

## Restrictive and Non-Restrictive Adjective Clauses

A restrictive adjective clause limits or narrows the meaning of the sentence in which it appears. The sentence must have that clause or the meaning changes; in other words, the clause is necessary to the meaning. Because they are essential to the sentence, restrictive adjective clauses can never be set off from the sentence with punctuation.

### Examples:

High-risk students *who attended extra tutoring sessions* had significantly higher grades than students who did not attend.

(The clause in italics is necessary to the sentence. If we took it out, the meaning of the sentence would change drastically; therefore, there should be no punctuation to set off the restrictive element here.) Look at the difference when the sentence is written incorrectly.

High-risk students, who attended extra tutoring sessions, had significantly higher grades than students who did not attend.

**Correct:** Students *who have not signed in at the desk* will not receive assistance.

**Incorrect:** Students, who have not signed in at the desk, will not receive assistance.

**Correct:** Students *who have done or attempted to do their homework* can check their answers against the professor's answer sheet.

**Incorrect:** Students, who have done or attempted to do their homework, can check their answers against the professor's answer sheet.

A clause is non-restrictive if it is not strictly necessary to the meaning of the sentence. It can be left out and the sentence will still be logical. The non-restrictive clause merely gives the reader extra information. Imagine that you could lift the non-restrictive clause out of the sentence, using the commas as handles, and the sentence could still function. That is why the clause is called “non-restrictive”: it does not restrict the sentence, or the sentence is not restricted to containing the clause.

### Examples:

Non-traditional students, *who are generally highly motivated*, tend to do well on the sample tests.

The cat, *who had already spent eight of his nine lives*, was spared from tragedy once again.

In both examples containing non-restrictive clauses, the material between commas could be “lifted” out without changing the general meaning of the sentences. That material gives extra but not essential information. In sentences containing restrictive clauses, the material cannot be “lifted” out and should not be enclosed by commas.

## Exercises

The following sentences contain clauses that may or may not be restrictive. Supply commas for the non-restrictive clauses.

1. The man who had the handlebar mustache pressed Adam for an answer.
2. Mr. Hoffer whose family lives in Germany will be our guest this weekend.
3. The explanation that she had given them seemed too horrible to be true.
4. Mr. Johnson whose son attends the University is our friend.
5. Thomas Jefferson who was born on the frontier became President.
6. A person who loves to read will never be lonely.
7. My father who was a country boy has lived in the city for years.
8. The girl by whom I sat in class is an honor student.
9. Jet pilots who are not in excellent physical condition should not be allowed to fly.
10. She is a woman who is respected by everyone.

### Answers:

1. Correct
2. , whose family lives in Germany,
3. Correct
4. , whose son attends the University,
5. , who was born on the frontier,
6. Correct
7. , who was a country boy,
8. Correct
9. Correct
10. Correct

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