of this handout.)

1. Edouard Manet, who was an attractive, well-dressed, charming Parisian, was not the stereotypical bohemian artist who starved in a garret.
2. The painters with whom Manet studied were traditionalists who usually rounded figures in paintings to give them a realistic sculptural quality.
3. Manet, whose art contrasted sharply with the art of his contemporaries, painted flat figures in jewel-bright colors without shadows or shading.
4. This approach, which left an “unfinished” look, tried to capture what the eye momentarily saw.
5. Manet’s painting that most shocked the French people was *Luncheon in the Grass*, which pictured a nude woman at a picnic with two fully dressed men.
6. In Manet’s time, paintings were usually judged by a prestigious Parisian art establishment that was known as the Salon.
7. The judges of the Salon, who held an annual showcase of the Academy of Fine Arts, only included work that conformed to their standards.
8. The Salon always rejected Manet’s paintings, which were full of color.
9. Now his paintings, which were so badly received during his lifetime, hang in the Louvre and the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

### Nonrestrictive vs. Restrictive Relative Clauses and Phrases

You may have noticed in the previous examples that some relative clauses and phrases require commas while others don’t. Commas indicate that the relative clause is not really needed in order to understand the sentence. The absence of commas indicates that the relative clause is needed in order to understand the sentence. We will first look at clauses that are set off with commas.

#### Nonrestrictive Relative Clauses and Phrases

Commas set off a **nonrestrictive** relative clause or phrase, that is, a clause or phrase that is not really needed to identify the noun being modified. In the following example, the clause *who was assassinated in 1963* adds some information about the modified noun, *John F. Kennedy*, but even without this extra information we would understand who he is. In other words, when we leave off the relative clause, the sentence still makes good sense.

John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963, was the first Catholic president.  
John F. Kennedy was the first Catholic president.

*Note:* A comma must be put before and after the nonrestrictive clause or phrase, unless of course it is at the end of a sentence, in which case the comma comes only before the non-restrictive clause.



Visit us on the web at [www.uhv.edu/ac](http://www.uhv.edu/ac)

Email at [tutor@uhv.edu](mailto:tutor@uhv.edu) University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

**Only two types of nouns are followed by nonrestrictive clauses or phrases: proper nouns and nouns already familiar to the reader.**

- A proper noun names a specific person, place, or thing.
- A noun already familiar to the reader because
  - it has been mentioned earlier
  - it is the only one of its kind, or
  - its reference is general and commonly known.

**The following are examples of nonrestrictive clauses or phrases.**

I went to the movies last night. *The movie*, which was about Ghandi, was fascinating.

*The highest mountain in the world*, Mount Everest, is located in Asia.

*Tennis*, which is a popular sport, is not difficult to learn.

### **Practice Exercises 2**

In the following sentences, modified noun phrases have been capitalized. Add commas only when the relative clause modifies a proper noun or a noun already familiar to the reader. (For answer key to this exercise, please see the final pages of this handout.)

(1.) ANDREW WYETH who was the son of an illustrator of children's books is probably the most popular U.S. painter of the twentieth century. (2.) N.C. WYETH who was Andrew Wyeth's father taught his son to pay attention to detail in his painting. (3.) THE ART OF ANDREW WYETH which is both realistic and emotional shows rural America at its best. (4.) HIS WORK which follows the style of earlier American realists has so much detail that it is almost like a photograph. (5.) THE PEOPLE who appear in his paintings are THOSE whom Wyeth knew. (6.) HIS RECENTLY REVEALED "HELGA" SERIES which includes nude studies of his neighbor has been critically acclaimed.

### **Restrictive Relative Clauses and Phrases**

The relative clause or phrase called restrictive when it **is** needed to understand which specific person or thing the modified noun is. A restrictive clause is *not* set off with commas. These clauses "restrict" or "limit" the meaning of the nouns they modify. They tell you *which one* and make the meaning specific. Relative clauses that begin with *that* are always restrictive; they should not be set off by commas.

The man *who came by yesterday* is my professor.

The man is my professor.

(*Which man?* Without the relative clause, we don't know which man.)



Visit us on the web at [www.uhv.edu/ac](http://www.uhv.edu/ac)

Email at [tutor@uhv.edu](mailto:tutor@uhv.edu) University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

### Practice Exercises 3

Add commas only where needed. (For answer key to this exercise, please see the final pages of this handout.)

1. Not all artists who become famous have spent years studying.
2. Anna Robertson Moses who was also known as Grandma Moses is considered the Grande Dame of U.S. art.
3. Grandma Moses who started painting when she was seventy-six never had an art lesson.
4. Her realistic and simple scenes depicting American rural life have been praised by critics and spectators alike.
5. These colorful pictures which are called “primitives” are based on her early life in rural New York.
6. She began to paint at a time when her arthritis made her pastime of embroidering too painful.
7. This energetic woman who lived to be 101 continued to create works of wonder and charm until shortly before her death.
8. Grandma Moses who painted without any formal training remains one of the twentieth century’s most famous primitive artists.



Visit us on the web at [www.uhv.edu/ac](http://www.uhv.edu/ac)

Email at [tutor@uhv.edu](mailto:tutor@uhv.edu) University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

## Relative Clauses Answer Keys

### Practice Exercises 1

1. Edouard Manet, (who) was an attractive, well-dressed, charming Parisian), was not the stereotypical bohemian artist who starved in a garret.
2. The painters (with [whom] Manet studied) were traditionalists ([who] usually rounded figures in paintings to give them a realistic sculptural quality).
3. Manet, ([whose] art contrasted sharply with the art of his contemporaries), painted flat figures in jewel-bright colors without shadows or shading.
4. This approach, ([which] left an “unfinished” look), tried to capture what the eye momentarily saw.
5. Manet’s painting ([that] most shocked the French people) was *Luncheon in the Grass*, ([which] pictured a nude woman at a picnic with two fully dressed men).
6. In Manet’s time, paintings were usually judged by a prestigious Parisian art establishment ([that] was known as the Salon).
7. The judges of the Salon, ([who] held an annual showcase of the Academy of Fine Arts), only included work ([that] conformed to their standards).
8. The Salon always rejected Manet’s paintings, ([which] were full of color).
9. Now his paintings, ([which] were so badly received during his lifetime), hang in the Louvre and the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

### Practice Exercise 2

(1.) Andrew Wyeth, who was the son of an illustrator of children’s books, is probably the most popular U.S. painter of the twentieth century. (2.) N.C. Wyeth, who was Andrew Wyeth’s father, taught his son to pay attention to detail in his painting. (3.) The art of Andrew Wyeth, which is both realistic and emotional, shows rural America at its best. (4.) His work, which follows the style of earlier American realists, has so much detail that it is almost like a photograph. (5.) The people who appear in his paintings are those whom Wyeth knew. (6.) His recently revealed “Helga” series, which includes nude studies of his neighbor, has been critically acclaimed.

### Practice Exercise 3

(1.) Not all artists who become famous have spent years studying. (2.) Anna Robertson Moses, who was also known as Grandma Moses, is considered the Grande Dame of US art. (3.) Grandma Moses, who started painting when she was seventy-six, never had an art lesson. (4.) Her realistic and simple scenes depicting American rural life have been praised by critics and spectators alike. (5.) These colorful pictures, which are called “primitives,” are based on her early life in rural New York. (6.) She began to paint at a time when her arthritis made her pastime of embroidering too painful. (7.) This energetic woman, who lived to be 101, continued to create works of wonder and charm until shortly before her death. (8.) Grandma Moses, who painted without any formal training, remains one of the twentieth century’s most famous primitive artists.

Copyright 2003 by the Academic Center and the University of Houston-Victoria.  
Revised 2003 by Sandra Heinold.



Visit us on the web at [www.uhv.edu/ac](http://www.uhv.edu/ac)

Email at [tutor@uhv.edu](mailto:tutor@uhv.edu) University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288