

## Which: Non-restrictive Clause

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*Which* signals a non-restrictive clause. A non-restrictive clause adds extra information to a sentence. The essential meaning of the sentence would not change if the non-restrictive clause were omitted. Commas set off the non-restrictive clause from the rest of the sentence.

### EXAMPLE 1

Diamonds, **which sparkle**, are expensive.

### EXAMPLE 2

Adam took his car, **which had a bad transmission**, to the mechanic.

In EXAMPLE 1, the non-restrictive clause (“which sparkle”) adds additional information but does not affect the meaning of the sentence (diamonds are expensive).

In EXAMPLE 2, the non-restrictive clause describes Adam’s car. Knowing that his car has a bad transmission is not necessary to know that he took it to the mechanic.

## That: Restrictive Clause

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*That* signals a restrictive clause. A restrictive clause determines information that is necessary to the meaning of the sentence. Without a restrictive clause, the meaning of the sentence would change. Restrictive clauses are not set off with commas.

### EXAMPLE 3

**Diamonds that sparkle** are expensive.

### EXAMPLE 4

Adam took **his car that had a bad transmission** to the mechanic.

In EXAMPLE 3, the restrictive clause (“that sparkle”) restricts what type of diamonds are expensive. This sentence specifies that only “sparkly diamonds” are expensive.

In EXAMPLE 4, the sentence implies that Adam has more than one car. We cannot remove the restrictive clause (“that has a bad transmission”) because it specifies the car Adam is taking to the mechanic.

## Who

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*Who* replaces *that* and *which* when referring to a person. Commas denote non-restrictive clauses and their absence denotes restrictive clauses.

### EXAMPLE 5

Peter, **who lives in Toronto**, works in the banking industry.

### EXAMPLE 6

Doug and Carol are **my closest friends who live in the Calgary area**.

In EXAMPLE 5, *who* signals a non-restrictive clause because it is set off with commas. We do not need to know that Peter lives in Toronto to understand that he works in the banking industry.

In EXAMPLE 6, *who* signals a restrictive clause because there is no comma. This sentence implies that I have closer friends than Doug and Carol, but of all my friends in the Calgary area, Doug and Carol are my closest.

## Whom

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Whom is the objective case of *who*, which means it describes an object not a subject. For example, in the sentence, “I love you”, I is the subject because it does the action of “loving” and you is the object because it is the one being loved.

### EXAMPLE 7

Peter talked **to the man whom I had spoken of**.

In EXAMPLE 7, I speaks of the man. Therefore, I am doing an action making me the subject while the man is the object because he is being spoken of. An easy way of telling is to identify whether the noun you are describing does an action “Peter who lives” simplifies down to “Peter lives”; or an action is being done to someone “Peter whom we spoke of” boils down to “we spoke of Peter.”

## Additional Resources

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M. Fogarty. (2008, March 21). Which versus that. Quick and Dirty Tips. Retrieved from <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/which-versus-that-0?page=all>

T. Krupa. (2012, January 19). That versus which. APA Style Blog. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2012/01/that-versus-which.html>