ADJECTIVE CLAUSES

An adjective tells us something about a noun, e.g.

I like a good story.
Soye is a clever boy.
Is this your lost kitten?

But instead of these single words as adjectives, we could use a sentence that does the same work i.e. that tells us something about the noun. For example:

I like a story that is good.
Soye is a boy who is clever.
Is this your kitten which was lost?

Each of these sentences (that is good; who is clever; which was lost) does the work of an adjective. But none of them makes complete sense by itself. These sentences make complete sense only when they are with the other sentence. So they are clauses. And, because they do the work of an adjective, they are called *adjective clauses*. The other sentences on which they depend for their meaning (I like a story; Soye is a boy; Is this your kitten?) are called *main clauses*.

The main clause is the chief clause; the adjective clause is a *subordinate* one (that is, it is less important as it depends on another). You can have other kinds of subordinate clause as well as adjective ones.

The main clause and one or more subordinate clause together make a complex sentence.

These are complex sentences. We can 'analyse' them; that is, show them divided into main clauses and subordinate clauses like this:

Main Clause	Subordinate (adjective) clause
This is the house	that Jack built.
Here is the letter	which I received.
Where is the boy	who looks after the sheep?

Sometimes the adjective clause divides the main clause, like this:

The house <u>that Jack built</u> has fallen down.
The letter <u>which I received</u> is in my pocket.
The boy <u>who looks after the sheep</u> is fast asleep.

We analyse those complex sentences like this:

Main Clause	Subordinate (adjective) clause
The house has fallen down	that Jack built.
The letter I received is in my pocket	which I received.
The boy is fast asleep	who looks after the sheep.

The important point to note here is this:

In both groups of sentences, the adjective clause 'that Jack built' has been put next to the noun 'house' which it described:

This is the house *that Jack built*.
The house *that Jack built* has fallen down.

Similarly, in the next pair of sentences, the adjective clause 'which I received' is put next to the noun 'letter' which it described.

The rule therefore is: *The adjective clause must go as near as possible to the noun it describes*.

We can analyse complex sentences with adjective clauses more fully like this:

Main Clause	Subordinate (adjective) clause	Work done by adjective clause
This is the house	*that Jack built.*	*qualifies 'house'*
The house, has fallen down,	*that Jack built.*	*qualifies 'house'*

How Adjective Clauses are formed

Consider these two simple sentences:

- This is Jack Sprat.
- He can't eat any fat.

You can make those two sentences into one compound sentence by joining them with the conjunction *and*, like this:

This is Jack Sprat and he can't eat any fat.

Another way to join them is:

This is Jack Sprat who can't eat any fat.

Now we have made the two simple sentences into a complex one. *This is Jack Sprat'* is the main clause; *who can't eat any fat* is a subordinate adjective clause. Notice how we made that complex sentence. If you compare it with the compound one you will see that instead of *and* (a conjunction) and *he* (a pronoun), we have used one word, *who*, that does the work of *and* and *he*. The word *who* is a pronoun, because it stands instead of *he*; it is also a conjunction because it joins together (or relates) the two sentences. It is called *Relative Pronoun*.

A relative pronoun does the work of a pronoun and a conjunction.

It stands instead of a noun and also joins an adjective clause ot another clause in a complex sentence. The three most commonly used relative pronouns are *who* (used for people), *which* (used for things) and *that* (used for people and things).

When making complex sentences like this, remember to put the adjective clause next to the noun it describes.

The adjective clause should go as near as possible to the noun it describes.