

THAT vs. WHICH*

That always introduces an *essential* clause.

EXAMPLE: We should use the lettuce *that Susan brought*.

The clause *that Susan brought* identifies the specific lettuce that should be used and is therefore an essential clause.

Which can introduce both non-essential and essential clauses; however, in essential clauses, **that** is preferred over **which** whenever possible .

EXAMPLE: The romaine lettuce, *which is in the refrigerator*, would make a good salad.

The clause *which is in the refrigerator* is a non-essential clause because it just adds some information about the lettuce.

EXAMPLE: You already told him *which lettuce you want to use for the salad*.

The clause *which lettuce you want to use for the salad* is the object of the verb *told* and is essential (Although the clause is essential, in this example **that** cannot appropriately be substituted for **which**).

However, “Take the sweater *which Aunt Lily gave you* [essential clause]” is **not** the best form. For an essential clause, use **that** if you can: “Take the sweater *that Aunt Lily gave you*.”

➡ Non-essential clauses are set off by commas. Essential clauses are not.

Check your understanding with this complex sentence: “Computed tomography (CT), *which can show structures with greater detail and in multiple dimensions*, can detect lesions *that may be difficult to view on plain radiograph*, for example, incomplete or stress fractures.”** The **which** clause is non-essential; it just offers more information about CT scans. The **that** clause is essential to identify which lesions.

THAT vs. WHO and WHOM

That refers to animals that lack a name and to things.

EXAMPLE: Many of the pythons *that escape from private collectors in north Florida* find a home in the Everglades. The fact *that pythons are breeding in the preserve* is disturbing the ecosystem.

Who and **whom** refer to people and to animals with names.

EXAMPLE: In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy is a girl *who* visits Oz. She gains courage and comfort from her dog, Toto, *whom* she takes with her.

* Adapted from Fowler, H. Ramsey, and Jane E. Aaron, *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 10th Ed., New York: Pearson Longman, 2007, 879.

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