Relative clauses

Relative clauses are of three types: restrictive, (defining) non restrictive (appositive or non defining) and free (or headless) relative clauses

*Restrictive relative clauses contribute to find the reference of the head noun*

(1) The boy (who(m)/that) I saw is your brother

Non restrictive relative clauses only add information (often used with proper nouns) to a noun whose referent is already identified

(2) John, who is a very nice guy, has decided to move to Rome

Free relative clauses have no head noun and are generally introduced by a wh-item (with or without ever)

(3) Whoever says this, is a traitor

It is important to distinguish between restrictive and non restrictive relative clauses, because they have a partially different system

**Restrictive relative clauses**

can be introduced by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominative</th>
<th>Accusative</th>
<th>Genitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>who [+human]</td>
<td>whom</td>
<td>whose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which [-human]</td>
<td>which</td>
<td>of which (whose is less used but possible)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*whom* is generally formal, in colloquial language who is often used for the object as well

NB: do NOT use *which* for humans, *the man which* is a very typical mistake made by Italian speakers, which is possible for +humans only in interrogative clauses

Wh-items can be used with prepositions as well: in general the preposition is left in situ, when it is adjacent to the wh-item the structure is more formal (in general for phrasal verbs it is preferred to leave to preposition in situ)

(4) The man whom I was talking to went out
that can also be used, it never changes its form, it can be both + or – human

**Use of that**

*That* is generally used with the direct object or with the object of a preposition

(5) The boy that I saw on the bus  
(6) The table that the boy crawled under  
(7) The boy that the dog barked at

Notice that the preposition always remains in situ, while in the case of wh-items it can be adjacent to the wh-item.

Alternative: wh-item (with the wh item it is possible not to have preposition stranding, with *that* preposition stranding is obligatory)

(8) The table under which the boy crawled  
(9) The table which the boy crawled under  
(10) The table that the boy crawled under  
(11) *The table under that the boy crawled

*That* can be used for the subject relative if the antecedent is –human,

(12) The table that stands in the corner

That is preferred to which in the following cases:

a) when the head noun is a quantifier:

(13) I told him all that was matters (*all which)

b) when the antecedent has a superlative adjective

(14) I saw the funniest thing that one could ever see

c) when the head noun is introduced by an ordinal number

(15) The first statement that was made

d) when the antecedent is after the verb ‘be’

(16) it’s a book that will be popular
NB With + human subject wh-item preferred →

(17) The man who phoned is the new principal

Complementizer deletion: 
In English relative clauses it is possible to omit the complementizer that when the relative is NOT a subject relative 
Therefore, zero can be used either with direct objects or with objects of P with preposition stranding

(18) The boy we met
(19) The table we saw
(20) The boy the dog barked at
(21) The table the boy crawled under

But not:
(22) *The boy saw me is your brother

with zero the preposition has to be stranded (see that above)
REMEMBER: with phrasal verbs preposition stranding is obligatory with all types of relatives:

(23) The man who(m) he was looking at…

With place expression the P has to be expressed, with time expressions it can be deleted

(24) This is the university she works at
(25) This is the time she usually arrives (at)

This is not possible with wh items (which), you cannot delete the preposition

*When can replace in/on which

(26) The day when they arrived

*Where can replace at/in which

(27) The place where they are staying

*Why can replace for which

(28) The reason why I tell you this…
Neither that nor zero can be used for the genitive, the only possibility is whose:

(29) The boy whose father has been arrested…

The distinction between wh-items and *that*/zero has to do with formal versus colloquial speech

**Non restrictive relative clauses**

It is not possible to use either *that* or zero, the clause is preceded and followed by a comma (this is not the case for restrictive relative clauses)

(30) He voted for Bush, which surprised me
(31) I met John, who is indeed a nice guy

Therefore, non restrictive relative clauses can only be introduced by a wh-pronoun

The relative pronoun can be modified by a quantifier:

(32) The students, several of whom had already passed their exam,…

It is possible to use whose for – animate NPs only when the relative indicates possession:

(33) The damaged ship, whose crew has now been taken off,

In non restrictive relative clauses it is more common to have the preposition before the wh-item (but not with phrasal verbs, see above)

**Free relative clauses**

They are introduced by a wh-item compound with –ever

(34) You can eat whatever you like
(35) I’ll find him, whenever he is

However means *per quanto*

(36) However hard you work, you are never going to pass the exam

**Non finite forms**

A relative clause can be transformed into a non finite clause introduced by zero
The usual form is the gerund/present participle, not always intended as progressive form, often as an habitual action

(37) The student writing on the blackboard is very smart

(38) The result was a mixture consisting of oil and vinegar

(39) Students attending this course are required to prepare a summary

Another possible form is a past participle

(40) The cars repaired by this mechanic never break again

Infinitive can also be used to modify nouns:

The noun has to be subject of the infinitival form

(41) The next train to arrive is the one from York

(42) The money to buy food is in the left drawer

(43) The first man to see

(44) The first man to be seen

Infinitives can also replace the object of a preposition

(45) He had a lot of books to read

(46) They finally found a garden to play in