

An adjective is a word that describes a noun (which is a person, place, or thing) or a pronoun (e.g. she, they). Adjectives come before the words they describe.

e.g. The sick passenger was taken to the infirmary.

adj. noun

An adjective clause is a group of words that acts like an adjective. Adjective clauses begin with words like *which, that, who, whom, whose, where, and when*. Unlike adjectives, adjective clauses come after the words they describe.

e.g. The passenger who was sick was taken to the infirmary.

noun adj. clause

Sometimes these clauses are necessary (restrictive) to the meaning of the sentence, and sometimes they are unnecessary (non-restrictive).

Restrictive Adjective Clauses

- contain defining information about a noun or pronoun
- cannot be deleted from the sentence without changing the basic meaning of the sentence
- sometimes use “that”
- do not require commas

e.g. The owl that is most commonly found in the Maritimes is the barred owl.

noun adj. clause

e.g. Students who have spouses have access to family housing services.

noun adj. clause

- notice that if the above adjective clauses were removed from the sentences, important information about the noun would be missing

Non-Restrictive Adjective Clauses

- contain extra information about a noun or pronoun
- can be deleted without changing the basic meaning of the sentence
- often use “which” instead of “that”
- require commas before and after

e.g. The Morelos Dam, which was completed in 1950, diverted most of the Colorado water crossing into Mexico to the Mexicali valley.

noun adj. clause

e.g. Conrad Bain, who starred on the television show *Diff'rent Strokes*, died at age 89.

noun adj. clause

Practice Exercises

Underline the adjective clauses, keeping in mind that there may be more than one per sentence. Decide whether the clause is restrictive (necessary, no commas) or non-restrictive (unnecessary, needs commas). Add commas if necessary.

- ___ 1. She wants to attend King's College which is where her mother and older sister both went to university.
- ___ 2. The octopus's ink sac is an organ that allows it to escape from predators.
- ___ 3. Students who plagiarize face a range of academic penalties, from failing the assignment to being expelled from university altogether.
- ___ 4. Dextre is a robotic device that allows astronauts to perform maintenance on the hull of the International Space Station without having to leave the facility.
- ___ 5. I have three sisters. My sister who lives in South Carolina works for the Easter Seals. My youngest sister who lives in Halifax manages a children's store.
- ___ 6. The organization that employs the greatest number of people in the world is the US Department of Defense which employed 3.2 million people in 2015.
- ___ 7. People who get at least 150 minutes of aerobic activity each week have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Answer Key

NR 1. She wants to attend King's College, which is where her mother and older sister both went to university.

R 2. The octopus's ink sac is an organ that allows it to escape from predators.

R 3. Students who plagiarize face a range of academic penalties, from failing the assignment to being expelled from university altogether.

R 4. Dextre is a robotic device that allows astronauts to perform maintenance on the hull of the International Space Station without having to leave the facility.

R/NR 5. I have three sisters. My sister who lives in South Carolina works for the Easter Seals. My youngest sister, who lives in Halifax, manages a children's store.

R/NR 6. The organization that employs the greatest number of people in the world is the US Department of Defense, which employed 3.2 million people in 2015.

R 7. People who get at least 150 minutes of aerobic activity each week have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.