

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:

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

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

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

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 14:21**

