

THAT, WHICH, WHO

“That,” “which,” and “who” are seen at the beginning of clauses and add detail. However, each conveys different information. A strategy for knowing whether to use “that” versus “which” — generally, “which” follows a comma. Commas often indicate whether or not a clause is essential. If you would use commas to offset nonessential information, use “which.”

Using “That”:

- Restrictive clauses (clauses beginning with “that”), restrict the identity of the subject of the sentence—it is specific and necessary information.
 - Ex. The dog that bit me was small.
 - Ex. The car that I bought is blue.
 - In these examples, “that” limits the identities of the dog and car, and the information that follows “that” is specific to the subject.
 - Ex. You cannot remove that prepositional phrase without changing the meaning of the sentence.
 - Ex. It wasn't just any old fight that made me end it; it was the fight we had regarding “the chicken or the egg.”

Using “Which”:

- Using “which” indicates that information isn't necessary (and begins a nonrestrictive clause). Nonrestrictive clauses, unlike restrictive clauses, do not restrict the subject but instead provide additional information.
 - Ex. The brown journal, which she received for her birthday, looks older than it is.
 - In the previous example, it doesn't matter when or under what circumstances the journal was received. The clause, beginning with “which,” indicates that the information is there to supplement the subject and just provide additional understanding (but not information that is necessary).

Using “Who”:

- Use “who” the same way that you would use “that,” but only when referring to human subjects.
 - Ex. My friend who wears too much perfume is catching a ride with me today.
- The information provided after “who” is necessary for understanding which friend the speaker is discussing.