

Restriction/Nonrestriction (aka Essential/Nonessential Elements)

- Phrase: a group of related words without both a subject and a verb.
- Clause: a group of related words that contain both a subject and predicate. Two types: main clause (independent), which can stand alone as a sentence, and subordinate clause (dependent), which cannot stand as a sentence by itself.
- An appositive is the same as an invisible who/which (which Andrew teaches), where the "who/which" and the verb (a "be" verb) are omitted. Example: That typewriter, which was my standby in college, ... can become: That typewriter, my standby in college, ..., with "my standby in college" an appositive (renames the noun that precedes it).

Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Elements (a.k.a. essential or nonessential)

Phrases, clauses, and appositives can be restrictive or nonrestrictive.

Nonrestrictive: Set off with commas

If you delete the nonrestrictive element, it does not change the information in the main clause or make it nonsensical. It is not essential to the main clause information. Nonrestrictive elements may add important information to the sentence, but they *do not affect the meaning of the main clause*.

- Charlotte Turtle, a sophomore, was the fastest runner in the 50-meter dash. (nonrestrictive appositive)
- A dapper man, his shoe under his arm, appeared in the revolving door. (nonrestrictive phrase)
- The engineer, who glanced away at the time, missed the cows floating past the windows of the train. (nonrestrictive clause)

Restrictive: No commas

If you delete the restrictive element, it alters the meaning of the main clause or makes it nonsense. *Restrictive elements are essential to the meaning of the main clause.*

- Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been banned at libraries. (restrictive appositive)
- Americans live on a diet heavy in sugars, fats, and salt. (restrictive phrase)
- Anyone who agrees with me can join me on the platform immediately. (restrictive clause)

Note: "That" is never used to begin a nonrestrictive clause. Example: All comments that are negative will be filed in the cabinet under "N." (restrictive clause)

Also: The issue of restriction/nonrestriction applies only to elements falling in the middle or end of a sentence. Therefore, a dependent clause coming at the beginning of the sentence should be set off with a comma even if it is restrictive. Example: If rain could rise upward, where would it stop? BUT: Where would rain stop if it could rise upward?

Some elements grammatically can be either restrictive OR nonrestrictive. This is where grammar gets cool. Which you choose depends on what you mean to say.

Example: In which of the following sentences do *all* students have to deliver reports?

a. The students who wear hats shall have to deliver five-minute oral reports during recess.

b. The students, who wear hats, shall have to deliver five-minute oral reports during recess. (They all must deliver reports, and, incidentally, they all wear hats.)

Example: In which of the following sentences does the writer mean to imply that *all* nineteenth-century women glorified war?

a. Howell's story "Editha" portrays the woman of the late nineteenth century, who glorifies war.

b. Howell's story "Editha" portrays the woman of the late nineteenth century who glorifies war.

Exercise. Identify the clause, phrase, or appositive in question. Then explain whether it should be nonrestrictive or restrictive and why. Add commas to nonrestrictive elements.

1. At the prom, all the guys who wear black will have to sit on the south side of the dance floor. (R clause—guys who don't wear black get to sit anywhere)
2. Nicholas Kain, professor of Angst, used to cry all over his lectern and ruin his lovingly prepared notes. (NR appos—he happens to be a professor at that school)
3. Stuart, who usually wears overalls, arrived dressed in shorts. (NR, clause—it is interesting what he usually wears, but doesn't affect how he came today)
4. I'll soon understand your intentions if they are truly good. (R, clause—I'll understand them only if they are good)
5. If your intentions are truly good, I'll soon understand them. (R, clause—but takes comma because it starts the sentence. Restriction/nonrestriction doesn't apply to openers.)
6. The poet T. S. Eliot was a pedestrian too. (R, appos—important to know which poet)
7. I will go with you to the pool if we can attend the concert afterward. (R, clause—swimming depends on the concert)
8. He agreed to this arrangement, although he didn't really like concerts. (NR, clause—doesn't really matter why he agreed)
9. All books that are undersized must be carted away and stored in the tower, for the prince likes uniformity above all things. (R, clause—*that* is never used to begin a nonrestrictive clause)
10. In which sentence are girls unfairly maligned as being unable to mow lawns?
 - a. Girls, who are in their summer dresses, can't mow the lawn. (NR, clause—indicates the sentence means all girls regardless of their attire)
 - b. Girls who are in their summer dresses can't mow the lawn.
11. In which sentence do I have more than one cat?
 - a. My cat Bingley knows how to give an admirable back rub with his well-tempered and discreet claws. (R, clause—essential because there is more than one cat)
 - b. My cat, Bingley, knows how to give an admirable back rub with his well-tempered and discreet claws.
12. In which sentence might all the students at Home School High find themselves becoming icicles?
 - a. The students at HSH who hang out on the front porch may turn into icicles this winter.
 - b. The students at HSH, who hang out on the front porch, may turn into icicles this winter. (NR, clause—All may freeze, and, incidentally, all hang out on the front porch.)

Grammar Rule:

Commas with a who/which (adjectival) clause

Rule: Use commas to set off *nonessential* who/which (adjectival) clauses.

Examples:

1. Mrs. Smith, who is an interior designer, likes bold colors. *(Nonessential who/which clause, since she would like bold colors whether or not she was an interior designer.)*
2. He is bothered by children who speak unkindly to their brothers and sisters. *(Essential who/which clause because he is not bothered by ALL children, only those who speak unkindly to their brothers and sisters.)*

Note: Sometimes an element may be interpreted as essential or as nonessential. The writer of the sentence must punctuate the sentence so that it conveys the meaning he intends.

Example:

1. Direct any questions about writing style to our teacher who is an expert on such matters. *(Here the who/which clause is essential because the writer wants to indicate that we have more than one teacher and that questions about writing style should be directed to the one who is an expert in such matters.)*
2. Direct any questions about writing style to our secretary, who is an expert on such matters. *(Here the clause is nonessential because the writer wants to indicate that we have only one secretary and that she is an expert on writing style.)*

Grammar Worksheet

Using Commas with the Who/Which Clause

Directions:

1. Decide if the who/which clauses are essential or nonessential. Write an "E" for essential or an "N" for nonessential on the space before each number.
2. Use commas around the nonessential clauses where needed.
3. Hint: Remove the who/which clause from the sentence and see if it is perfectly clear and makes sense; if so, it is nonessential.

Examples:

 N Edgar, who is walking in from third base, hits and fields well.

 E The player who is walking in from third base hits and fields well.

1. _____ Albert who is my youngest brother is turning nine in October.
2. _____ The car which belongs to my uncle is red.
3. _____ The man who owns the shop is named Roger.
4. _____ The squirrel which was extremely speedy scampered up a tree.
5. _____ People who steal from others should be punished.
6. _____ Dogs which foam at the mouth could be rabid.
7. _____ Jim who is an interesting man played football for ten years.
8. _____ Rugby which is an aggressive sport is played in Europe.
9. _____ Computers which have large hard-drives are able to store volumes of information.
10. _____ George Washington who was our first president was from Virginia.
11. _____ Cats which are more than two colors are female.
12. _____ Trees which are the tallest of all plants are able to produce food.
13. _____ Alex who is an excellent artist is in three of my classes.
14. _____ Cars which have under-inflated tires are difficult to control.
15. _____ God who created the universe and everything in it sent His Son to die for our sins.

Grammar Worksheet **KEY**

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