Lena Peterson
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About which versus that

Many writers, also native ones, find it hard to choose between which and that. The general and classic rule is this one:

Use that in restrictive clauses and which in non-restrictive clauses.

For many of us this rule does not make it clearer at all. Another, and more helpful, way to say the same thing is this one:

Use that to identify the object of the sentence and which to add more information about it.

(This explanation is taken from Segment 17 in Lyn Dupré's *BUGS in Writing*[1])

Here are some examples from recent reports that may elucidate the difference.

GOOD: Any method for sampling-rate conversion that converts from a lower sampling rate to a higher one is called an interpolation method.

Here we use *that* because the part that starts with that is a restrictive clause; it cannot be removed from the sentence without changing its main meaning. Restrictive clauses are clauses that *identify* objects or creatures. Such restrictive clauses should not be placed between commas.

GOOD: The zero-padding method, which corresponds to ideal interpolation in the frequency domain, is the simplest interpolation method to implement.

In the example above we use *which* because the clause that starts with which does not change the main meaning of the sentence, rather is adds additional information about the object: the zero-padding method. Such non-restrictive clauses should be placed between commas.

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[1] Lyn Dupré, *BUGS in Writing – A Guide to Debugging your Prose*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998.