

Using Commas to set apart restrictive and non-restrictive wording

Don't let the jargon terms restrictive or non-restrictive throw you off. To punctuate these groups of words correctly, all you need to do is to identify the phrase or clause in question and then decide whether it is central to the meaning of your sentence. If it is, then it is restrictive, but more importantly the wording should not be sandwiched with commas. If you don't need the phrase or clause, if it is just additional modifying information, then it is non-restrictive. Such wording should be sandwiched with commas that signal its relative lack of significance.

Restrictive clauses

Examples

1. The early Irish *who lived by farming and herding* were the core of their society.
2. They praised neighbors and foes *who lived honorable lives*.
3. The notion of honor *that was so highly valued* determined the actions of men and women alike.

Non-Restrictive clauses

Examples

4. The cow, *with its many benefits*, was the centerpiece of the economy.
5. The position of Ard Ri, *the high king*, had not yet been achieved.
6. The populace, *which appears to have been Celtic*, created and supported a vibrant culture.

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Sample Sentences

Punctuate appropriately the italicized wording.

1. The leftover spuds *that were on the cutting board* were rather mushy to the touch.
2. Christina *the cook* had asked her guests *who if anyone was allergic* to mushy potatoes.
3. There were two in the group *who admitted to such allergies*.
4. Those two *who wore peach-colored dresses* spoke about years of distrust for French fries.
5. Such off-beat food allergies *the bane of their sufferings* have seldom been recognized or understood.
6. Christina *who is conscientious to a fault* always asks about mushy potatoes.

The following sentences are incorrectly punctuated. In what way(s)?

7. The big red, four-door Ford was filled with ducks, that needed to get to water.
8. The riverboat driver who always worked for pay, had found them in a pine tree.

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9. That forest with its strange history was the focus of the townspeople's attention.

10. The two best-known inhabitants, the old man and the cat on the bike, had celebrated the arrival of the ducks for months.