

# Which vs. That

## “. . . which . . .” or “,which . . .”

“Which” is used in both *subordinate clauses* and *nonessential clauses*. Within *subordinate clauses*, “which” is used in this format: **Sentence 1 + which + sentence 2**. With *nonessential clauses*, “which” is used as follows: **Sentence + comma + which + extra information** describing the noun/pronoun.

### **Example 1 (subordinate clause):**

**Elizabeth set the alarm clock which she thought was the loudest.**

In this example, the first sentence “Elizabeth set the alarm clock” is joined to the second sentence “she thought [it] was the loudest.” The second sentence does have both a subject and verb, so it is subordination. (Certain subordinate words require slight adjustments to the second sentence. In this case, the pronoun “it” was removed when “which” was added because the second sentence becomes more dependent upon the first.)

### **Example 2 (nonessential clause):**

**Elizabeth bought the loudest alarm clock, which was also the most expensive on the shelf.**

In this example, the main message and meaning of the sentence is “Elizabeth bought the loudest alarm clock.” The phrase “which was also the most expensive on the shelf” is not a sentence—it is just a phrase that describes the loudest clock. It is *nonessential* information, however, because if the information was removed, the main message and meaning of the sentence would not be changed.

## “. . . that . . .”

“That” is used in both *subordinate clauses* and *essential clauses*. Within *subordinate clauses*, “that” is used in this format: **Sentence 1 + that + sentence 2**. Within *essential clauses*, “that” is used as follows: **Sentence + that + critical or necessary information** describing the noun or pronoun.

### **Example 1 (subordinate clause):**

**Elizabeth needs to buy an alarm clock that she can depend upon.**

In this example, the first sentence “Elizabeth needs to buy an alarm clock” is joined to the second sentence “she can depend upon [it].” Again, the second sentence has both a subject and verb, so it is subordination. (The slight adjustment—removing the extra “it”—helps to make the sentence smoother.)

### **Example 2 (essential clause):**

**Elizabeth needs to buy an alarm clock that is loud enough to wake her up.**

In this example, the information “Elizabeth needs to buy an alarm clock” does not convey the entire meaning of the sentence. Elizabeth does not need to buy *just any* alarm clock. She needs to buy an alarm clock “that is loud enough to wake her up.” In this instance, the information following “that” is not a sentence—it is a phrase that provides information that is critical to the meaning of the sentence. If the information was left out, the sentence could still work and be grammatically correct, but the meaning would be altered. This makes it an *essential clause*.