Relative Clauses



Ideas for

Intervention

Here you will find resource materials for intervention. These are not programs or recommended methods but are meant to aid you by providing myriad resources and techniques for intervention. We’ve taken the time to research available resources and to offer them for you to consider.

First, think about the role that the relative clauses, also known as adjective clauses, play within the greater grammatical context. Relative clauses are a noun-modifying construction that results in a higher-level noun phrase (Abdolmanafi, 2012).

Now, let’s think broad: A regular noun phrase isn’t always sufficient enough to express every communication need. A relative clause allows for the speaker to offer additional information about the noun that is mentioned (Rowley, 2018).

When a relative clause is used, it is relating back to the original noun as either the subject or object within the main clause. When this happens, it is referred to as relativization (Rowley, 2018).

It is also important for providers (e.g., teachers, clinicians, etc.) to consider the impact that the client’s appropriate use of relative clauses will have on their educational and linguistic success. According to the New York State Common Core initiative: by ninth to tenth grade, students should be able to use various types of clauses, including a relative clause, in order to convey specific meanings and add variety into their language skills ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9.1.B](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/9-10/1/b/)).

There are several different relative pronouns to consider when it comes to relative clauses. Some are as follows: is, who, which, whom, whose, that.

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The most important consideration in teaching any grammatical concept, including relative clauses, is a deep understanding of language development. This includes the ability to compare your client’s performance to expected developmental norms.

* Relative clauses are among one of the less common forms of clausal embedding that are seen in preschool aged children. However, once a child is of school age, approximately twenty to thirty percent of their two-clause sentences may include relative clauses (Owens, 2014).
	+ - Preschool children that do incorporate relative clauses into their language typically use the relative pronouns *that* and *what* (Owens, 2014).
		- School aged children are able to utilize more complex relative pronouns including *whose, whom,* and *in which* (Owens, 2014).
* According to Owens (2014), relative clauses begin to appear in language when a child is around forty-eight months old or has a mean length of utterance (MLU) of 3.75-4.5.
	+ - It is important to note that at this stage of development, children begin to use relative clauses that are attached to an object serving as a post-noun modifier for empty nouns (Owens, 2014).
		- For example, a relative clause that is attached to a noun in the object position may resemble the following sentence: “I like the movie that *I saw last night.*”

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* Owens (2014) also states that when a child is 56 months and older, or has a MLU of 4.5+, relative clauses that are attached to a subject will begin to emerge.
	+ - For example, a relative clause that is in the middle of a sentence to describe the subject may resemble the following sentence: “The movie *that you* watched was my favorite.”
* Throughout late childhood and adolescence, relative clauses that are attached to the subject or serve as the subject become more prevalent in language. However, the use of relative clauses in this type of clausal embedding is typically seen more frequently in written language, as opposed to spoken language (Owens, 2014).
	+ - An example of this type of a relative clause includes: “*Whoever wishes to go* should stand in line.”

 Methods



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It is important to note some considerations for different populations of children when evaluating the use of relative clauses.

* According to Owens (2014), children with intellectual disabilities (ID) and learning disabilities (LD) have differing language characteristics, including the development of the relative clauses.
	+ - It has been found that children with ID have shorter and less complex sentences in their language. More specifically, they often have fewer subject elaborations and relative clauses than their mental-age-matched peers who are typically developing (Owens, 2014).
		- Children with LD also have language characteristics that include the differences in the development of syntactic complexity. One of the differences include difficulty with the use of relative clauses (Owens, 2014).

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* As previously mentioned, relative clauses modify the noun phrase to provide more information. The noun in a sentence may either be the subject or an object. When the noun is a subject, the relative clause is known as a subject relative clause (SRC). When the noun is an object, the relative clause is referred to as an object relative clause (ORC) (Eckman et al., 1988).

According to Eckman and colleagues (1988), it has been found that individuals who are learning English as a second language often display more significant difficulties with ORCs as opposed to SRCs.

This has been found to be a result of the amount of time it takes to process an ORC as the relative head in the beginning of the sentence must be held in working memory for a longer amount of time before resolution is possible (Eckman et al., 1988).

An example of an ORC is as follows: The princess who the girl hugged \_\_\_.

An example of a SRC is as follows: The princess who \_\_\_ hugged the girl.

 Methods

Relative Clauses

* According to Abdolmanafi (2012), providing intervention regarding relative clauses is best conducted through a form-focused method of instruction for English Language Learners (ELL).

Form-focused instruction is based on the principle of having a pre-established understanding of meaning and use prior to learning the linguistic structure of relative clauses (Abdolmanafi, 2012).

* An expectation-based model has also been found to be effective in the teachings of relativized structures (Chen & Hale, 2021).

An expectation-based model allows for both structural and non-structural uncertainties to be reduced for the processing of relative clauses to be made simpler (Chen & Hale, 2021).

Some uncertainties may be related to the parameters of different construction types in sentences including full noun phrase versus pronoun, ditransitive verb, reduced relative clause, etc. (Chen & Hale, 2021).

* Teaching through play provides a naturalistic environment for the child to learn and generalize the targeted principles. Structured communicative play has been applied to many grammatical goals, including relative clauses (Eisenberg, 2004).

Providing direct models and natural reinforcers are easily obtainable through structured communicative play therapy, which allows for the child to be a more active participant in therapy (Eisenberg, 2004).



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Resources



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Relative Clauses

Books and Articles

[*Silly Sally*](https://www.amazon.com/Silly-Sally-Red-Wagon-Books/dp/0152019901), written by Audrey Wood. This book is recommended for children in preschool- grade three.

[*Whose Knees Are These?*](https://www.amazon.com/Whose-Knees-These-Jabari-Asim/dp/0316735760) written by Jabari Asim. This book is recommended for children in preschool- kindergarten.

[*Lola at the Library*](https://www.amazon.com/Lola-at-Library-Anna-McQuinn/dp/158089142X), written by Anna McQuinn. This book is recommended for children in preschool- first grade.

Games and Activities

Build a sentence:

* Children may understand what a relative clause is, however, they may have trouble in applying their knowledge to formulate a sentence. With this activity, you will provide the students with relative clauses (i.e., “which made him sick,” “that only eats broccoli,” or “whose armpit is smelly”). Utilizing relative clauses that will engage the children will increase the amount of motivation to complete the activity. Once the students have the relative clauses, they will be instructed to formulate a sentence using the relative clause. This will allow for an understanding of how relative clauses accompany noun phrases at the sentence level.

Putting it all together:

* Relative clauses are used to provide ample amounts of information to describe the noun in a sentence. With this activity, the students will be provided with two sentences that must be combined using a relative clause. Some examples of sentences include, “The students won the spelling bee contest. The teacher was proud of their students,” “The car was in an accident. The mechanic repaired the car.”
	+ - * + If necessary, the students may also be provided with possible relative pronouns to use when connecting their sentences (e.g., that, who, whose, when, which, etc.).



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Identifying the modified noun:

* Begin this activity by providing the students with sentences that contain relative clauses. The relative clause in each sentence should be underlined. Then, the students will be instructed to read the sentence and circle the noun that is being modified by the relative clause.
	+ - * + After students are successful with this activity, they may be provided with sentences containing relative clauses that are not identified for them. They will then be instructed to underline the relative clause and circle the modified noun.

Would You Rather:

* This game can be used to teach relative clauses as the questions can be formulated using relative clauses. For example, you may ask the child, “would you rather be the reason why there are no penguins in the North Pole or be the reason why there are no monkeys in the rainforest?” The child will then answer the question using a relative clause.
	+ - * + Some additional would you rather questions that contain relative clauses include; would you rather know a person who is the President or know a person who invented the iPhone? Would you rather have food that falls from the sky or food that comes out of the shower?

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Games and Activities

Printables:

* [Worksheet describing relative pronouns and relative clauses with fill in the blank activity](https://busyteacher.org/8969-relative-pronouns-and-relative-clauses-worksheet.html)
* [Defining and non-defining relative clauses](https://en.islcollective.com/english-esl-worksheets/grammar/relative-clauses/relative-clauses/77949)
* [Trashketball review game](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Relative-Adjective-Clauses-Trashketball-Review-Game-1644566?st=5a76b559c9122c273ce0e8b1aa3802a2)

Websites

* [YouTube Lecture](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftZr1_Ny8L8)
* [It’s All Relative: a guide to supporting students in the understanding of relative clauses](https://busyteacher.org/16396-how-to-teach-relative-clauses.html)

Please visit [our Pinterest page](https://www.pinterest.com/sugarlanguage/relative-clause/) for additional resources and activities:

Pinterest Q&A:

What is Pinterest? Pinterest is a social media platform that serves as an electronic bulletin board. Many SLPs use it as a way to electronically “bookmark” (i.e., save) activities for future sessions.

How much does it cost? It’s free! However, you must create an account in order to access the SUGAR Language boards or use the website in general.

How do I use it? Please check-out the following link for an in-depth explanation of all things [Pinterest.](https://www.lifewire.com/how-to-use-pinterest-3486578)

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