# THAT versus WHICH
## GRAMMAR

**ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY**

**www.mun.ca/writingcentre**

## PURPOSE

**Relative pronouns to introduce a dependent clause.**

## THAT OR WHICH?

If the dependent clause is required to understand the sentence (defining), use ***that*** without a comma.

If the dependent clause is not essential to the sentence meaning, use ***which*** plus a comma.

## CLAUSES

A clause is a group of words that provides details to its antecedent (noun). This group of words includes a noun and a verb.

➢ *The cyclist **that** broke the world record was sponsored by the company.*

➢ *The cyclist **, which** broke the world record **,** was sponsored by the company.*

Two types of clauses:

1. **Independent Clause**
   o Complete thought

2. **Dependent Clause**
   o Incomplete thought
   o Must be partnered with an independent clause
   o two forms of dependent clauses

a) **Restrictive Clause**
- Essential to sentence meaning
- Clause restricts the meaning of the antecedent
- No commas are used.

Also referred to as the essential clause and the defining clause.

b) **Nonrestrictive Clause**
- Not essential to understand the sentence
- Clause simply adds extra information for the audience
- Audience can ignore the clause and still understand the sentence
- Clause uses commas

## THAT
o Partners with **restrictive clause**
o No surrounding commas with the restrictive clause
o If the restrictive clause was removed, the audience will lose essential information about the noun (antecedent).

Examples:

- *The **questions** that were asked were troubling.*
  - *The **questions** were troubling.*
  - *Which **questions**?*
- *The lab report was located in the **room** that was locked.*
  - *The lab report was located in the **room**.*
  - *Which **room**?*
- *The **foundation** that the new company poured was weak.*
  - *The **foundation** was weak.*
  - *Which **foundation**?*
- *Museum visitors can see different **kinds of tools** that were used by the settlers.*
  - *Museum visitors can see different **kinds of tools**.*
  - *Which **kinds of tools**?*

## WHICH

- o Partners with **nonrestrictive clause**
- o Uses commas to surround the nonrestrictive clause
- o Indicates that the details in the clause will not impact the sentence meaning.

Examples:

- **Fishing**, *which is my father's favourite activity*, *is relaxing.*
    - o **Fishing** *is relaxing.*
- *My class is located in the* **Education Building**, *which is always hot.*
    - o *My class is located in the* **Education Building**.
- **Microwaved popcorn**, *which I do not like*, *is popular with many students.*
    - o **Microwaved popcorn** *is popular with many students.*
- **The family home**, *which was declared a heritage property in 1983*, *was for sale for three years.*
    - o **The family home** *was for sale for three years.*



## Contact us

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