**Relative pronouns: les pronoms relatifs**

**(qui, que, dont, ce qui, ce que, etc...)**

**What's a Relative Pronoun?**

Relative pronouns are used to combine sentences and to avoid redundancy in writing. They are used to introduce relative clauses--parts of sentences that describe, define or expand on something already referred to in the sentence--and in English, the relative pronouns are usually **who, whom, which, or that**:

I need the book **which** is in your bag.  
Julie is a person **whom** I hold in the highest esteem.  
What is the title of the paper to**which** you referred earlier?

In each of these sentences, the relative pronoun is in **bold**, and the relative clause is in blue (the rest of the sentence could stand alone without it.)

In English, we often omit the relative pronoun (Julie is a person I hold in the highest esteem.) but in French, you must always use it.

To choose the correct relative pronoun in French, you need to ask two questions:  
1. What is the grammatical function of the pronoun in the relative clause?  
2. Are we referring to a person or a thing?

Let's ask these questions of our example sentences.

I need the book **which** is in your bag.

Look at the relative clause --which is in your bag --  
1. is which the subject of the verb is, or its object, or is it the object of a preposition?  
2. Does which refer to a person or a thing?

Likewise, in this example: Julie is a person **whom** I hold in the highest esteem.

Look at the relative clause --whom I hold in the highest esteem --  
1. Is whom the subject of the verb hold, or its object, or is it the object of a preposition?  
2. Does whom refer to a person or a thing?

Try this one: What is the title of the paper to**which** you referred earlier?

Look at the relative clause --to which you referred earlier --  
1. Is which the subject of the verb referred, or its object, or is it the object of a preposition?  
2. Does which refer to a person or a thing?

Once you've figured out the answer to these two questions, this chart shows which relative pronoun you choose in each case.