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.

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.
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, *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.