**that and which in restrictive and non-restrictive clauses**

A restrictive clause is one that contains information essential to the meaning of the sentence; therefore, no commas are used around it.

*The identified agency that had responsibility for the boy's future was ACS.*

The clause "that had responsibility for the boy's future" is essential to the meaning of the sentence. It restricts the agency that the writer refers to.

A non-restrictive clause is one that contains information not essential to the meaning of the sentence; therefore, commas are used around it.

*ACS, which was the identified agency, had responsibility for the boy's future.*

The clause "which was the identified agency" is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. It provides additional information of some kind.

When using the words *that* or *which* to introduce a clause, first ask yourself whether the statement you're writing is essential to the meaning of your sentence. If it is, then begin it with the word *that* (without a comma before it). If it is not essential, then use the word *which* with a comma before it.

*The students needed pencils that were durable.*
*The students needed durable pencils, which were expensive.*

*I can’t miss the lecture that will be on current social policy initiatives.*
*I can’t miss the lecture, which is one I can’t miss, will be current social policy initiatives.*

*The New York that I know and love is beginning to change.*
*New York, which is beginning to change, is the city I know and love.*

*The class that met from 9 to 11 on Wednesday was full.*
*The class, which met from 9 to 11 on Wednesday, was full.*

And keep in mind that the above applies to more than clauses introduced by either *that* or *which*. Use commas around any statement that describes or provides additional information about the main clause.

*The class, no matter what anyone said, was stimulating.*

*My HBSE professor, who's my current favorite in the whole world, was voted outstanding teacher.*

*The professor, when she thought appropriate, challenged the students to perform at a higher level.*

*Room 311-312, where the presentation was to be held, had already been booked.*