



Who vs That vs Which

That, which, and who are words (relative pronouns) which signal to a person who is reading or writing that a group of words form a dependent or subordinate clause. When should each be used?

WHO

Use **who** only with people and sometimes with animals that seem almost human.

- I noticed a man **who** had tattoos of snakes adorning his forehead and cheeks.
- the dog **who** greeted them with a toothy grin was hers.

THAT

Use **that** to refer to animals and things and anonymous groups of people.

- The pet shop charged twenty dollars for the guinea pig **that** I wanted.
- The box **that** she chose was decorated with sequins and ribbons.
- We enjoyed the band **that** played at intermission.

Use **that** with restrictive clauses. A restrictive clause defines the meaning of a noun by providing necessary information that cannot be omitted about the noun in the sentence. Note that commas are not used with restrictive clauses.

WHICH

Use **which** to refer to animals and things. Unlike **THAT**, which can be used for both restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses.

- The lecture **which** he attended was interesting and informative.
- The bird, **which** is on the endangered species list, is an eagle.
- Thank you for the gift of chocolates, **which** I truly enjoyed.

In the above examples, **which** is first used with a restrictive clause as shown by the lack of commas on either side of the clause (the word **that** would also be acceptable in the sentence).

In the next two sentences, commas are used to signify a nonrestrictive clause that could be omitted, and the meanings of the sentences would not be changed.

For easier memorization and use, some authorities, including the APA Style Manual, recommend only using **that** for restrictive clauses and **which** for nonrestrictive clauses.