



Who vs. Whom

Knowing when to use “who” or “whom” is a common quandary for many writers. The correct usage of each word hinges on its placement and purpose in a sentence.

A quick review:

They key to understanding when to use “who” or “whom” goes back to the basic construction of a sentence: subject + verb + direct object. The subject is always a noun—a person, place or thing. The verb denotes the action. The noun receiving the action of the verb is the direct object. In the sentence, “*I read the book,*” the subject is “*I,*” the noun performing the action. The action is “*read.*” The noun receiving the action of the verb is the direct object “*book.*”

Who:

As stated, the subject of the sentence is always a noun: a person, place or thing. Subjects are also referred to being in the “nominative case.” When the subject is a person, and therefore in the nominative case, “who” is correct.

Example: *The **student who** sits beside me in class is from France.*
 *My **mom, who** lives in Florida, sent me cookies!*

Whom:

Direct objects, however, are considered to be in the “objective case.” The objective case of the word “who” is “whom.” In the example below, the noun “*Harry*” is the direct object of the verb “*called.*”

Example: *I called **Harry, whom** I had not seen in several weeks.*

Nouns that follow a preposition are also considered to be in the objective case. They are the “object” of the preposition, those short words that provide details to a sentence. Google “preposition,” and the list is almost 100 words long! Some of the most frequently used are *to, as, in, out, at, for, with, on, off, above, below, near, and around.* “Whom” is the correct choice, following a preposition.

Examples: *Ask not **for whom** the bell tolls.*
 *This is Jane, **with whom** I play tennis every Saturday.*

Another tip:

The same rule of “who” and “whom” applies to “whoever” and “whomever.”