

Defining Symptoms and Medical Procedures

When defining a symptom or procedure, “which is” or the word “or” can be used. If “which is” is omitted, it must be replaced with “or.”

Example: Defining a Symptom

tachycardia = an abnormally rapid heartbeat

*The patient experiences tachycardia, **which is an abnormally rapid heartbeat.***

*The patient experiences tachycardia, **or an abnormally rapid heartbeat.***

Example: Defining a Medical Procedure

rhinoplasty = the reshaping of the nose

*Rhinoplasty, **which is the reshaping of the nose,** causes considerable bruising and swelling.*

*Rhinoplasty, **or the reshaping of the nose,** causes considerable bruising and swelling.*

Here, the word “or” means that the two items are equal to each other.

*Rhinoplasty, **or the reshaping of the nose,** ...*

*The reshaping of the nose, **or rhinoplasty,** ...*

Commas must be used when the two items are equal to each other. For example:

If Robert’s nickname is Chip,

Robert = Chip

So, we can say:

*Robert, **or Chip,** is waiting for us in the cafeteria.*

*Chip, **or Robert,** is waiting for us in the cafeteria.*

If we did not use commas, we would be talking about two different people:

Robert or Chip is waiting for us in the cafeteria.

Similarly, if we did not use commas, we would be talking about two different symptoms:

The patient experiences tachycardia or an abnormally rapid heartbeat. WRONG

Note: If the definition of the symptom or medical procedure includes a “general class,” the word “or” cannot be used. As discussed above, use “which is” or omit “which is.”

*Cholecystectomy, (which is) a **surgical procedure**, involves removing the gallbladder.*

This is a general class – do not use “or.”
“Which is” may be omitted.

*Cholecystectomy, which is / ,or **the excision of the gallbladder**, is performed to treat gallstones.*

This is a definition of a medical procedure without a general class.
So, “which is” may be replaced with “or.”

When the adjective clause contains a “general class,” “or” cannot be used.

Defining Symptoms and Medical Procedures: Exercise

Directions: Some of the sentences below contain a which-clause that defines a SYMPTOM or MEDICAL PROCEDURE, and some do not. If the which-clause is a definition of a SYMPTOM or MEDICAL PROCEDURE, delete “which is” and replace it with “or.”

Example: *Gastrectomy, ~~which is~~ the removal of the stomach, is performed to treat stomach cancer and severe ulcers.*

Gastrectomy, or the removal of the stomach, is performed to treat stomach cancer and severe ulcers.

- 1) The chorion, which is the outermost layer of cells on a fertilized egg, develops into the placenta.
- 2) Tingling, which is an abnormal prickling feeling in the skin, is a symptom of nerve injury, diabetes, or carpal tunnel syndrome.
- 3) Ileostomy, which is the creation of a hole in the abdominal wall, is performed to remove solid waste from the body.
- 4) Hypotonia, which is lack of muscle tone, causes an infant to seem unusually floppy, like a rag doll.
- 5) Bone marrow, which is the soft, spongy tissue inside bones, contains fat and produces red blood cells.
- 6) The sigmoid colon, which is the final S-shaped part of the intestine, connects with the rectum.
- 7) Some patients with depression experience hypersomnia, which is excessive sleeping.