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which  (wĭch, hwĭch)

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pron.

1. What particular one or ones: *Which of these is yours?*

2. The one or ones previously mentioned or implied, specifically:

a. Used as a relative pronoun in a clause that provides additional information about the antecedent: *my house, which is small and old.*

b. Used as a relative pronoun preceded by *that* or a preposition in a clause that defines or restricts the antecedent: *that which he needed; the subject on which she spoke.*

c. Used instead of *that* as a relative pronoun in a clause that defines or restricts the antecedent: *The movie which was shown later was better.*

3. Any of the things, events, or people designated or implied; whichever: *Choose which you like best.*

4. A thing or circumstance that: *He left early, which was wise.*

adj.

1. What particular one or ones of a number of things or people: *Which part of town do you mean?*

2. Any one or any number of; whichever: *Use which door you please.*

3. Being the one or ones previously mentioned or implied: *It started to rain, at which point we ran.*

[Middle English, from Old English *hwilc*; see **k^{wo}**- [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Usage Note: The relative pronoun *which* can sometimes refer to a clause or sentence, as opposed to a noun phrase: *She ignored him, which proved to be unwise. They swept the council elections, which could never have happened under the old rules.* More than 80 percent of the Usage Panel approved both of these examples in our 2009 survey.

Sometimes *which* clauses of this sort are presented as separate sentences. These are technically sentence fragments, and they often pack a rhetorical punch: *"I was caught for a week on the Siachen Glacier, in a giant blizzard. There is no harsher place on this earth; it belongs to no one. Which won't keep people from squabbling over it someday"*

([Andrea Barrett](#)). While this example is perfectly acceptable, writers who want to avoid this use of *which* and adhere to the traditional rules can usually substitute *this* for it at the start of a new sentence, though often at the loss of some dramatic flair. · Note that *which* clauses that modify whole sentences can sometimes create ambiguities. The sentence *It emerged that Martha made the complaint, which surprised everybody* may mean either that the complaint itself was surprising or that it was surprising that Martha made it. This ambiguity may be avoided by using other constructions such as *It emerged that Martha made the complaint, a revelation that surprised everybody*. Remember that *which* is used in this way only when the clause or sentence it refers to precedes it. When the clause or sentence follows, writers must use *what*, particularly in formal style: *Still, he has not said he will withdraw, which is more surprising. Still, what is more surprising, he has not said he will withdraw.* See Usage Notes at [that](#), [what](#), [whose](#).

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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