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.

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:
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.