

## 73 Relative clauses (2)

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, **who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1970**, wrote several novels about the Soviet labour camps in Siberia.



### 1 Non-defining relative clauses

Non-defining relative clauses do not describe exactly who or what we mean. Instead they give us extra information about the subject or object of a main clause:

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn, **who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1970**, wrote several novels.*

If we remove the clause, the sentence still makes sense:

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote several novels.*

Compare this with defining relative clauses:

*Angela Green is the woman **who lives next door**.*

*Angela Green is the woman.* [which woman?]

⚠ We don't use *that* or *what* in non-defining relative clauses:

✗ *The painting, **that is now restored**, can be seen in the National Gallery.*

✓ *The painting, **which is now restored**, can be seen in the National Gallery.*

Because non-defining relative clauses do not identify the subject in the main clause, there is a difference in meaning:

DEFINING *The passengers **who were injured in the crash** were taken to hospital.*

(Only the injured passengers were taken to hospital. We know that some were not injured.)

NON-DEFINING *The passengers, **who were injured in the crash**, were taken to hospital.*

(All the passengers were taken to hospital. We know that they were all injured.)

### 2 Punctuation and use of prepositions

Unlike defining relative clauses, non-defining relative clauses are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. We usually put the clause immediately after the subject it refers to:

⚠ ✗ *The author of the novel **lives in Edinburgh**, which you can buy for €20.*

✓ *The author of the novel, **which you can buy for €20**, lives in Edinburgh.*

We use prepositions in non-defining relative clauses in the same way as in defining relative clauses (► Unit 72.4):

*Sue recently won a prize, **which she never stops talking about**.*

*That house, **which we used to live in**, has been sold.*

🔊 **Pronunciation ► 1.31**

### 3 Comment clauses with *which*

We can use a non-defining relative clause, usually at the end of the sentence, to say something about the whole of the main clause:

*The army team was unable to make the bomb safe, **which meant everyone had to leave the area**.  
Solzhenitsyn wrote his books while he was still a prisoner, **which was very brave**.*

⚠ We use *which*, NOT *who*, *whose*, *that* or *it*, to introduce a comment clause.

We put a comma before *which*:

✗ *Solzhenitsyn wrote his books while he was still a prisoner, **who was very brave**.*

✓ *Solzhenitsyn wrote his books while he was still a prisoner, **which was very brave**.*