

**Who is correct?
Yes, though it may depend on whom you ask!**

“Who” and “whoever” are [subjective pronouns](#); “whom” and “whomever” are in the [objective case](#). As simple and important as that distinction is, many people have difficulty deciding on the proper usage of “who” and “whom” in sentences.

The two sentences below illustrate the easy usage in which “who” is clearly the subject and “whom” clearly the object. In such simple cases, virtually everyone can determine the proper choice:

Who is that masked man? (subject)

The men, four of whom are ill, were indicted for fraud. (object)

When who is not the main subject of the sentence, however, many people become confused. They tinker and change who to whom.

It was Thomas Jefferson, I think, who was the third president of the United States.

Notice that “who,” not “whom,” is still the correct form as the subject of the clause that follows. The proper name, Thomas Jefferson, could be substituted for “who” to make a perfectly good sentence:

Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States.

As a ready check in such sentences, simply substitute the personal pronoun “he/him” or “she/her” for “who/whom.” If he or she would be the correct form, the proper choice is who.” If “him” or “her” would be correct, use “whom.”

This technique of substituting a personal pronoun for the relative pronoun works nicely whenever you have difficulty deciding whether to use “who” or “whom,” assuming that you have no difficulty using the proper form of personal pronouns.

Even when the word order must be altered slightly, you can use the technique:

Mrs. Dimwit consulted an astrologer whom she met in Seattle. (She met him in Seattle.)

Jones is the man whom I went fishing with last spring. (I went fishing with him.)

Joyce is the girl who got the job. (She got the job.)

Whom can we turn to in a time of crisis? (Can we turn to her?)

The delegates differed as to who they thought might win. (Not whom. Here the entire clause is the object of the preposition. Substitution is particularly helpful in cases such as this. They thought **he** might win.)

Who is that masked man? (subject)

The men, four of whom are ill, were indicted for fraud. (object)

And, now, for a really tough test (or, at least, most people trip up on it):

I decided to vote for whoever called me first.

Give it to whoever deserves it.

It's “whoever” in both cases. Even though you can read the first sentence as “I decided to vote for him” (which would make it “whomever”), the entire phrase “(he) called me first” is the object of the preposition “for.” So, it's “whoever.” It's the same for the second example: “...he deserves it” wins out.

Three “easy-to-use” rules
so you'll always get it correct

Rule #1: Substitute “he/him” or “she/her”: If it's either “he” or “she,” then it's who; if it's “him” or “her,” then it's whom.

Rule #2: Every verb with a tense in a sentence must have a subject. And that word is always in the nominative case, so it's "who." For example: In this sentence, “I decided to vote for whoever called me first”:

- “I” is the subject of “decided”
- “he” (whoever) is the subject of the verb “called.”

In the sentence, “Give it to whoever deserves it”:

- The implied “you” is the subject of “give”
- “he” (whoever) is the subject of the verb “deserves.”

This rule supersedes the first rule as it relates to who” and “whom.”

Note: Related to this rule is one that says: The subject of a phrase is always attached to that phrase -- no matter what. For example:

Ask whoever reads that book to answer the question.

Break down the sentence thusly:

(You) ask him (he reads that book) to answer the question.

In the phrase “he reads that book,” you cannot separate the subject “he” from the phrase to which it is attached.

If you remember these two rules -- substitute “he/him” or “she/her,” and that every verb with a tense must have a subject -- you should solve the "who/whom" quandary every time.

If you apply those two rules and you're still not sure, apply the all-important Rule #3.

Rule #3: If it takes more than 30 seconds to figure it out, pick the one that sounds best to the ear (read it aloud) and move on. Why? Because even grammarians are likely to squabble over which to use. But always -- always -- apply rules #1 and #2 first.

Which of these sentences are correct?

1. We will give the money to the person who needs it most.
2. We filed a complaint against the contractor who we hired last month.
3. No one knows who you are.
4. Who are you calling?
5. Who is at the door?
6. We will be kind to whomever knocks on our door for help.
7. Whomever we elect for president will be in office for four years.

Use **who** if the pronoun is the subject of the verb, and use **whom** if the pronoun is the object of the verb or the object of a preposition. For example:

___ is there?

___ has been notified?

___ are we expecting?

For ___ did you buy the flowers?

Who is there?

Who has been notified?

Whom are we expecting?

For whom did you buy the flowers?

1. _____ has read the book?
2. To _____ did he give the letter?
3. _____ is at the door?
4. _____ was awarded the prize?
5. _____ did he tell?
6. _____ answered the question correctly?
7. _____ does she like the best?
8. _____ would be the most suitable person for the job?
9. For _____ are they waiting?
10. _____ has been informed of the situation?
11. _____ can we ask?
12. _____ will be ready by eight o'clock?
13. _____ is watering the flowers?
14. _____ did you photograph?
15. _____ attended the meeting?
16. _____ was at the party?
17. _____ could be heard most easily?
18. _____ do you believe?
19. To _____ did you sell your car?
20. _____ will be waiting for us?

Paying attention to grammatically correct usage, for each of the following sentences, fill in the blank with **who**, **whom** or **whose**. In these sentences, use **whose** only as a possessive adjective, preceding a noun. For example:

___ is raking the leaves?

___ did you call?

To ___ was he speaking?

___ bicycle is leaning against the steps?

Who is raking the leaves?

Whom did you call?

To whom was he speaking?

Whose bicycle is leaning against the steps?

1. By _____ was this written?
2. _____ gloves are lying on the table?
3. _____ lives here?
4. _____ did they help?
5. _____ child is this?
6. _____ was allowed to enter the competition?
7. _____ handwriting is the most legible?
8. With _____ was she speaking?
9. _____ sang the song?
10. _____ does she know?
11. _____ shoes are these?
12. _____ will make the cake?
13. _____ was present?
14. _____ curiosity would not be aroused by such a tale?
15. _____ will he teach?