

Using *which* vs. *that*

Most experienced writers distinguish between the use of which and that when those pronouns begin clauses that may be viewed as restrictive or non-restrictive. Remember, that emphasizes the meaning of the clause; which de-emphasizes the meaning, and de-emphasized clauses are most often sandwiched by non-restrictive commas.

Examples

1. The snap peas, which were planted a week ago, are sprouting with vigor.
2. The heirloom variety of lettuce that cost a bundle per seed has not grown much at all.

Sample Sentences

Punctuate appropriately the italicized wording.

1. The bookstore *that advertised everything 75% off* had wildly inflated prices.
2. The books *which had been recently cleaned* sat quietly on their shelves.
3. Wandering the cluttered stacks *which smelled of book dust*, the young woman located a sturdy copy of Cicero's *Offices*.
4. Next to that volume sat a copy of the Second Philippic *which included notes in German*.
5. Nearby was a series of titles *that described Egyptian reed weaving*.

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6. One text *which had been much thumbed through* fell open to a page describing cats.

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

7. Who would have thought, that mushy potatoes could be so offensive?

8. Who would have believed that the first triumvirate which included Caesar, Pompey and Crassus, could have taken such effective control of Rome?

Should the following sentences use which or that?

9. A well-stocked library that adheres to its mission will have many books on many subjects.

10. The potato chips which the two children had devoured induced their illness.