

Learning to Distinguish between Who, That, or Which

Careful writers and speakers distinguish among the relative pronouns *who*, *that*, and *which*.

WHO is used to refer to persons. It may introduce essential or nonessential clauses.

Example: *Anyone who can build social media followers is in demand.* (The relative clause *who can build social media followers* is essential. Without this clause, the sentence says that anyone is in demand. However, only one who can build social media followers is in demand.)

Example: *Kevin Lee, who is excellent at building social media followers, made our brand grow 25 percent over six months.* (The relative clause *who is excellent at building social media followers* is nonessential. It describes but does not limit the main clause. The main clause can stand alone without the added information. Hint: When individuals are named, information added in *who* clauses is almost always nonessential. Notice that commas set off nonessential clauses.)

THAT refers to animals or things and should be used to introduce essential clauses.

Example: *The Instagram account that Kevin created attracted many followers.* (The relative clause *that Kevin created* is essential. What web site attracted many visitors? Only the Instagram account that Kevin created attracted the visitors. Don't use the relative pronoun *which* to introduce essential clauses.)

WHICH refers to animals or things and introduces a nonessential clause.

Example: *The Instagram account, which was totally redesigned by Kevin Lee, has helped our brand grow.* (The relative pronoun clause is intended to be nonessential. Because it merely adds extra information, it is set off by commas.)

The tricky part is deciding whether a clause is nonessential. Nonessential clauses contain information that the reader does not need to know; the main clause is understandable without this extra information. In some cases, only the writer knows whether the clause is intended to be essential or nonessential. If a clause is intended to be nonessential, it should be set off from the rest of the sentence by commas.

In the following sentences, revise any incorrect relative pronouns and punctuation. Mark *C* if the sentence is correct.

1. On Instagram it's more important to have 1,000 followers that actively participate than 10,000 fans who were purchased.
2. Our customer account teams, that were recently developed to meet our changing business needs, will analyze your business operations from every angle.
3. Any site who has free delivery will appeal to potential customers.

4. Anyone that has recently purchased a smartphone knows how quickly they become obsolete.
5. Managers are looking for people that have good vocabularies, grammar, and manners.
6. The new rules which will become effective July 1 are intended to increase worker safety.
7. Jeffrey has a dog who likes to eat cold pizza.
8. Many assembly work areas provide a special handle which can be pulled to stop the line if an imminent danger arises.
9. Some of the parts which were moving down the assembly line required special robots to lift them onto the cars being assembled.
10. Our team which has the authority to set up its own work schedules tries to rotate the hardest jobs.
11. We appointed a safety committee which provides guidelines to individual work units.
12. Hawaiian Vintage chocolate which is grown in the fertile regions of Kona and Keaau is the only chocolate produced from American-grown cocoa beans.
13. Those chocolate lovers who are willing to pay the high price of \$56 a pound appreciate the fruity aroma and intense taste of Hawaiian chocolate.
14. Any car which is traveling over the speed limit will be ticketed.
15. Western rattlesnakes who are the most common rattlers in the West hibernate together in large numbers during the winter months.