

English Ladder

Student Workbook

That vs Which: Understanding Essential and Non-Essential Information

A polished self-study handout designed for print or tablet use. Read the concept, notice the pattern, and then complete the matching practice set on your own.



Grammar Concepts #12

Key Points

Summary

Visual anchor


Use the concept poster to spotlight the main language pattern in **That vs Which: Understanding Essential and Non-Essential Information** and keep the explanation visible during practice and discussion.


ENGLISH LADDER


Concept #12 ► **That vs Which**


When the information included **is essential** to the meaning of a sentence, we use **"that"** without commas.


When the information included **is not essential** to the meaning of a sentence, we use **"which"** with commas.


The shape **that** is red is called a "cube". 

The shape, **which** is red, is a cube. 

The tool **that** is completely silver is called a "wrench". 

The tool, **which** is completely silver, is a wrench. 

The animal **that** has big ears is an elephant. 

The animal, **which** has a hump, is a camel. 

* If the subject is a person, the word "who" is used in both cases. But commas are still used when the information is not essential.

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Core Idea

When learning English, it's important to understand how to use the words that and which correctly. These words are used to introduce clauses that describe nouns, but their usage depends on whether the information in the clause is essential or non-essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Quick reference

| | |
|--|--|
| Essential Information: Using "That" | The shape that is red is called a "cube". Here, "that is red" is essential because it specifies which shape is being referred to. |
| Essential Information: Using "That" | The book that has a blue cover is mine. |
| Non-Essential Information: Using "Which" | The shape, which is red, is a cube. "Which is red" adds extra information about the shape but is not necessary to identify it as a cube. |
| Non-Essential Information: Using "Which" | The book, which has a blue cover, is mine. |
| Special Note: Using "Who" | The girl who won the race is my sister. (Essential) "Who won the race" is essential to identify which girl. |
| Special Note: Using "Who" | The teacher who assigned the homework is very strict. (Essential) |

Key Points

Essential Information: Using "That"

When the information included is essential to the meaning of a sentence, we use "that" without commas. Essential information provides details that are necessary to understand the noun it describes. If we remove the essential clause, the sentence loses important meaning.

Examples:

- The shape that is red is called a "cube". Here, "that is red" is essential because it specifies which shape is being referred to.
- The tool that is completely silver is called a "wrench". "That is completely silver" is essential to identify the specific tool.
- The animal that has big ears is an elephant. "That has big ears" is essential to specify which animal.



More examples:

- The book that has a blue cover is mine.
- The car that is parked outside belongs to John.
- The student that studies the most often gets the best grades.

Non-Essential Information: Using "Which"

When the information included is not essential to the meaning of a sentence, we use "which" with commas. Non-essential information provides extra details that can be removed without changing the basic meaning of the sentence.

Examples:

- The shape, which is red, is a cube. "Which is red" adds extra information about the shape but is not necessary to identify it as a cube.
- The tool, which is completely silver, is a wrench. "Which is completely silver" gives additional information but is not essential to know it's a wrench.
- The animal, which has a hump, is a camel. "Which has a hump" provides extra detail about the animal but isn't necessary to identify it as a camel.

More examples:

- The book, which has a blue cover, is mine.
- The car, which is parked outside, belongs to John.
- The student, who studies the most, often gets the best grades.

Special Note: Using "Who"

If the subject is a person, the word "who" is used in both cases. However, commas are still used when the information is non-essential.

Examples:

- The girl who won the race is my sister. (Essential) "Who won the race" is essential to identify which girl.
- My sister, who won the race, is very fast. (Non-Essential) "Who won the race" adds extra information about my sister but is not necessary for the main point.

More examples:

- The teacher who assigned the homework is very strict. (Essential)
- Mr. Johnson, who assigned the homework, is very strict. (Non-Essential)
- The man who lives next door is a doctor. (Essential)
- Dr. Smith, who lives next door, is very kind. (Non-Essential)



Summary

- Use "that" for essential information without commas.
- Use "which" for non-essential information with commas.
- Use "who" for people, following the same rules for essential and non-essential information.

Understanding the difference between essential and non-essential information will help you use that and which correctly, making your English more precise and clear.



Practice Check

Answer the quiz questions below with responses consistent with the grammar concepts taught on the left.

ITEM 01

The house _____ is on the corner is blue. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 02

The car, _____ is red, is very fast. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 03

The book _____ I borrowed was excellent. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 04

My phone, _____ is very old, still works fine. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 05

The movie _____ we watched last night was scary. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 06

The flowers, _____ are on the table, are for you. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 07

The student _____ studies the hardest usually succeeds. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 08

My computer, _____ is very fast, helps me work efficiently. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 09

The song _____ she sang was beautiful. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 10

The cake, _____ was chocolate, was delicious. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____



ITEM 11

The book _____ has a red cover is mine. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 12

The car, _____ is parked outside, is my sister's. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 13

The dog _____ barked all night kept us awake. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 14

My brother, _____ lives in New York, is visiting us. (a) that (b) which (c) who

Answer: _____

ITEM 15

The bike _____ I ride is very old. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 16

The movie, _____ stars my favorite actor, is a hit. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 17

The building _____ collapsed was very old. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 18

The painting, _____ was stolen, is very valuable. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 19

The restaurant _____ we went to was expensive. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 20

The shoes, _____ are black, are very comfortable. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____



ITEM 21

The film _____ we watched last night was interesting. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 22

The tree, _____ is very old, provides a lot of shade. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 23

The cat _____ caught the mouse is very clever. (a) that (b) which

Answer: _____

ITEM 24

The teacher, _____ assigned the homework, is very strict. (a) that (b) which (c) who

Answer: _____



Self-check Answer Key

Use the key after you have completed every item on your own.

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The house The house that is on the corner is blue. is on the corner is blue. (a) that (b) which

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The car, The car, which is red, is very fast. is red, is very fast. (a) that (b) which

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The book The book that I borrowed was excellent. I borrowed was excellent. (a) that (b) which

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My phone, My phone, which is very old, still works fine. is very old, still works fine. (a) that (b) which

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The movie The movie that we watched last night was scary. we watched last night was scary. (a) that (b) which

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The flowers, The flowers, which are on the table, are for you. are on the table, are for you. (a) that (b) which

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The student The student that studies the hardest usually succeeds. studies the hardest usually succeeds. (a) that (b) which

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My computer, My computer, which is very fast, helps me work efficiently. is very fast, helps me work efficiently. (a) that (b) which

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My brother, My brother, who lives in New York, is visiting us. lives in New York, is visiting us. (a) that (b) which (c) who

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The tree, The tree, which is very old, provides a lot of shade. is very old, provides a lot of shade. (a) that (b) which

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The cat The cat that caught the mouse is very clever. caught the mouse is very clever. (a) that (b) which

**ITEM 24**

The teacher, The teacher, who assigned the homework, is very strict. assigned the homework, is very strict. (a) that (b) which (c) who