

## Who/Which Clause

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A “who” or “which” clause is simply a group of words that begins with who or which and has a verb in it. (The who or which is the subject of the clause.)

When do you use “who”? – When talking about people.

When do you use “which”? – When talking about things.

What about animals? If they act like humans or are pets, use “who.” If they are clearly animals, use “which.”

To indicate the who/which clause: Underline only the who or which, not the whole clause. If you have more than one, underline only one in every paragraph.

### ***There are two ways to create a who/which:***

1. Take two sentences that begin with the same subject and turn one into a “who” or “which” clause.

#### **Examples:**

- The yellow-bellied sapsucker is native to Canada and the northern United States. It destroys young trees by sucking sap from the branches.

The yellow-bellied sapsucker, which is native to Canada and the northern United States, destroys young trees by sucking sap from the branches.

- John Smith knew how to trade with the Indians for food. He helped save Jamestown.

John Smith, who knew how to trade with the Indians for food, helped save Jamestown.

2. Take a noun (person or thing) and add information to it in the form of a “who” or “which” clause.

#### **Examples:**

- The lion was most grateful for the appearance of the little mouse.
- The lion, who felt he would never be able to disentangle himself from the hunter’s net, was most grateful for the appearance of the little mouse.
- John Smith made a clever rule.
- John Smith, who knew the hearts of men, made a clever rule.

### ***CRUCIAL: Don’t let your “who” or “which” steal your sentence!***

A who/which clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

The disheveled princess stood dripping.

The disheveled princess, who stood dripping. (What’s wrong with this?)

## Advanced Who/Which's, Plus Invisibles

The who/which dress-up may now include *that* (when it starts an adjective clause, not when it's a demonstrative pronoun, as in "that pumpkin," or when it starts a noun clause, as in "she thought that..."), *whom*, and *whose*. Adjective clauses (the *who* or the *which*) usually immediately follow the noun they describe.

1. *Who* refers to people. *That* and *which* refer to groups or things.  
Glen is the one who rescued the bird.  
Glenna is on the team that won first place.
2. *Whose* refers to people or objects to indicate possession. (Remember not to confuse *whose* with *who's*, which means *who is*.)  
Don't sit on that table, whose leg is broken. (not ... *whiches* leg is broken)  
Who's going to ride the Wipeout?
3. Use commas if you can remove the who/which clause from the sentence and the main clause meaning doesn't change (sentence still says the same thing).

We call these nonessential clauses, because they aren't essential to the meaning of the main clause.

Bring the overdue books, which are lying on the table.

The engineer, who was asleep at the time, missed the cows floating past the train windows.

4. If a *which* clause is essential, *that* is preferred over *which*. Essential clauses do not take commas.  
Anyone who agrees with me can join me on the platform immediately.  
All laughter that is out of place will be stuffed into a nearby drawer.
5. Use *whom* instead of *who* when the *who* clause is the object of something, often the object of a preposition.

### **Trick: he/him method**

he = who

him = whom

Substitute *he* or *him* to decide:

Who/Whom wrote the letter?

He? Him? wrote the letter, so who? whom? is correct.

For who/whom should I vote?

Should I vote for he? him?, so who? whom? is correct.

We all know who/whom pulled that prank.

We all know that he? him? pulled that prank, so who? whom? is correct.

We want to know on who/whom the prank was pulled.

We want to know if the prank was pulled on he? him?, so who? whom? is correct.

## Invisible Who/Which's

Sometimes, you can write a *who* or *which* clause that doesn't need a *who* or *which*.

The cake, ~~which was~~ coated with sparkles, shimmered in the candlelight.  
T. S. Eliot, ~~who was~~ a poet, was a pedestrian, too.

**Hint 1:** Invisible Who/Which's are most likely to occur when they are followed by a "be" verb, so making the *who* or *which* invisible also rids your sentence of a pesky "be."

**Hint 2:** Invisible Who/Which's often have an -ing or -ed.

Sammie dashed ahead with his red wagon, ~~which was~~ pulling a mighty load.

**Hint 3:** It's hard to make an *essential* who/which clause invisible. If it sounds right with *that* instead of *which*, don't bother trying!

The clothes that are in the drawer need airing.  
The clothes in the drawer need ironing. Fine sentence, but not an invisible who/which, just a prepositional phrase describing "clothes."

**Hint 4:** When you use invisibles, READ ALOUD the sentence to make sure it still works. The sentence should sound great and still make sense.

We have two nine-year kids on the team, in the highest division of the league.  
Unclear whether a "which is" or a "who are" is indicated. Is it the team or the kids that are in the highest division?

**Indicator:** Underline the word before and after the comma along with the comma, in one continuous underline.

Stuart, famous for his sand figures, switched to ice sculpting.