

That vs. Who(m) That vs. Which

Defined:

That replaces people, named animals, objects, unnamed animals, or abstract concepts.

Who and *whom* replace people or named animals.

Which replaces objects, unnamed animals, and abstract concepts.

Tips:

Both *that* and *which* introduce a clause, phrase, or word. Writers should replace *that* with *which*, when necessary. *That* is restrictive and *which* is nonrestrictive:

The bubble gum ice cream *that* I chose is my favorite.

Without the restrictive clause (“*that* I chose is my favorite”), the sentence would be fragmented.

Bubble gum ice cream, *which* is my favorite, is the flavor I chose.

The nonrestrictive clause (“*which* is my favorite”) is not essential in conveying meaning of the sentence.

Writers can omit *that* when removing it will not confuse the reader.

This is the solution *that* I am suggesting. vs. This is the solution I am suggesting.

I know *that* you were absent yesterday. vs. I know you were absent yesterday.

Writers should replace *that* with *who* or *whom* when the subject consists of people or named animals:

Johnny Depp, *who* met me at Il Fornaio, was well dressed.

Why *who*? Because the subject is *he*.

He met me at Il Fornaio.

Johnny Depp, *whom* I want to visit me on my birthday, is unavailable for the whole month of July.

Why *whom*? Because the object is *him*.

I want *him* to visit me on my birthday.

Exercise:

Science is an interpretation of reality ____ (1) explains our surrounding world. Newton, ____ conceptualized the idea of gravity, has added to valuable knowledge constructs that people use to understand their natural surroundings. Laws, ____ (2) are only accepted after numerous observations of a particular phenomenon, help construct our belief system. Tomorrow, I will give a speech about Newton, ____ (3) continues to be a very important scientist of our day. I will also speak about contemporary scientists, like Jane Goodall, ____ (4) I wish I could meet in the near future.

Key: 1. that 2. who 3. which 4. who 5. whom