

Who, That, and Which

Rule 1.

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

Examples:

Mark is the one **who** rescued the bird.

Noriko is on the team **that** won first place.

Kaori belongs to an organization **that** specializes in saving endangered species.

Rule 2.

That introduces essential clauses while **which** introduces non-essential clauses.

Examples:

I do not trust products **that** claim "all natural ingredients" because this phrase can mean almost anything.

The reader would not know which products were being discussed without the that clause.

The product claiming "all natural ingredients," **which** appeared in the Sunday newspaper, is on sale.

The product is already identified. Therefore, which begins a non-essential clause.

NOTE:

Essential clauses do not have commas surrounding them while non-essential clauses are surrounded by commas.

Rule 3.

If this, that, these, or those has already introduced an essential clause, you may use **which** to introduce the next clause, whether it is essential or non-essential.

Examples:

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

Those ideas, **which** we've discussed thoroughly enough, do not need to be addressed again.

NOTE:

Often, you can streamline your sentence by leaving out which.

Example:

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

Better:

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