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