

A Quick Reference Guide from Writing Support Services

<http://www.cuw.edu/Tools/resources/lrc/writingcenter/grammar.html>

THAT, WHICH, WHO

TERMS

Restrictive (Essential) clauses give essential information to the sentence.

Example

I visited the agency that deals in real estate.

The underlined clause tells what type of agency is being visited.

Non-restrictive (Nonessential) clauses give nonessential information. The clause could be removed from the sentence without changing the meaning.

Example

I completed my investigative report, which explored the aspects of the Jewish wedding ceremony.

This clause could be removed because it does not clarify the fact that the investigative report has been completed.

THAT

That is most commonly used to refer to non-specific people in restrictive clauses.

Awkward Example

My boss that was hired by the agency has experience selling real estate.

The person in the sentence is one specific woman, not any person.

Better Example

*The agency is looking for someone **that** has experience in selling real estate.*

That can also be used to refer to objects.

Example

*The ball **that** hit me came from right field.*

WHICH

Which is commonly used to refer to objects in non-restrictive clauses.

Awkward Example

The agent, which joined the company last month, fought for equality in the workplace.

Better Example

The agency, which was founded in 1982, was intended to ensure equal representation of minorities in the workplace.

Awkward Example

The baseball team trainer, which joined last month, helps bring revenue to the city.

Better Example

The baseball team, which is privately trained, brings revenue to the city.

Which can also be used for restrictive clauses. This is often determined by punctuation, or the lack thereof. This use is less common, often **that** is used instead.

Restrictive Example

The proposal which interested investors was the most reasonable.

Non-Restrictive Example

The team's proposal, which interested the investors, was quite reasonable.