

Essential vs. Nonessential: “Which One?” Test (Clarified)

Ask this question every time:

👉 Does this phrase tell me *which one* I’m talking about, or does it just add extra info?

If it tells you **which one** → **Essential** → **No commas**

If it adds **extra info** → **Nonessential** → **Use commas**

✓ Clear, Explanatory Chart

Sentence Part	Does it tell “which one”?	Why?	Commas?
Chase, who lost his book , found it today.	✗ No	We already know exactly who “Chase” is. The phrase only adds extra detail about him.	✓ Yes — nonessential
The little boy who lost his tooth is my brother.	✓ Yes	There are many little boys. This phrase identifies <i>which</i> boy the speaker means.	✗ No — essential
My car, which is red , is outside.	✗ No	The phrase “which is red” describes the car, but doesn’t help us figure out <i>which</i> car is meant. We already know.	✓ Yes — nonessential
Students who study do well.	✓ Yes	This phrase narrows it to a specific group of students — the ones who study, not all students.	✗ No — essential
The teacher, who loves grammar , gave us homework.	✗ No	We already know which teacher. This just adds a fun detail.	✓ Yes — nonessential
The students who were absent need to turn in their work.	✓ Yes	It specifies <i>which</i> students — only the absent ones.	✗ No — essential

A Beka tends to follow this formal guideline:

If a noun refers to one specific person by title or name, the modifying clause is usually treated as nonessential.

Examples they tend to expect commas on:

- **Mrs. Smith, who teaches math,** assigned homework.
- **My pastor, who preached last week,** visited us.
- **George Washington, who led the army,** became president.

Even if real-world usage might vary.

This is why some answers in the book feel odd.