



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)*