

That/Which Video Transcript

scene opens on person feeding ducks—serene, wholesome atmosphere

[Gentle delivery—think Mr. Rogers. Alternate between looking at the camera and looking at the ducks in the background. Take your time here.] You know what I love? Ducks. There’s nothing more peaceful than watching ducks on a warm day as the wind jostles your hair and the occasional quack in the distance meets your ears like a sweet lullaby.

But you know what I don’t love? [Drop the Mr. Rogers act—look at camera with a totally deadpan expression]. Trying to remember the difference between *that* and *which*. (*Pause with deadpan expression*)

Hi, I’m Gabriel from the OWL, and today we’re going to distinguish between two very pesky words that can confuse our sentences and frustrate our readers.

We use *that* and *which* depending on whether the clause it introduces is restrictive or non-restrictive. A restrictive clause means the information is necessary to the preceding noun. When we have a restrictive clause, we use *that*. Let’s look at some examples now.

Take this sentence: Ducks that skim the surface for food are called “dabbling ducks.” Because there are different types of ducks, the “that” clause is necessary.

Here’s another one: The duck that nests under my porch just laid eggs last week. In this case, we’re also identifying a specific duck based on its behavior: there are many ducks in the world, but just one lives under my porch. Without the information in the restrictive clause, we would be talking about any duck. Adding a restrictive clause and using *that* adds the specificity the sentence requires.

One more: I have a waffle maker that makes waffles in the shape of a duck. Once again, if we ended the sentence at “I have a waffle maker,” we would be missing crucial information—the whole point of the sentence is that there is something special about this waffle maker.

Now let's look at when we use *which*. We use *which* when the information isn't necessary to the sentence, that is, it's a non-restrictive clause. There's another important distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses: we use commas to separate the non-restrictive clauses from the rest of the sentence.

Take this sentence: Male mallard ducks, which have green heads, are called "drakes." Because all male mallard ducks have green heads, the added information isn't necessary to the sentence. Also notice the commas surrounding the clause.

Here's another one: *The Ugly Duckling*, which was my favorite story as a child, is about a duck growing up and realizing it's a swan. Once again, the information about the story being my favorite isn't necessary to the sentence, so we use a non-restrictive clause and "which."

One more: My car, which I bought used from my neighbor, has duck bumper stickers. The information about me buying the car from my neighbor isn't crucial information, so it's a non-restrictive clause.

Now let's look at a sentence where you might use *that* or *which*.

On the screen

1. My duck that moos like a cow always wears a hat on my birthday.
2. My duck, which moos like a cow, always wears a hat on my birthday.

What's the difference here? In the first sentence, the implication is that I have multiple ducks, and using "that" specifies which duck I'm talking about.

For the second sentence, we understand I only have one duck, and the sound it makes is added information. See the difference?

Before we end, let's take a moment to practice. Take a look at these sentences and see whether they need *that* or *which*.

On the screen

1. Example 1: Pine Tree Elementary School (*which/that*) was next to a duck pond always served pizza on Fridays.

2. Example 2: I'm always scared to go in the Halloween store (which/**that**) has the duck clown costumes.
3. Example 3: The Declaration of Independence (**which**/that) doesn't mention anything about ducks was written primarily by Thomas Jefferson.

By now, hopefully it's clearer how to use *that* and *which* in a sentence. The distinction between these two words may be small, but it can nevertheless have big ramifications for your sentence's meaning. (*Sincerely*) It sort of reminds me of the delicate interplay of ripples that form on the surface of my favorite pond when a few good pieces of bread hit the water... it's really almost... enchanting, when you think about it... (*Stare off, lost in thought*)

Now, then. If you'll excuse me, I have some very important work to get back to. Thanks for watching. (*Goes back to feeding ducks*)

