

Communication 4312 -- Who and Whom

Who and whom may be difficult, but they are not impossible.

Mastering their use requires a great deal of attention in writing and speaking. But the reward is the satisfaction of knowing that you have mastered grammar's most tricky construction.

Who and whom often appear in sentences that are turned around or have more than one subject and verb. This is what makes the distinction difficult.

The best way to grasp the distinction in who and whom is to establish in what situations who and whom appear, and to collect sentences that conform to each of the various usages.

Who appears in three instances:

1. When who is the subject of the verb and the verb comes after who.

Who asked for me?

May I say who is calling?

Who called last night while I was away?

She just broke up with someone who meant a lot to her.

2. When who is the subject of the verb but another noun and verb are inserted between who and its verb.

She is the woman who police believe took the jewels.

Jones, who Smith says is playing at a more consistent level than at any time in his pro career, was named the Oak Farms Most Valuable Player for his efforts against the Cardinals.

3. As a predicate nominative.

He knows who the winner is.

Do you remember who it was we invited first?

Whom appears in two situations.

1. As the object of the preposition.

A. In one instance the preposition and whom may be together:

To whom did he give the money?

B. Or, whom can be separated from the preposition, as:

Whom did the police come for?

You know whom you are dealing with.

2. As the indirect object of the verb.

They asked whom he would name.

Who was the Black Rider whom the Hobbits saw in the foggy darkness?

It was not unusual for a team to run to the phone to call one of its friends around the country to find out whom it should select.

Conner declined to say whom he contacted in the White House to arrange the meeting.

Whoever/whomever follow the same rules:

She is encouraging them to write to their favorite player, whoever that may be.

Give the package to whoever answers the door.

Here are examples of **misuse** of who and whom:

Whitmire has been silent on **who** she would appoint as chief.

Wright's last primary opponent was former City Councilman Tommy Thompson, **who** Wright defeated by more than 10 to 1.

■ David McHam