

What Are Interrogative and Relative Pronouns?

To “interrogate” is to ask someone questions in a very thorough manner. **Interrogative pronouns** are used in the same manner—to ask questions. Unlike other pronouns, interrogative pronouns do not have an antecedent. If they did, then the question would be answered and unnecessary.

Relative pronouns are used to join or “relate” a subordinate clause to the main clause in a sentence. Relative pronouns usually begin the subordinate clause since they are used for joining one to the other.

With very few exceptions, both interrogative and relative pronouns are the same. But, they are vastly different in the way they are used. The subordinate clauses that relative pronouns join to sentences can be considered as “extra information” that would lead the reader toward further understanding. But, these clauses are really unnecessary to the “basic” meaning of the sentence.

The people were surprised by Monopoly’s success.

The above example is a basic sentence—it simply makes a statement. If I were to add a subordinate clause, I could add additional meaning or information to the main sentence without changing the original message.

The people who invented the game were surprised by Monopoly’s success.

Now we know that the people who were *surprised* were the inventors of Monopoly, but did we really “need” to know this information or was it just kind of a “boon”? This is what relative pronouns do—provide bonuses.

The following is a list of interrogative and relative pronouns. Those words that are different between the two categories are in bold.

The pronoun “who” and all of its forms refer only to people. The pronoun “which” refers only to things. The pronoun “that” can refer to either people or things.

Interrogative	who, whom, whose, which, what, whoever, whomever, whichever, whatever
Relative	who, whom, whose, which, what, that , whoever, whomever, whichever, whatever, whosoever

NOTE: The relative pronoun “that” is also used to introduce or “join” a paraphrased or summarized quote to the sentence. Grammatically, this would make the added material a subordinate clause.

Examples:

What came first? The chicken or the egg? (interrogative)

Who ya gonna call?” (interrogative) From *Ghostbusters*

“Do you ever get the feeling **that** there is something going on we don't know about?”
(relative) From *Diner*

“Shall I tell you **what** I find beautiful about you?” (relative) From *Starman*

“**What's** in the box?” (interrogative) From *Seven*

If actions are stronger than words, **why** is the pen mightier than the sword?
(interrogative)

“ **What** is the matter with the poor is Poverty; **what** is the matter with the rich is Uselessness. (relative) –George Bernard Shaw

FROM ANIMAL FARM BY GEORGE ORWELL

In January there came bitterly hard weather. The earth was like iron, and nothing could be done in the fields. Many meetings were held in the big barn, and the pigs occupied themselves with planning out the work of the coming season. It had come to be accepted

that the pigs, **who** were manifestly cleverer than the other animals, should decide all questions of farm policy, though their decisions had to be ratified by a majority vote. This arrangement would have worked well enough if it had not been for the disputes



“How the West was Won” 2012 Australian Sand Sculpture Competition—
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between Snowball and Napoleon. These two disagreed at every point **where** disagreement was possible. If one of them suggested sowing a bigger acreage with barley, the other was certain to demand a bigger acreage of oats, and if one of them said **that** such and such a field was just right for cabbages, the other would declare **that** it was useless for anything except roots. Each had his own following, and there were some violent debates. At the Meetings Snowball often won over the majority by his brilliant speeches, but Napoleon was better at canvassing support for himself in between times. He was especially successful with the sheep. Of late the sheep had taken to bleating ‘Four legs good, two legs bad’ both in and out of season, and they often interrupted the Meeting with this. It was noticed **that** they were especially liable to break into ‘Four legs good, two legs bad’ at crucial moments in Snowball’s speeches. Snowball had made a close study of some back numbers of the Farmer and Stock-breeder **which** he had found in the farmhouse, and was full of plans for innovations and improvements. He talked learnedly about field-drains, silage and basic slag, and had worked out a complicated scheme for all the animals to drop their dung directly in the fields, at a different spot every day, to save the labour of cartage. Napoleon produced no schemes of his own, but said quietly **that** Snowball's would come to nothing, and seemed to be biding his time. But of all their controversies, none was so bitter as the one **that** took place over the windmill.