That, Which, Who:
Essential and Non-Essential Clauses

**Essential Clauses:**
Essential clauses (restrictive, or relative, clauses) includes information that is important to the meaning of the sentence.

**That:**
The word “that” refers to objects or places and is the biggest indicator of an essential clause (versus “which,” which is a tell-tale of a non-essential clause). It introduces a descriptive or informative phrase that adds important details to a sentence.

Example:  
*The book that Dr. Doright left in the dining hall showed up on his desk today.*

**Non-essential Clauses:**
Non-essential clauses (non-restrictive clauses) include information that is not important to the meaning of the sentence. A comma always precedes a non-essential clause.

**Which:**
The word “which” introduces information that is not necessarily key or essential to understanding what the writer wants to say and is the biggest indicator of a non-essential clause.

Example:  
*Dr. Doright left the book, which was a birthday gift, in the dining hall.*

**Who—Essential and Non-essential:**
*Who* always refers to people, not objects or places and can be used as to offset essential and non-essential clauses.

Examples:  
*Dr. Doright, who teaches Composition 1101, has a terrific sense of humor.* (Non-essential)  
*The man who backed his car into me drove away without stopping to give me his insurance information.* (Essential)

Need more help? Schedule an appointment with the Writing Studio in 2420, 25 Park Place at http://gsu.mywconline.net/