
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The Grammar Gameshow

Relative Clauses 2

Will

Hello and welcome to today's Grammar Gameshow! I'm your host, Will. Could anything be more affirming? And of course, let's not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie

Good morning, everyone!

Will

Today, we're going to be asking three questions about...

Leslie

Relative clauses! That useful grammar that allows you to modify a noun!

Will

OK! Let's see how our contestants are doing! Good morning! You spent Saturday and Sunday locked up in our studio due to last episode's lockdown. Lucky you! There's nothing quite like a lazy weekend, is there? I feel so refreshed. How was yours?

Levington

So cold...so hungry.

Will

And contestant number two?

Kate

Please, I need a phone. I haven't been home for days! My family's going to be worried about me.

Will

No, I'm afraid we block all mobile phone signals in the studio to prevent cheating. Not to worry! Nice to see you both again looking so well. OK. Let's get going, and don't forget you can play along at home too. Question one. We know that 'who', 'which', 'that' and 'whose' can be used as relative pronouns. However, relative adverbs 'when' and 'where' can also be used for talking about places and times. They can always be replaced by a preposition and 'which'. Look at these sentences and tell me how to replace 'when' or 'where'. That was the day when I fell in love.

Kate

On which. That was the day on which I fell in love.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

This is the place where I found the money.

Levington

At which. This is the place at which I found the money.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

A bank is a place where you can withdraw money.

Levington

From which. A bank is a place from which you can withdraw money.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

That was the time when the train departed.

Kate

At which. That was the time at which the train departed.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Excellent! 'When' and 'where' are relative adverbs that describe places or times, and that can be used in the same way as 'who', 'which', 'whose' and 'that'. However, 'when' and 'where' can always be replaced by 'which' and a preposition. The choice of preposition depends on the context, so be careful!

Will

Well done both of you! Three points each. On to question two. We've just seen that sometimes relative clauses have prepositions in them. How does the position of the preposition relate to the relative clause's formality?

Levington

The preposition can be in two positions – immediately before the relative clause or at the end of the relative clause.

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Well done! The preposition can appear in two positions. If it appears before the relative pronoun, the sentence is more formal – this is in a more written style. If it is at the end of the relative clause, the sentence is less formal – this is more spoken.

Will

Good job. Two points for you. Let's have a quick-fire practice round, eh? Look at these sentences and tell me if they're formal or informal. This is the hospital in which I was born.

Kate

Formal.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

There's the boy (who) I got the book from.

Levington

Informal.

Leslie

Correct.

Will

This is the medicine (which) your friend can't live without.

Levington

Informal.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

She's the business person from whom I learned everything.

Kate

Formal.

Leslie

Correct!

Will

And for a bonus point, can you tell me why the last sentence was even more formal?

Kate

Not only is the preposition before the relative pronoun, but the speaker has used 'whom', which is an object form of 'who' and is also formal.

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Well done Kate! 'Whom' is a relative pronoun used for people, but only when they are the object of the relative clause! It's quite formal and not spoken much, but it looks nice in writing!

Will

Well done Kate! 66 points for you. It's time for our last question and then you get to go home...one of you anyway. Question three. The last relative pronoun 'what' can also be used in relative clauses, but it is different. Look at this sentence and tell me why. A nice long holiday is what I need.

Levington

As a relative pronoun, 'what' means 'the thing which'. A nice long holiday is the thing which I need.

Will

Leslie?

Leslie

Well done Levington. 'What' can be used as a relative pronoun to mean 'the thing which'. But unlike other relative pronouns, which need or refer to a noun, 'what' is the noun and relative pronoun combined, so be careful!

Will

Good job Levington, have...a thousand points. Well, that brings us to the end of today's Grammar Gameshow. Let's count out the points...accounting for last show's points...and the ones today...and a bit of...and carry the... And the winner is, Levington! Well done! Here's what you've won!

Leslie

It's breakfast! So tasty!

Levington

Food!

Will

We'll see you next week, where you can play for another prize. And Kate, you've been through quite an ordeal, eh? Is there anything you want to say before...

Kate

Can I please just call my family? They must be worried sick.

Will

There's no mobile phone service in the studio, I'm afraid...to discourage cheating. You understand.

Kate

Yes...I suppose...

Will

Call forth the lightning. It looks like we'll need another contestant. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye, Leslie.

Leslie

Sayonara, Leslie!

Will

See you next time!