

More Commonly Confused Words

Who/Whom vs. That vs. Which

Rule 1: *Who* and *whom* refer to people. *That* and *which* refer to groups or things.

Examples:

Anya is the one **who** rescued the bird. *Mary* is the person **whom** I trust.

My teacher is the person **who** influenced me the most.

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

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

Rule 2: *That* or *who* or *whom* can introduce essential clauses needed to identify the noun preceding it.

Examples:

The car **that was parked in front of my house** was stolen last night.

The word *that* is essential (important) in identifying the car I'm talking about. (It's not my car or your car or the car in my driveway – it's the car parked on the street.)

The waiter **who took our order** is currently dating my daughter.

There are a lot of waiters in the restaurant. I'm identifying which one dates my daughter.

The order **that I placed three months ago** has been lost.

I place a lot of orders so I'm telling you which one was lost.

NOTE: Essential clauses do not have commas.

Rule 3: *Which* and *who* or *whom* introduce nonessential clauses you don't really need.

Examples:

Mary's car, **which was parked in front of my house last night**, was stolen.

The car is already identified. It's the one belonging to Mary. So I use *which*.

Our waiter, **who is currently dating my daughter**, will receive a large tip.

It's clear which waiter I'm referring to; I'm just adding extra information about him.

The order, **which I really need so I can finish this project**, has been lost.

We already know which order I'm referring to. The clause is not needed to identify it.

NOTE: Nonessential clauses have commas to set them apart.

Rule 4. 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 nonessential.

Examples:

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

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

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

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