

How to Omit a Relative Pronoun

Relative pronouns are often omitted except in the most formal of contexts. However, how we should do so can be difficult, particularly for non-native speakers. This article tells you how to omit a relative pronoun and be grammatical at the same time.

Make sure it's a relative pronoun

Only 'which', 'that', 'whom' and 'who' fit into this category. Words like 'whose' and 'where' are conjunctions or determiners.

Determine whether it is a defining clause or non-defining clause. Ignoring the preposition, if there is a comma before the relative pronoun, it is a non-defining clause. If you find this hard to understand, ask yourself if the sentence will make sense without the relative clause. For example, 'The seedy guy to whom I looked down was arrested today' is a defining clause, while 'The seedy guy, who was arrested today, is a real moron' is a non-defining clause. If it is a non-defining clause, you can't omit the relative pronoun.

Break the sentence up into two. For example, change 'This is the guy whom I met last night' to 'This is a guy. I met him last night.'

Determine whether your relative clause is modifying the subject or object of the sentence. If it is modifying the subject, you can't omit the relative pronoun unless you re-word the sentence.

If there is a preposition before the relative pronoun (such as 'in which'), put it at the end. If it doesn't make sense, or putting a preposition at the end of a sentence is unsuitable for the context, scratch the idea.

Warnings

- In formal contexts, it may be wiser to leave the relative pronoun. If you are unsure that the relative pronoun is in conversational or formal usage, don't omit it.

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