TREE DIAGRAMS FOR CLAUSES and PHRASES  
Based on Morenberg’s *Doing Grammar*

Remember all CLAUSES have the SAME structure as SENTENCES—they must have BOTH a Subject NP and a VP with a conjugated verb (AKA “finite”). So, a RELATIVE CLAUSE—or a Noun/That Clause or a Adverb Clause or an Adjective Clause, etc.—must have an NP and a VP, just like the most basic sentence types we have looked at.

It may be helpful to think of it this way. All language is recursive. That means all the forms we have looked at during the semester can make copies of themselves (in various formats) lower and lower in the sentence. Thus we get “embedded sentences” inside the main sentence. Noun Phrases can have sentences hanging off them—if that sentence \*describes\* the noun, we call it a Relative Clause. So if you think of a **Relative Clause** as an **NP + S** it might make more sense to you.  
  
Here’s some vocabulary that may help:  
Sentence—must have a subject NP plus a VP with a conjugated (i.e. “finite”) verb  
CLAUSE— must have a subject NP plus a VP with a conjugated (i.e. “finite”) verb

Difference between a Sentence and a Clause? Depends. All sentences are clauses, but not all clauses are sentences:

A Sentence is the same thing as an INDEPENDENT CLAUSE. It doesn’t need anything else to function as a separate sentence.  
  
A DEPENDENT CLAUSE has all the elements of a Sentence, but additions (perhaps a subordinator) or changes (a relative clause pronoun) make it necessary for the Dependent clause to be attached to a SENTENCE in order to make sense.

SENTENCE/ INDEPENDENT CLAUSE:

Mary gave the book to Sam   
*(notice this is a Vg sentence—but you can have \*any\* type of sentence as a clause).*  
  
DEPENDENT CLAUSE—NOT a Sentence *(consequently, I put asterisks (\*) at the beginning of each to show that they are not well-formed sentences in English). Examples:*

\*that Mary gave the book to Sam. *(noun/that clause)*

\*Mary, who gave the book to Sam *(relative clause)*

\*When Mary gave the book to Sam *(adverb clause –shows time)*

So, we draw tree diagrams to show the relationship of the CLAUSE to the MAIN Sentence (AKA the Independent Clause). Morenberg calls the Main Sentence the Matrix sentence.

Here’s a RELATIVE CLAUSE

Josh is a mechanic who has good skills..

“who has good skills” describes what kind of mechanic Josh is.

S

**NP:Subj** **VP:Pred**

MV NP:Subj Comp

AUX VBE NP: Head **REL CLAUSE: Adj**

**NP:Subj** **VP:Pred**

AUX VT  NP:DO

Josh Ø is a mechanic who Ø has good skills

Do you see that the NP:Subj and VP:Pred of the Relative Clause are identical to the NP:Subj and VP:Pred of the main sentence?

Here the relative clause is on the Subject Complement of a BE Verb. But it doesn’t matter where the HEAD of the relative clause is. It could be the NP:Subject—or the NP: Direct object, or the Object of a Preposition, or an NP Object complement. An NP inside a relative clause, can also have a relative clause hanging off it.

Here’s a sentence where the Relative Clause hangs off the Noun Phrase that is the object of a preposition in a Prepositional Phrase:

“Josh worked with a mechanic who has good skills.”

In the earlier sentence:  
“Josh is a mechanic who has good skills.”

“Josh” and “mechanic” refer to the same person in the real world. So “mechanic” is a Subject Complement because Subject Complements rename or describe the Subject NP.

In the second sentence

“Josh worked with a mechanic who has good skills.”

“Josh” and “mechanic” refer to different people in the real world.

**Here’s the tree diagram for “Josh worked with a mechanic who has good skills.”**

The **PP** is “*with a mechanic who has good skills*”

The **object of the preposition** *with* is the NP “***a mechanic who has good skills***”

That NP breaks down into a Head NP: ***“a mechanic”***

AND a relative Clause: ***“who has good skills”***

S

**NP:Subj** **VP:Pred**

MV **PP:Adv of instrument**

AUX VI

PP NP: Obj of Prep

Prep NP:HEAD

**REL CLAUSE: Adj**

**NP:Subj** **VP:Pred**

AUX VT  NP:DO

Josh Ø worked *with* ***a mechanic who Ø has good skills***