Relative Clauses (no, not *that* kind of relative)

Usually, the terms *restrictive* and *nonrestrictive* describe relative clauses—clauses beginning with *who*, *which*, or *that*.

**Restrictive Clauses**

A **restrictive** clause is *essential* to the meaning of the sentence because it helps to identify the word that it is modifying.

Consider this example:

> The students *who submit their papers late* will be penalized by one letter grade.

Without the modifying clause, the meaning of this sentence would change, because “the students” could refer to any group of students. The clause “*who submit their papers late*” narrows down which students will be penalized.

**Notice that a restrictive clause is an essential part of the sentence and is not set off by commas!**
**Nonrestrictive Clauses**

A *nonrestrictive* clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence because it is adding extra information about the word it modifies.

Consider this example:

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My oldest brother, who has just graduated from college, is sitting over there in the corner.
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The clause, “who has just graduated from college” is not essential to identifying which brother the writer is talking about, since the word “oldest” has already done that. Therefore it is a nonrestrictive clause because it is *not* restricting the meaning of the word *brother*.

**Notice that a nonrestrictive clause is not an essential part of the sentence and because it is considered “extra” information, it is set off by commas!**