



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

Writing Skills Improvement Program

Tips for Using “That” and “Which”

What are the differences between the words “that” and “which,” and how do you know which one to use?! The following information may be helpful.

That

Usually, “that” fulfills a role as lead of a restrictive clause in a sentence. A restrictive clause defines another phrase in the sentence and if you get rid of a restrictive clause, the meaning of the sentence may be confused.

Example: Trees that have thorns scare me.

The words “that have thorns” define (restrict) the type of trees that scare me. If I remove them, the sentence is still grammatically correct and makes sense, but it does not make it clear that only trees that have thorns scare me. Not all trees scare me.

Which

Usually, “which” fulfills a role as a lead of a nonrestrictive clause. A nonrestrictive clause modifies a phrase, but is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.

Example: Palo Verde trees, which have thorns, scare me.

The words “which have thorns” add meaning and help the reader understand more about the Palo Verde trees, but if we take those words out, it is still clear that it is a specific type of tree that scares me.

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