Who vs. Whom

Who and whom are relative pronouns; that is, they relate an adjective or noun clause (a modifier) to the subject (who) or the object (whom) in a sentence. In speech, who is generally substituted for all uses of whom, simply because spoken English is more informal than written English. Because who is used in speaking, confusion arises as to when it is correct to use whom.

HINT
Try substituting he/she or him/her when deciding whether to use who/whom.

If he fits, the correct pronoun choice is who.

If him fits, the correct pronoun choice is whom.

Examples

1. I don't care (who, whom) you hire, as long as you hire someone soon.
   Substitute: You hire (he, him)

2. The doctor (who, whom) he recommended is a surgical specialist.
   Substitute: He recommended (he, him)

Who or Whom in an Interrogative Sentence:

An interrogative sentence is a question, and thus the word order is inverted. In order to decide correctly between a choice of who/whom, first change the word order so that the sentence becomes a declarative sentence (statement). (ie. Did you go to class? You did go to class.) Then apply the hint given above. A few who/whom questions cannot be changed to declaratives. In this case, still apply the hint.
Exercise I

Print out the following exercise to complete it.
Change the interrogative sentences to declarative sentences (statements) and choose **who** or **whom**.

1. (Who, Whom) is the woman wearing the jewels?
2. (Who, Whom) did you invite to the party?
3. (Whoever, Whomever) would believe your story?
4. (Who, Whom) did you take me for?
5. (Who, Whom) wrote that story?

**Who or Whom in a Dependent Clause:**

First of all, isolate the clause from the rest of the sentence, always beginning with **who, whom**. If the isolated clause is in inverted order, change it to normal order.

**HINT**

If only **who, whom** appear before the verb, the clause is in normal order. If **who, whom** plus a noun/pronoun appear before the verb, the order is inverted.

**Examples**

(whoever, whomever) he meets ... (whoever + he + meets = inverted order)
(whoever, whomever) calls this evening ...(whoever + calls (verb) = normal order)
Exercise II

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Use the procedure given above to choose the correct pronoun.

1. The newly elected officer is a woman (who, whom) we all respect.
2. The lawyer (who, whom) we heard is a noted courtroom speaker.
3. John Wilson, (who, whom) we heard yesterday, is a famous criminal attorney.
4. Do you know (who, whom) will be awarded the prize?
5. This question is for (whoever, whomever) has the correct data.
6. Do you know (who, whom) will be awarded the honorary degree?
7. (Whoever, Whomever) draws the short straw will have to clean the apartment.
8. My brother, (who, whom) you met last week, has an apartment in your building.
9. (Whoever, Whomever) told you that is wrong.
10. The person (who, whom) we elected is Carla Robbins.

Clause Within a Who/Whom Clause:

A clause within a who/whom clause is called a parenthetical clause (ie. I think, he says, we believe). Whenever you see such a clause, mentally omit it.

Example

1. That is the man - I think - (who, whom) they selected as sales leader.
2. Jack the Ripper was (we believe) the man (who, whom) murdered seventeen people.
Additional Practice

Decide whether the pronouns used below are correct. If any are incorrect, change them.

Exercise A

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

1. Who did he ask to be the chairperson?
2. Who has been responsible for spreading such rumours?
3. Who will the company appoint to the new position?
4. Who did you meet at the A.T.A. convention?
5. Who came with you?

Exercise B

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

1. Give the award to whoever you think best deserves it.
2. She was one of those people whom her boss called "fidgeters".
3. You must hire whoever you think will do the best work.
4. We elected John, whom we all agreed is well qualified to be president.
5. Do you know who they will select?
6. You may give the books to whoever you wish.
7. Madonna is the singer whom the media exploit.
8. Todd is a man whom I think will go far.