1 Defining and non-defining relative clauses (1)

As the name suggests, defining relative clauses define the noun they refer to. If we *already* clearly know which noun (in either the singular or the plural) is being described, then it cannot be followed by a defining relative clause.

The following sentences are wrong.

* *The Pope that is much respected comes from Poland.*
* *Mr Smith you met yesterday is a computer salesman.*
* *The Pacific Ocean I sailed across last year is the world's largest ocean.*

Say if the gaps in the following sentences are more likely to be filled with defining or non-defining relative clauses, or whether both are possible.

a. I don't like having to talk to people _____

_____.

b. Peter Smith _____

rang you earlier.

c. Politicians _____

are a dishonorable bunch of people.

d. I'll show you the photographs _____

_____.

e. The Houses of Parliament _____

stand on the River Thames.

f. My children _____

are coming with us on a trip to America.

g. I gave her a piece of cake _____

_____.

h. I'd like you to meet someone _____

_____.

i. The British police _____

are highly trained.

j. My cat _____

is getting a little overweight.

k. My cat's name is Wally. The only food _____

is the most expensive brand.

l. He's a very happy cat. Dogs _____

are his only source of worry in the world.

2 Defining and non-defining relative clauses (2)

Below are the missing relative clauses, without the pronouns. Put them into the correct sentence in exercise 1, inserting a relative pronoun and commas where necessary.
Some of the clauses could be either defining or non-defining, with a change in meaning. Which are they?

a. . . . were built between 1840 and 1857 . . .
b. . . . she ate greedily . . .
c. . . . I've never met before . . .
d. . . . I took on my last holiday . . .
e. . . . I've been wanting to introduce you to for ages . . .
f. . . . he eats . . .
g. . . . deceive the public . . .
h. . . . likes to sleep in front of the fire all day . . .
i. . . . carry guns . . . .
j. . . . still go to school . . .
k. . . . chase cats . . .
l. . . . lives in Bradford, not the one who lives in Chester . . .

3 Correcting mistakes

In the following sentences, there are mistakes in the relative clauses. Find them and correct them.

a. A man to whom I was talking to recently told me a joke, which was very funny, but that I have unfortunately forgotten.
b. Our director for who's job I applied when the previous director left, has announced that the pay rise, which we asked for, has had to be postponed, that really upset us.
c. The actress Joan Kelly whose most famous film was *One for the Road* for that she won an Oscar award, has died at the age of 77 at her home in California, in which she had lived for the last twenty-five years.
d. This morning, I got a cheque in the post that I wasn't expecting, for some work, which I did a long time ago, translating business texts.
e. Lord Brown on whom many people look as the best prime minister of the century and who's memoirs that were published last year caused a scandal, got married today to a woman, who he first met fifty-five years ago, when they were at school together.

Exercise 1

Sample answers

a. Defining, because we don't know *which* people.
b. Non-defining, because the person has been identified.
c. It could be defining or non-defining — it depends on your view of politicians. Are they *all* dishonourable, or only some?
d. It could be defining or non-defining.
e. Non-defining.
f. Probably non-defining.
g. Probably non-defining.
h. Defining.
i. Probably non-defining.
j. Non-defining.
k. Defining.
l. It could be defining or non-defining.

Exercise 2

a. The Houses of Parliament, which were built between 1840 and 1857, stand on the River Thames.
b. I gave her a piece of cake, which she ate greedily.
c. I don't like having to talk to people I've never met before.
d. I'll show you the photographs I took on my last holiday.
e. I'd like you to meet someone I've been wanting to introduce you to for ages.
f. My cat's name is Wally. The only food he eats is the most expensive brand.
g. Politicians who deceive the public are a dishonorable bunch of people. (Defining — only some politicians do.)
   Politicians, who deceive the public, are a dishonorable bunch of people. (Non-defining — they all do.)
h. My cat, who likes to sleep in front of the fire all day, is getting a little overweight.
i. The British police who carry guns are highly trained. (Defining, because only a few British police carry guns.)
j. My children, who still go to school, are coming with us on a trip to America. (This is a non-defining relative clause. In theory, a defining relative clause is possible, which would mean that only those children who still go to school — not those who have already left — are coming.)
k. He's a very happy cat. Dogs that/who chase cats are his only source of worry in the world. (Defining — only some dogs chase cats.)
   He's a very happy cat. Dogs, who chase cats, are his only source of worry in the world. (Non-defining — all dogs chase cats.)
l. Peter Smith who lives in Bradford, not the one who lives in Chester, rang you earlier. (An unlikely situation, and an unlikely sentence!)

Exercise 3

a. A man I was talking to recently told me a joke that was very funny, but which I have unfortunately forgotten.
b. Our director, whose job I applied for when the previous director left, has announced that the pay rise we asked for has had to be postponed, which really upset us.
c. The actress Joan Kelly, whose most famous film was *One for the Road*, for which she won an Oscar award, has died at the age of 77 at her home in California, where she had lived for the last twenty-five years.
d. This morning, I got a cheque in the post, which I wasn't expecting, for some work I did a long time ago, translating business texts.

e. Lord Brown, who many people look on as the best prime minister of the century, and whose memoirs, which were published last year, caused a scandal, got married today to a woman he first met fifty-five years ago, when they were both at school together.