

WHICH OR THAT?

Which and *that* are both relative pronouns. They introduce relative clauses. But English, being a language that it is, actually has two types of relative clauses: *restrictive* and *non-restrictive* relative clauses that signal the importance of the information they contain.

Non-restrictive Clauses

1. Non-restrictive clauses add parenthetical, non-defining information that is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence; remove it and the sentence still makes sense.

E.g. Zebras, which live in Africa, kill more people each year than do crocodiles.

2. Non-restrictive clauses are introduced by the correct form of *which* or *who*.
3. In English non-restrictive clauses should be set off by commas, dashes, or parentheses.

Restrictive Clauses

1. Restrictive clauses limit or restrict the noun or substantive it modifies.

E.g. The zebra *that* the lion attacked was clearly sick.

2. Restrictive clauses are introduced by *that*.
3. Because they are integral to the meaning of the sentence, restrictive clauses are not set off by commas, dashes, or parentheses.

Other Distinctions:

1. *Which* can only refer to inanimate antecedents (use the correct form of *who* / *whom* for animate antecedents); *that* can refer to animate or inanimate antecedents.
2. *Which* can be used after a preposition; but *that* cannot.
E.g. it is not correct to say "Is this the consul *with that* you fought?" but it is to say "Is that the consul *with whom* you fought?").