

APSU Writing Center

That vs. Which and Who

That

Use that with restrictive clauses. These clauses limit or define the subject, distinguishing it from a larger group. No comma is used. If the latter part of the sentence directly defines the subject and is necessary for clarity, use that.

- **Example:** The painting **that** was hanging in the foyer was stolen.
 - **Explanation:** **that** specifies which painting was stolen.
- **That** can sometimes refer to people if they are not specifically named.
 - **Example:** The students **that** study usually do the best.

Which

Use which with nonrestrictive clauses. These clauses add extra information but do not define or limit the subject. Requires commas. If the clause is nonessential for clarity, use which with commas.

- **Example:** The painting, **which** was hanging in the foyer, was stolen.
 - **Explanation:** This clause tells that the painting was hanging in the foyer but does not specify **which** painting was stolen.
- **Exception:** If **that** has already been used to introduce a previous clause, which can introduce an essential clause.
 - **Example:** That is a problem **which** cannot be solved without a calculator.

Who

Use who for people, whether the clause is restrictive or nonrestrictive. Distinguish restrictive vs. nonrestrictive by commas.

- **Restrictive Example:** The suspect in the lineup **who** has red hair committed the crime.
 - **Explanation:** Limits to the suspect with red hair.
- **Nonrestrictive Example:** The suspect in the lineup, **who** owns a red car, committed the crime.
 - **Explanation:** Extra information that does not limit the suspect.