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.
Who

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.

**Whoever**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alice is friendly to (whoever/whomever) she meets.</td>
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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**