

Extension exercises

Chapter 27: Relative clauses | Comments

Exploring English

Answers to these questions will depend on the materials you choose. If a group of you choose to look at different materials, you are also likely to discover that choice and use of relative pronouns depends not only on the complexity of the sentences and the formality of the style, but also on the individual tastes and preferences of the writers.

Exploring how learners use English

The results of this research will depend on who your learners are. The lower their general level of English and the greater the difference between their first languages and English, the more problems relative clauses are likely to pose them.

You may find that 'teaching' relative clauses doesn't help your students to use them – sometimes this explicit attention to relative clauses can even have a 'frightening off' effect. This is the case particularly if we 'teach' too many features of relative clauses together, and particularly if we haven't previously (and systematically) directed learners to notice and understand relative clauses in texts that they have read and enjoyed.

Course materials

Answers to these questions will depend on the materials you choose to look at. Those which focus particularly on written English tend to pay more attention to all aspects of relative clauses. General English courses tend to deal with different kinds of relative clause together, at intermediate or late intermediate level. They tend to concentrate on reasons for choosing different pronouns, and on the difference between defining and non-defining clauses. Meaning and use are often dealt with very briefly (for example, by saying relative clauses are like adjectives). Materials sometimes suggest that relative clauses are essentially a feature of written language. Practice may be limited to very controlled exercises which involve combining or completing sentences, or filling in gaps with a correct pronoun.