

Who/Which Clause

Clause: A group of words that has both a subject and a verb.

A “who or which” clause is simply a group of words that begins with *who* or *which* and has a verb in it. (The *who* or *which* is the subject of the clause.)

When do you use “who”? – When talking about people.

When do you use “which”? – When talking about things.

What about animals? If they act like humans or are pets, use “who.” If they are clearly animals, use “which.”

To indicate the who/which clause: Underline only the who or which, not the whole clause. If you have more than one, underline only one in every paragraph.

Two ways to form:

1. Take two sentences that begin with the same subject and turn one into a “who” or “which” clause.

Examples:

The *yellow-bellied sapsucker* is native to Canada and the northern United States. *It* destroys young trees by sucking sap from the branches.

The yellow-bellied sapsucker, which is native to Canada and the northern United States, destroys young trees by sucking sap from the branches.

John Smith knew how to trade with the Indians for food. *He* helped save Jamestown.

John Smith, who ... ?

2. Take a noun (person or thing) and add information to it in the form of a “who” or “which” clause.

Examples:

The lion was most grateful for the appearance of the little mouse.

The lion, who felt he would never be able to disentangle himself from the hunter’s net, was most grateful for the appearance of the little mouse.

John Smith made a clever rule.

John Smith, who ...?, made a clever rule.

CRUCIAL: Don’t let your “who” or “which” steal your sentence!

The disheveled princess stood dripping.

The disheveled princess, who stood dripping. (What’s wrong with this?)

A who/which clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

Moms: The “who/which” clause is one of several kinds of dependent clauses. This one is an adjective clause because the entire clause describes a noun and therefore follows a noun.

Grammar Rule #10: The who/which clause is usually set off by commas. If you take it out of the sentence, you should still have a sentence left.

To check: If you remove the *who* or *which* clause, do you still have a sentence that can stand alone and make sense?

The disheveled young woman, who stood at the door with water dripping down her back and into her shoes, claimed Princess Authenticity.

If we remove the underlined “who” clause, we still have a complete sentence:

The disheveled young woman claimed Princess Authenticity.

Practice:

Add a *who* or *which* clause to the following sentences, either by adding more information or by combining sentences. Then write one of your own.

1. The frog prince spied the Princess’s golden ball. He questioned why she was weeping and wailing.
2. The Princess shed copious tears over the loss of her golden ball.
3. Ali winked at the passersby. They recognized he was up to his old tricks with the Sultan.
4. The Sultan gloried in Ali’s impromptu poem.

Your turn. In the space below, write one sentence with a “who” clause AND one sentence with a “which” clause.