Use the right arrow key on your keyboard to advance slides.

Using the nonrestrictive comma

See related columns:

Commas & skydiving

Stupid comma with that and which

When to <u>use</u> commas with <u>nonrestrictive</u> clauses

When <u>not</u> to use commas with <u>restrictive</u> clauses

Nonrestrictive clauses are generally introduced by which.

Restrictive clauses are generally introduced by that.

Both <u>nonrestrictive</u> and <u>restrictive</u> clauses may be introduced by <u>who</u>.

Nonrestrictive clauses are nonessential.

Nonrestrictive clauses do take commas.

Restrictive clauses are essential.

Restrictive clauses do not take commas.

1. The man who is wearing a white hat is 102 years old.

1. The man who is wearing a white hat is 102 years old.

[Which man?]

1. The one who is wearing a white hat

1. The man who is wearing a white hat is 102 years old.

1. The man[] who is wearing a white hat[] is 102 years old.

1. The man[] who is wearing a white hat[] is 102 years old.

No commas with restrictive clauses

2. The man who is wearing a black hat is 90 years old.

2. The man who is wearing a black hat is 90 years old.

[There's only one man.]

2. The man who is wearing a black hat is 90 years old.

2. The man[,] who is wearing a black hat[,] is 90 years old.

2. The man[,] who is wearing a black hat[,] is 90 years old.

Commas with nonrestrictive clauses

Two hints:

When to use commas

with nonrestrictive clauses

First hint:

Can the clause be placed in

parentheses?

2. The man (who is wearing a black hat) is 90 years old.

Second hint:

Can the phrase "by the way"

be inserted?

by the way

2. The man (who'is wearing a black hat) is 90 years old.

2. The man[,] who is wearing a black hat[,] is 90 years old.

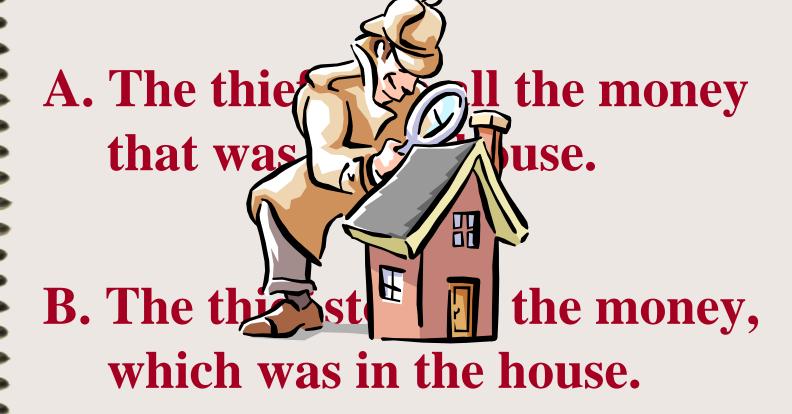
2. The man[,] who is wearing a black hat[,] is 90 years old.

Commas with nonrestrictive clauses

Now for a test.

3. In which of the following sentences does the thief get all of the money?

A. The thief stole all the money that was in the house.



A. The thief stole all the money that was in the house.

A. The thief stole all the money that was in the house.

Why?

A. The thief stole all the money that was in the house.

In this sentence, the thief didn't get the money hidden in the garage, only the money that was in the house.

In this sentence, the thief gets all the money, which happens to be in the house.

B. The thief stole all the money, which was in the house.

4. Sally wrote the report which was accepted by the board.

John wrote the report which was rejected.

4. Sally wrote the report which was accepted by the board.

John wrote the report which was rejected.

[two authors and two reports]

4. Sally wrote the report which was accepted by the board.

John wrote the report which was rejected.

4. Sally wrote the report [that] was accepted by the board.

John wrote the report [that] was rejected.

4. Sally wrote the report [that] was accepted by the board.

No commas with restrictive clauses

5. The quality that impresses me most, is commitment.

5. The quality that impresses me most, is commitment.

[Which quality?]

5. The one that impresses me most

[Which quality?]

5. The quality that impresses me most, is commitment.

5. The quality that impresses me most[] is commitment.

5. The quality that impresses me most[] is commitment.

No commas with restrictive clauses

5. The quality that impresses me most[,] is commitment.

I like to call the unnecessary comma above the "comma of desperation."

The <u>"comma of desperation"</u> is used by desperate writers who don't know the rule – so they drop in a comma where it feels right to have one.

5. The quality that impresses me most[,] is commitment.

5. The quality that impresses me most[] is commitment.

5. The quality that impresses me most[] is commitment.

No commas with restrictive clauses

6. The hat in the closet is mine.

The hat on the table is yours.

6. The hat in the closet is mine.

The hat on the table is yours.

[There are two hats.]

6. The hat in the closet is mine.

The hat on the table is yours.

6. The hat [] in the closet [] is mine.

The hat on the table is yours.

6. The hat [] in the closet [] is mine.

The hat on the table is yours.

No commas with restrictive clauses

7. We will formulate an action plan which will serve as your guide for improving your writing over time.

7. We will formulate an action plan which will serve as your guide for improving your writing over time.

[There's only one plan.]

7. We will formulate an action plan which will serve as your guide for improving your writing over time.

7. We will formulate an action plan[,] which will serve as your guide for improving your writing over time.

7. We will formulate an action plan[,] which will serve as your guide for improving your writing over time.

Commas with nonrestrictive clauses

8. The dance we attended, was at the Wabasha Caves.

8. The dance we attended, was at the Wabasha Caves.

[There is more than one dance in question.]

8. The dance we attended, was at the Wabasha Caves.

8. The dance we attended[] was at the Wabasha Caves.

8. The dance we attended[] was at the Wabasha Caves.

No commas with restrictive clauses



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