

5. Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns are the most important type of pronoun, from a GMAT perspective. A relative pronoun *relates to* (refers to) noun that appears prior to it in the sentence, to resolve its reference. The most prominent relative pronouns are: *who, which, that, whom, when and where*. Examples:

*The candidate **who** wins the greatest popular vote is not always elected.*

*The crate, **which** was left in the corridor, has now been moved into the storage closet.*

Examples:

The car that is parked in the basement is mine.

– Relative pronoun *that* in the above sentence *relates to* (refers to) noun *car* to resolve its reference.

Spielberg’s new movie, which was just released last week, is a big hit.

– Relative pronoun *which* in the above sentence *relates to* (refers to) noun *movie* to resolve its reference.

My father-in-law, who is a renowned lawyer, loathes formal education.

– Relative pronoun *who* in the above sentence *relates to* (refers to) noun *father-in-law* to resolve its reference.

Note: Closely linked to relative pronouns, is the concept of *relative clauses* (we discuss *clauses* in section 2.2.1). *Clauses* that start with a *relative pronoun* are called *relative clauses*.

Examples:

My car, which was parked in the basement, developed a technical snag.

– *which* is the *relative pronoun* in this sentence. The *clause* that starts with this *relative pronoun* (in this case: *which is parked in the basement*) is called *relative clause*. It is worth noting that in this *relative clause*, the relative pronoun *which*:

- i. is the *subject* of the relative clause *which is parked in the basement*
- ii. *relates to* (refers to) the noun *car*

People who work hard towards achieving their goals succeed in life.

– *who* is the *relative pronoun* in this sentence. The *clause* that starts with this *relative pronoun* (in this case: *who work hard towards achieving their goals*) is called *relative clause*. In this *relative clause*, the relative pronoun *who*:

- i. is the *subject* of the relative clause *who work hard towards achieving their goals*
- ii. *relates to* (refers to) the noun *people*

Limitations of how “relative pronouns” can be used

	Who/whom	Which/that	Where	When	Whose
Person	√				√
Place		√	√		√
Thing		√			√
Idea		√			√
Time				√	