

# Who, which, that

## Introduction



These are my boots **which** are good for hiking.

## Definition

**Who, which** and **that** are **relative pronouns**.

## Construction and use

We use them to introduce **relative clauses**.

**Who** is used to talk about people:

These are the people **who** attended the conference.

**Which** is used to talk about things:

They went to the conference **which** was in Paris.

**That** is used to talk about things or people:

These are the people **that** attended the conference.

They went to the conference **that** was in Paris.

## Defining relative clauses

In these sentences, we need the relative clause to define the people and the conference:

These are the people **who** attended the conference.

They went to the conference **that** was in Paris.

If we only say, "These are the people" or "They went to the conference", there is some information missing - we might not know which people or which conference.

In these kinds of sentences, we do not use commas and we can use **that** instead of **who** and **which**. **That** is more common in conversation. Here are some examples:

The client **who/that** comes from London is visiting us next week.  
The files **which/that** are on the table are mine.  
These are the boots **which/that** are good for hiking.

## 'That' or 'who/which' in defining relative clauses?

1. **Who or that?** Most of the time, there is no difference but:

<b>Who</b> is more common than <b>that</b> in this kind of defining sentence.	A surgeon is someone <b>who</b> performs operations. An architect is a person <b>who</b> designs buildings.
<b>Who</b> is more common than <b>that</b> in this kind of sentence - 'the man' is the <u>subject</u> of the verb 'went'. <b>That</b> is more common in this kind of sentence - 'the man' is the <u>object</u> of the verb 'invited'.	This is the man <b>who</b> went to the seminar in Paris.  This is the man <b>that</b> we invited to the seminar in Paris.
<b>That</b> is more common in <b>superlative</b> and similar sentences, often seen with perfect tenses.	The first people <b>that</b> joined the team were the technicians. He's the most efficient manager ( <b>that</b> ) I've ever worked with.

2. **Which or that?** Most of the time, there is no difference but:

In most sentences, <b>that</b> is more common.	The computer <b>that</b> was broken is OK now. This is the book <b>that</b> 's a bestseller in Europe.
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<p>After <b>quantifiers</b> such as 'all', 'any', 'anything', 'every', 'everything', 'no', 'nothing', 'some', 'something', 'much', 'many' and 'most', <b>that</b> is more common.</p>	<p>They did everything <b>that</b> was necessary. Some of the information <b>that's</b> in this file is confidential.</p>
<p><b>That</b> is more common in <b>superlative</b> and similar sentences, often seen with perfect tenses.</p>	<p>This is the biggest and best meeting room <b>that's</b> available. This is the first time (<b>that</b>) I've worked for a foreign company. It was the best film (<b>that</b>) I'd ever seen.</p>
<p>Sometimes, we have to use <b>that</b> in sentences that refer to days and times etc.</p>	<p>The last time (<b>that</b>) I went to Paris, it rained all weekend. The last time which I went to Paris, it rained all weekend. ❌ [see note 1. below]</p> <p>I joined this company in the same year (<b>that</b>) the head office moved to London.</p> <p>I joined this company in the same year which the head office moved to London. ❌ [see note 2. below]</p>

**Notes**

1. This is because 'time' is not the subject of the verb 'went' so in the following sentence, we can use either **that** or **which** because 'time' is the subject of the verb 'is'.

Wednesday at 11.00 is the time **that/which** is best for me.

2. However, we can say: I joined this company in the same year in **which** the head office moved to London.

Here are some more examples:

The day on **which** he retired was a sad one for all of us.  
Do you remember all those months in **which** we had to work late every night?

## Examples



Oh no, this isn't the colour **which/that** was on the website.



I have four children. My son **who/that** lives in Paris is a lawyer.



A guitarist is someone **who/that** plays the guitar.



Do you remember the church **which/that** was on the corner?



Let's go to this town **which/that's** on the coast.



The first thing **that** needs our attention is the problem with the old computers.



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Last update: **2023/02/14 14:32**

