Students as “Grammarians”: Discovering Grammatical Rules
Lesson on Punctuating Defining and Non-Defining Adjective Clauses

Lead-in

In pairs, read the following sentences and do the tasks listed below.

a. I bought a warm sweater.
   Underline the adjective in sentence a.
   Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

b. I bought a sweater which is warm.

a. Jason was nervous.
   Underline the adjective in sentence a.
   Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

b. Jason spoke to the store manager, who turned out to be quite nice.

a. She recommended a great movie.
   Underline the adjective in sentence a.
   Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

b. I rented the movie that she recommended.

a. My mother would like to open a small gallery.
   Underline the adjective in sentence a.
   Underline the adjective clause in sentence b.

b. My mother, whose photographs have won a few awards, would like to open a small gallery.
Presentation: Discovering the Topic

Some of the following sentences are missing commas. Punctuate them correctly. Refer to the sentences from the previous exercise.

I bought a sweater which is warm.
Jason spoke to the store manager who turned out to be quite nice.
I rented the movie that she recommended.
My mother whose photographs have won a few awards would like to open a small gallery.

Have you noticed any differences in punctuation?

Presentation: Discovering the Rule

In pairs, read the sentences again and answer the questions.

Exercise 1

a. I bought a sweater which is warm.
   • Does the clause “which is warm” define the word “sweater”?
     In other words, is it necessary or does it provide extra information about the sweater?
   • If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know what kind of sweater someone bought?
   • Does the sentence have a comma?

b. Jason spoke to the store manager, who turned out to be quite nice.
   • Does the clause “who turned out to be quite nice” define the word “manager”?
     In other words, is the clause “who turned out to be quite nice” necessary or does it provide extra information about the manager?
   • If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know whom Jason spoke to?
   • Does the sentence have a comma?
c. I rented \textbf{the movie} that she recommended.

- Does the clause "\textit{that she recommended}" \textbf{define} the word "movie"?

\begin{quote}
In other words, is the clause "\textit{that she recommended}" \textit{necessary} or does it provide \textit{extra information} about the movie?
\end{quote}

- If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know what movie I rented?

- Does the sentence have a comma?

d. \textbf{My mother}, whose photographs have won a few awards, would like to open a small gallery.

- Does the clause "\textit{whose photographs have won a few rewards}" \textbf{define} the word "mother"?

\begin{quote}
In other words, is the clause "\textit{whose photographs have won a few rewards}" \textit{necessary} or does it provide \textit{extra information} about my mother?
\end{quote}

- If we took out the adjective clause, would we still know who wants to open a small gallery?

- Does the sentence have commas?

\textbf{Exercise 2}

Think about your answers to the questions from the previous exercise. Summarize your findings by circling the right answer.

a. I bought \textbf{a sweater} which is warm.

\begin{tabular}{l|c|c}
EXTRA INFORMATION & NO COMMA & NON-DEFINING \\
NECESSARY INFORMATION & COMMA & DEFINING \\
\end{tabular}

b. Jason spoke to \textbf{the store manager}, who turned out to be quite nice.

\begin{tabular}{l|c|c}
EXTRA INFORMATION & NO COMMA & NON-DEFINING \\
NECESSARY INFORMATION & COMMA & DEFINING \\
\end{tabular}
c. I rented the movie that she recommended.

EXTRA INFORMATION                  NO COMMA                  NON-DEFINING
NECESSARY INFORMATION              COMMA                      DEFINING

d. My mother, whose photographs have won a few awards, would like to open a small gallery.

EXTRA INFORMATION                  NO COMMAS                  NON-DEFINING
NECESSARY INFORMATION              COMMAS                     DEFINING

Exercise 3

Now you are ready to formulate the rule about punctuating defining and non-defining adjective clauses.

To punctuate _______________________ clauses correctly, we need to decide if they provide __________________ or __________________ information about the noun which precedes them. If the information is essential, the clause is then defining and it _______________ a comma. If, however, the information is ______________, the clause is non-defining and it ____________________ a comma.

Practice

Underline adjective clauses. Insert commas where necessary.

    a. Her youngest daughter who has just graduated from college decided to join the Peace Corps.
    b. This blanket is much too big. Why don’t we take the one that Mary gave us for Christmas?
    c. The tourists whose luggage was lost should leave their phone numbers at this desk.
d. My hometown which is surrounded by lakes gets quite cold in the winter.

e. Have you spoken to the neighbor whose cat scratched our door?

f. I’m not very proud of the paper which I wrote for my history class.

g. Their house which has just been renovated may be worth a million dollars now.

**Production**

*Write answers to the following questions using adjective clauses. Use the relative pronouns given in parentheses. Punctuate your sentences correctly. Share them with your partner.*

a. *What movies do you dislike most? (that)*

   __________________________________________________________
   
   _________________________________________________________

b. *What kind of person makes the best friend? (who)*

   __________________________________________________________
   
   _________________________________________________________

c. *What does your favorite sport involve? Is it very popular in your country? (which)*

   _________________________________________________________
   
   _________________________________________________________

d. *What kind of person is your mother (father, boss, favorite teacher)? What does he or she do that makes you think so?*

   _________________________________________________________
   
   _________________________________________________________