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**SSC – 245**

## Who vs. Whom

**Overview:** Relative pronouns, such as *who* and *whom*, can be tricky because many writers are unclear about the specific rules regarding their use. Students often decide to completely eliminate *whom* from their vocabulary simply because they don't understand how and when to use it. This handout will go over when to use each pronoun in different types of sentences and also give quick tips for remembering their different functions.

### Who vs. Whom: The Basics

*Who* and *whom* are both relative pronouns, which means that they function to connect a clause to the rest of a sentence. In other words, relative pronouns are found in sentences that contain more than one clause, and they relate to a specific word or phrase that they modify. *Who* and *whom* are usually used only in relation to people. In the following example, *who* relates to “an instructor,” and introduces the relative clause “who was the recipient of an award.”

- Last semester I took a class with an instructor *who* was the recipient of an award.

### Subject and Object Pronouns

When deciding whether to use *who* or *whom*, it is important to first recognize that *who* is used in reference to the subject of a sentence, and *whom* is used in reference to the object of a sentence. The subject is what performs the action in the sentence, and the object is the receiver of the action. Therefore, *who* relates to “he,” “she,” and “we” while *whom* relates to the pronouns “him,” “her,” and “us.” In the following sentence, *whom* is the object of “cared for,” while “Michael” is the subject.

- I ran into Alicia last night, *whom* Michael cared for deeply.  
(If this still sounds confusing, try to reword the clause with “her”: “Michael cared for *her* deeply.”)

This also goes for questions that begin with *who* or *whom*. Again, if you are not sure what acts as the subject or object in the clause, rephrase the question as a statement, replacing *who/whom* with *he* or *him*, and see which one fits. Take a look at the examples below:

- *Who* ate my candy bar? *He* ate my candy bar.  
Or
- *Whom* did you have in mind for the new job listing? I had *him* in mind for the new job listing.

## Compound Forms of Who/Whom

*Who* and *whom* function in the same way in their compound forms, *whoever* and *whomever*.

- *Whoever* volunteers to cover my shift is a great friend. (Whoever is the subject of “volunteers”)
- I support *whomever* you choose for the part. (Whomever is the object of “you choose”)

**Practice:** Because *whom* is so uncommonly used in everyday speech, many consider its usage too formal, especially for a conversational-like narrative, such as a casual email or journal entry. Therefore, the usage of *who* where *whom* belongs is often overlooked because of our normal interpretation of the English language. However, when writing in an academic setting, you should strive to always maintain the most correct grammar usage even if it varies from how you would phrase the sentence in a normal conversation with friends. Remember, most academic writing *is* formal, so your sentence construction and word choices should reflect that. Review one of your essays. Examine every time you use the word “who,” and make sure that it’s the subject of the sentence and not the object. If it is the object of the sentence, be sure to change it to “whom.”