

WORD CHOICE TIP 4

Know the difference between *who/whoever* and *whom/whomever*.

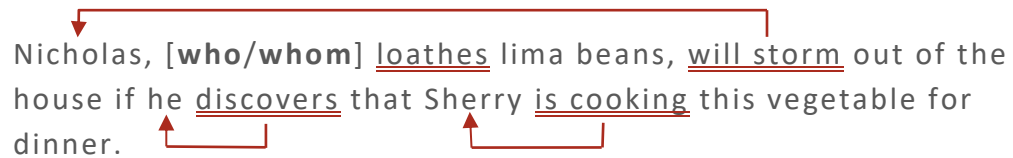
WHO/WHOEVER

Who and **whoever** will be the subjects of verbs. Use these forms when a sentence has a leftover verb that needs a subject. Read this example:

Nicholas, [**who/whom**] loathes lima beans, will storm out of the house if he discovers that Sherry is cooking this vegetable for dinner.

Before making a decision, verify that all of the verbs have subjects.

Nicholas, [**who/whom**] loathes lima beans, will storm out of the house if he discovers that Sherry is cooking this vegetable for dinner.

A diagram with red arrows and brackets. A long arrow points from the bracketed text "[who/whom]" to the underlined verb "loathes". A shorter arrow points from the underlined verb "discovers" to the subject "he". Another shorter arrow points from the underlined verb "is cooking" to the subject "Sherry".

The verb **will storm** has **Nicholas** as its subject. The verb **discovers** has **he** as its subject. And the verb **is cooking** has **Sherry** as its subject. **Loathes**, however, has no subject, so you need to choose **who**, the subject form:

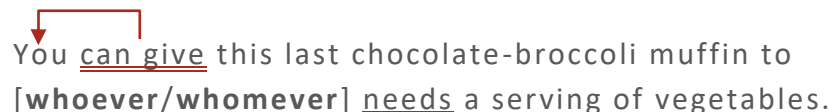
Nicholas, **who** loathes lima beans, will storm out of the house if he discovers that Sherry is cooking this vegetable for dinner.

Whoever works the same way:

You can give this last chocolate-broccoli muffin to [**whoever/whomever**] needs a serving of vegetables.

When you analyze the verbs, you can determine the form you need:

You can give this last chocolate-broccoli muffin to [**whoever/whomever**] needs a serving of vegetables.

A diagram with a red arrow and bracket. An arrow points from the bracketed text "[whoever/whomever]" to the underlined verb "needs".

The verb *can give* has *you* as its subject, but the verb *needs* is lonely. It needs *whoever*, the subject form.

You might be used to *whom* following *to*—for example, *to whom it may concern*. But in that short clause, the verb *may concern* already has a subject, *it*. A verb must have a subject, even if that means *who/whoever* follows a preposition like *to*.

You can give this last chocolate-broccoli muffin to *whoever* needs a serving of vegetables.

WHOM/WHOMEVER

Whom and *whomever* will be objects in sentences—direct or indirect objects and objects of a preposition. Use these forms when every verb in a sentence already has a subject. Here is an example:

Georgette searched the mall for her friends, [**who/whom**] she found flirting with cute guys at the food court.

Before you make a decision, analyze the verbs:

Georgette searched the mall for her friends, [**who/whom**] she found flirting with cute guys in the food court.



Since the verb *searched* has *Georgette* as its subject and the verb *found* has *she* as its subject, you do *not* need another subject. Use the *object* form instead:

Georgette searched the mall for her friends, *whom* she found flirting with cute guys in the food court.

Whomever works the same way:

You can give this steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew to [**whoever/whomever**] you want.

Notice how all the verbs already have subjects:

You can give this steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew to
[whoever/whomever] you want.

So you need the **object** form:

You can give this steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew to
whomever you want.

QUICK TEST

Directions: Make the appropriate choice for each sentence below.

1. At red lights, my friend Javier tries to race [**whoever/whomever**] pulls up beside him.
2. Susan, [**who/whom**] was in an ugly mood, pushed past a Girl Scout trying to sell cookies.
3. Noel, [**who/whom**] I've known since middle school, has decided to trade in his ancient Honda.
4. You should try to impress [**whoever/whomever**] has a fat wallet.
5. The Johnsons, [**who/whom**] everyone in the neighborhood hates, let their noisy dogs bark all night.

