

***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.

The subject of 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.