

Misused Words: Who, Whom, Whoever, and Whomever

People often do not know when to use the pronouns “who,” “whom,” “whoever,” and “whomever.” However, with a simple trick, they will always choose the correct pronoun.

For this trick, use the following key:

who = she, he, I, they

whom = her, him, me, them

Who

In the following sentences, use the steps that are outlined to decide whether to use **who** or **whom**.

Example

Nicole is a girl (**who/whom**) likes to read.

Step 1: Cover up the part of the sentence before “**who/whom**.”

Nicole is a girl (**who/whom**) likes to read.

Step 2: For the remaining part of the sentence, test with a pronoun using the above key. Replace “who” with “she”; replace “whom” with “her.”

Who likes to read = **She** likes to read

Whom likes to read = **Her** likes to read

Step 3: Consider which one sounds correct. (Remember that the pronoun “she” is the subject of a sentence, and the pronoun “her” is part of the object of a sentence.)

“**She** likes to read” is the correct wording.

Step 4: Because “she” works, the correct pronoun to use is “**who**.”

Nicole is a girl **who** likes to read.

Whom

Example

Elizabeth wrote a letter to someone (**who/whom**) she had never met.

Step 1: Cover up the part of the sentence before “**who/whom.**”

Elizabeth wrote a letter to someone (**who/whom**) she had never met.

Step 2: Because the remaining part of the sentence has a subject (she) at the beginning, test with the pronouns at the end of the sentence. Replace “who” with “he”; replace “whom” with “him.”

She had never met *who* = She had never met *he*

She had never met *whom* = She had never met *him*

Step 3: Consider which one sounds correct. (Remember that the pronoun “he” is the subject of a sentence, and the pronoun “him” is part of the object of a sentence.)

“She had never met *him*” is the correct wording.

Step 4: Because “him” works, the correct pronoun to use is “**whom.**”

Elizabeth wrote a letter to someone **whom** she had never met.

Whoever

To figure out when to use the pronouns “whoever” and “whomever,” use the following key:

whoever = she, he, I, they

whomever = her, him, me, them

Example

Danielle said that she’d run with (**whoever/whomever**) was ready.

Step 1: Cover up the part of the sentence before “**whoever/whomever.**”

Danielle said that she’d run with (**whoever/whomever**) was ready.

Step 2: For the remaining part of the sentence, test with a pronoun using the above key. Replace “whoever” with “she”; replace “whomever” with “her.”

Whoever was ready = *She* was ready

Whomever was ready = *Her* was ready

Step 3: Consider which one sounds correct. (Remember that the pronouns “she” and “he” are subjects of sentences, and the pronouns “her” and “him” are part of the objects of sentences.)

“**She** was ready” is the correct wording.

Step 4: Because “she” works, the correct pronoun to use is “**whoever**.”

Danielle said that she’d run with **whoever** was ready.

Whomever

Example

Alice is friendly to (**whoever/whomever**) she meets.

Step 1: Cover up the part of the sentence before “**whoever/whomever**.”

Alice is friendly to (**whoever/whomever**) she meets.

Step 2: Because the remaining part of the sentence has a subject (she) at the beginning, test with the pronouns at the end of the sentence. Replace “whoever” with “they”; replace “whomever” with “them.”

She meets *whoever* = She meets *they*

She meets *whomever* = She meets *them*

Step 3: Consider which one sounds correct. (Remember that the pronoun “they” is the subject of a sentence, and the pronoun “them” is part of the object of a sentence.)

“She meets **them**” is the correct wording.

Step 4: Because “them” works, the correct pronoun to use is “**whomever**.”

Alice is friendly to **whomever** she meets.

Activity

In the following sentences, choose the correct word (who/whom or whoever/whomever). Use the steps outlined in this handout to help you make the correct choice.

1. Dani is someone (who/whom) I admire.
2. He is the boy (who/whom) works at Starbucks.
3. She is the girl (who/whom) we saw at the movies.
4. (Whoever/Whomever) didn't help with cooking should wash the dishes.
5. I wonder (who/whom) told Olga about the surprise party.
6. They are the friends (who/whom) Tom introduced.
7. They are the ones (who/whom) rode the bus with me.
8. Kendra may choose (whoever/whomever) she likes.
9. Amy is the girl (who/whom) people should ask about music.

Answer Key for Activity

1. whom
2. who
3. whom
4. whoever
5. who
6. whom
7. who
8. whomever
9. whom

References

Lunsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer*. 5th Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013. Print.