

Relativpronomen

Relative clauses (*Relativsätze*) are clauses added on to a main clause (*Hauptsatz*) that provide additional information about a noun. They cannot stand on their own but must be part of a sentence. They are introduced by relative pronouns (*Relativpronomen*). We have them in English, too -- they are usually introduced by "who" or "that" or "which". For instance:

He's the man. He bought a house. ⇒ He's the man who bought a house.
I have a car. I drive the car to work. ⇒ I have a car that I drive to work.

In German, those sentences would be:

Er ist der Mann. Er hat ein Haus gekauft. ⇒ Er ist der Mann, der ein Haus gekauft hat.
Ich habe einen Wagen. Ich fahre den Wagen zur Arbeit. ⇒ Ich habe einen Wagen, den ich zur Arbeit fahre.

In German, the relative pronouns ("who" or "that") are for the most part the same as the definite articles **der, die, das**. The only exception is in the dative plural, which takes the form **denen**.

	MASK	FEM	NEUT	PLUR
NOM	der	die	das	die
AKK	den	die	das	die
DAT	dem	der	dem	denen

Note that where English distinguishes between "who" for people and "that" or "which" for things, German does not. German does distinguish between the case of the relative pronoun (we used to do this in English by using "who" and "whom"). Please note that, in the examples we'll be doing, German NEVER uses "*wer*" as a relative pronoun.

Figuring out which relative pronoun to use:

Although it seems hard at first, deciding which relative pronoun (*der, den, dem, etc*) to use is not that bad. You have to find out TWO things: what gender/number (masc, neut, fem, pl) we're talking about, AND what case it needs.

The gender and number of the relative pronoun are the same as the noun to which they refer (called the antecedent, *der Bezugswort*), found in the main clause. As an example: in the sentences above, we know that we're talking about ONE MAN and ONE CAR, respectively.

The case of the relative pronoun is found in the relative clause itself (not the main clause). In our examples, the man bought a house. The man is the subject of that clause; therefore, the relative pronoun will be in the nominative case (*der*). In the second sentence, I drive the car, so the car is the direct object = accusative case (*den*).

The Four Steps:	
1.	Find the antecedent (<i>Bezugswort</i>): what are we referring to?
2.	Determine the gender and number of the antecedent: how many and what gender?
3.	Figure out how the relative pronoun is used in the relative clause (subject, direct object, indirect object, object of a preposition) and which case that will require.
4.	Determine the correct relative pronoun given what you now know.

Some comments on word order

- The relative clause is always preceded by a comma. If the relative clause ends the sentence, then it ends with a period. If it gets stuck in the middle of the sentence (e.g. "The children who came here were my friends") then it is set off with commas on both sides ("Die Kinder, die hierher gekommen sind, waren meine Freunde.")
- The finite (conjugated) verb comes at the end of the relative clause. Separable prefix verbs are reunited and written as one word (e.g. "Ich habe einen Freund, der um 8 Uhr aufsteht.")
- In English, we often leave out the "that" relative pronoun ("The film I saw last night was bad" is really "The film THAT I saw last night ..."). In German you cannot omit the relative pronoun from a sentence -- you must always have a *der*, *die*, *das* or something.
- You cannot separate the relative pronoun from any preposition that goes with it. In English, we say "The man who I'm talking to is over there" -- in German that has to be "Der Mann, mit dem ich spreche, ist dort.")
- The relative clause wants to be as close to the noun it is describing as possible. This isn't a strict rule, but you'll see some examples of how the relative clause can be put in the middle of the sentence rather than at the end.

Combining two sentences into one

If two sentences contain the same noun, or pronouns, which refer to the same noun, they can often be combined with a relative pronoun to form one sentence.

The glass is broken. The glass fell off the table.	⇒	The glass that fell off the table is broken.
Das Glas ist gebrochen. Das Glas ist vom Tisch gefallen.	⇒	Das Glas, das vom Tisch gefallen ist, ist gebrochen.

Relative clauses also occur with dative forms and *with prepositions*.

The woman to whom I gave the book was very happy.
Die Frau, der ich das Buch gegeben habe, war sehr glücklich.

The family with whom I live is very friendly.
Die Familie, bei der ich wohne, ist sehr freundlich.

Remember that in English, the preposition often occurs at the end of the relative clause (the woman I gave the book **to**), but in German, the preposition will begin the relative clause. Again:

That is the house that I lived in.
Das ist das Haus, in dem ich gewohnt habe.