



Who vs. Which vs. That

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Rule 1. Who refers to people. That and which refer to groups or things.

Examples:

Glen is the one who rescued the bird.

She belongs to an organization that specializes in saving endangered species.

Rule 2. That introduces essential clauses while which introduces nonessential clauses.

Examples I do not like editorials that argue for racial differences in intelligence.

We would not know which editorials were being discussed without the that clause.

The editorial arguing for racial differences in intelligence, which appeared in the Sunday newspaper, upset me.

The editorial is already identified. Therefore, which begins a nonessential clause.

NOTE: Essential clauses do not have commas surrounding them while nonessential clauses do contain commas.

Rule 3. If that has already been used in the sentence, use which to introduce the essential clause that follows.

Example: That is a decision which you must live with for the rest of your life.

Rule 4. If the essential clause starts with this, that, these, or those, use which to connect.

Example Those ideas which were discussed on Tuesday will be put in the minutes of the meeting.

Even better: The ideas discussed on Tuesday will be . . .

Practice WHO vs. WHICH vs. THAT

Pick the correct word.

1. Books have been discovered that/which address the horrors of the Salem witch trials.
2. That book about the Salem witch trials, that/which was discovered in the basement of the library, will be published next year.
3. That is a book that/which I have not yet read.
4. The state law that/which banned logging ancient redwoods began at the grassroots level.
5. The state law to ban logging ancient redwoods, that/which began at the grassroots level, has gained the attention of lawmakers at the national level.

ANSWERS:

1. that
2. which
3. which
4. that
5. which

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