

# Relative Pronouns in Spanish

(Los Pronombres Relativos)

**Relative pronouns** are words that **connect two ideas or clauses** in a sentence — they refer back to a **noun (antecedent)** mentioned earlier and **replace it** in the second clause.

They work like English words such as *who, which, that, whose, where, and what*.

## 1) What Is a Relative Pronoun?

A **relative pronoun** introduces a clause that describes or gives more information about a **noun**.

English: The book **that** I read was interesting.

Spanish: El libro **que** leí fue interesante.

In both cases, *that / que* refers back to *book* and connects the two ideas.

## 2) The Most Common Relative Pronouns

Spanish	English	Use / Notes
<b>que</b>	that, which, who	Most common; refers to people or things
<b>quien / quienes</b>	who, whom	Refers only to people; often after prepositions or commas
<b>el que / la que / los que / las que</b>	the one(s) that / who	Adds clarity, gender, and number agreement
<b>el cual / la cual / los cuales / las cuales</b>	which, who	More formal version of <i>el que</i> forms
<b>lo que / lo cual</b>	what, that which	Refers to an idea or a situation (not a person or specific noun)
<b>cuyo / cuya / cuyos / cuyas</b>	whose	Expresses possession; agrees with what is owned
<b>donde</b>	where	Refers to a place
<b>cuando</b>	when	Refers to time expressions

**como**                      how                      Refers to manner or the way something happens

### 3) “Que” – The Most Common Relative Pronoun

**Que** can refer to **people, things, or places**. It usually means **that, which, or who**.

#### Examples:

- *El libro **que** leo es interesante.* → The book **that** I’m reading is interesting.
- *La chica **que** canta es mi hermana.* → The girl **who** sings is my sister.
- *El coche **que** compré es nuevo.* → The car **that** I bought is new.

*Que* can be used **with or without** a preposition, but **after a preposition referring to a person**, *quien* is often preferred.

### 4) “Quien / Quienes” – Refers Only to People

Used to mean **who** or **whom**.

Use	Example	Translation
After a comma	<i>Mi abuela, <b>quien</b> vive en Madrid, me llama cada día.</i>	My grandmother, who lives in Madrid, calls me every day.
After a preposition (a, con, de, para, etc.)	<i>La persona con <b>quien</b> trabajo es simpática.</i>	The person with whom I work is nice.
Plural form	<i>Las personas a <b>quienes</b> vi eran turistas.</i>	The people whom I saw were tourists.

*Quien* is mostly used in **non-defining clauses** (extra information) or **after prepositions**.

### 5) “El que / La que / Los que / Las que” – The One(s) That / Who

These forms **agree in gender and number** with the noun they refer to.

They're used for **clarity or emphasis**, especially after prepositions or to avoid confusion.

### Examples:

- *El chico con **el que** salgo es divertido.* → The boy **with whom** I go out is funny.
- *Las chicas para **las que** trabajo son amables.* → The girls **for whom** I work are kind.
- *Los que estudian mucho aprenden más.* → **Those who** study a lot learn more.

*El que* and its forms can replace *que* or *quien* when the meaning might otherwise be unclear.

## 6) “El cual / La cual / Los cuales / Las cuales” — Which, Who (Formal)

These are the **more formal equivalents** of *el que / la que / los que / las que*. Used often in writing, literature, or formal speech — especially **after prepositions**.

### Examples:

- *El libro, **el cual** está en la mesa, es mío.* → The book, which is on the table, is mine.
- *La mujer con **la cual** hablé es profesora.* → The woman with whom I spoke is a teacher.
- *Los estudiantes, **los cuales** son muy aplicados, aprobaron el examen.* → The students, who are very diligent, passed the exam.

## 7) “Lo que / Lo cual” — What, That Which

Used to refer to **an entire idea or situation**, not a specific noun.

Spanish	English
<i>No entiendo <b>lo que</b> dices.</i>	I don't understand what you're saying.
<i>No me gusta <b>lo que</b> hiciste.</i>	I don't like what you did.
<i>Llegó tarde, <b>lo cual</b> me sorprendió.</i>	He arrived late, which surprised me.

**Lo que** introduces **undefined ideas** (“what”)

**Lo cual** refers back to **something already mentioned** (“which”).

## 8) “Cuyo / Cuya / Cuyos / Cuyas” — Whose

Shows **possession**, and agrees with the **thing possessed**, not the owner.

### Example

*El hombre **cuyo** coche ves es mi tío.*

*La mujer **cuya** casa visitamos es doctora.*

*Los estudiantes **cuyos** libros están aquí son inteligentes.*

### Translation

The man whose car you see is my uncle.

The woman whose house we visited is a doctor.

The students whose books are here are smart.

**Cuyo** must agree in **gender and number** with the noun that follows (*coche, casa, libros*), not with *hombre, mujer, estudiantes*.

## 9) “Donde” — Where

Used to refer to **places**. It often replaces *en que* or *en el que/la que*.

### Examples:

- *El restaurante **donde** comimos es famoso.* → The restaurant **where** we ate is famous.
- *La casa **donde** nací ya no existe.* → The house **where** I was born no longer exists.
- *Esa es la ciudad **donde** vive mi familia.* → That’s the city **where** my family lives.

## 10) “Cuando” — When

Refers to **time expressions** or **moments**.

### Examples:

- *Recuerdo el día **cuando** te conocí.* → I remember the day **when** I met you.
- *Fue un momento **cuando** todos lloramos.* → It was a moment **when** we all cried.

## 11) “Como” — How / The Way (That)

Used to describe **manner** or **the way** something happens.

### Examples:

- *Así fue **como** lo conocí.* → That's how I met him.
- *No entiendo **como** llegaste tan rápido.* → I don't understand **how** you arrived so fast.
- *Es la forma **como** aprendí español.* → It's the way I [learned Spanish](#).

## 12) Summary Chart: Relative Pronouns Overview

Pronoun	Meaning	Refers To	Example
<b>que</b>	that, which, who	people/things	<i>El libro que leí.</i>
<b>quien(es)</b>	who, whom	people	<i>La persona con quien hablo.</i>
<b>el que / la que / los que / las que</b>	the one(s) that	people/things	<i>Los que trabajan mucho.</i>
<b>el cual / la cual / los cuales / las cuales</b>	which, who (formal)	people/things	<i>La casa, la cual es vieja...</i>
<b>lo que / lo cual</b>	what, that which	idea or situation	<i>No entiendo lo que dices.</i>
<b>cuyo/a/os/as</b>	whose	possession	<i>El hombre cuyo coche...</i>
<b>donde</b>	where	places	<i>La escuela donde estudio.</i>
<b>cuando</b>	when	time	<i>El día cuando llegaste.</i>
<b>como</b>	how, the way that	manner	<i>Así fue como pasó.</i>

## 13) Practice: Fill in the Blanks

1. El hombre \_\_\_\_\_ vive allí es mi abuelo.
2. La mujer con \_\_\_\_\_ hablé es muy simpática.
3. No entiendo \_\_\_\_\_ quieres decir.
4. La casa \_\_\_\_\_ techo es rojo es muy vieja.

5. Ese es el restaurante \_\_\_\_\_ comimos anoche.

**Answers:**

1. que
2. quien
3. lo que
4. cuyo
5. donde

**14) Practice: Translate**

1. The students who study a lot get good grades.
2. The woman whose son is sick is sad.
3. That's the place where we met.
4. I don't understand what you're saying.
5. The teacher, who is from Spain, is very nice.

**Answers:**

1. Los estudiantes que estudian mucho sacan buenas notas.
2. La mujer cuyo hijo está enfermo está triste.
3. Ese es el lugar donde nos conocimos.
4. No entiendo lo que dices.
5. El profesor, quien es de España, es muy simpático.

## Why Relative Pronouns Matter

Mastering relative pronouns helps learners:

- Connect **ideas smoothly** for complex sentences
- [Speak and write](#) with **fluency and sophistication**
- [Understand authentic Spanish texts](#) where these are used frequently
- Build **cohesive paragraphs** and **natural conversation flow**

They're key for moving from **simple** to **advanced** sentence structures in Spanish.

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