



Which: Non-restrictive Clause

Which

EXAMPLE 1	EXAMPLE 2
which sparkle	which had a bad transmission

That: Restrictive Clause

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	EXAMPLE 4
Diamonds that sparkle are expensive.	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.

Who

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

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

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>