

WHEN TO USE WHO AND WHEN TO USE WHOM

One of the problems that has plagued humankind, particularly studentkind, since the dawn of the English class is the troubling question of when to use *who* and when to use *whom*. Unfortunately, in order to answer this question satisfactorily, it will be necessary to remind you of a few grammar terms.

Pronoun

A word that is used to act as a sort of substitute for another word:

John is taking his laptop to school so that he can take notes more efficiently.

If it were not for pronouns, we would all go around talking like the Cookie Monster.



“Cookie Monster love to eat cookies!”

John is taking John’s laptop to school so that John can take notes more efficiently.

That’s the first grammar term – **pronoun**. Now let’s remind ourselves of two other grammar terms:

Subjects and Objects

*Just like nouns, pronouns can function either as **subjects** (the thing that is doing the action in the sentence) or **objects** (the thing that is being acted upon).*

John is taking his laptop to school so that he can take notes more efficiently.

In the above sentence, there are two clauses (Check out [Reviewing clauses](#) if you need a refresher on clauses.) In the first clause, *John* is the subject of the verb phrase *is taking*, and *laptop* is the object of *is taking*.

In the second clause of the sentence, *he* is the subject of the verb phrase *can take*.

Make Sense????

That is why we use the pronoun *he* - a subject pronoun - and not *him* - an object pronoun.

HERE IS A CHART THAT MAY HELP YOU.

Subject Pronouns	I, we	you	he, she, they
Object Pronouns	me, us	you	him, her, them
Possessive Pronoun	my, mine our(s)	your(s)	his, hers, their(s)

So, what does all of this have to do with using **who** and **whom**?

Just like the above pronouns, whether you use **who** or **whom** is determined by how it is being used in the sentence. In other words, it is determined by whether it is functioning as a subject or an object.

Look at this sentence:

We can't tell **who** received an invitation.

Why did I use **who**?

I used **who** because it is acting as the subject of the verb **received**.

Now, look at this sentence:

The guests **whom** we invited are all carrying their invitations.

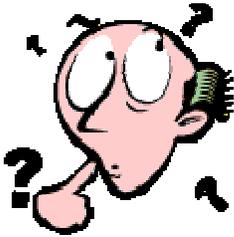
Why did I use **whom**?

I used *whom* because the verb *invited* already has a subject - the pronoun *we*. Therefore, *whom* must be functioning as an object.

How about this sentence?

The guests *who* are carrying their invitations
are the ones *whom* we invited.

Thoroughly confused?



Don't be. Take it apart. The pronoun *who* is functioning as the subject of the verb phrase *are carrying*. Therefore, I have to use the subject pronoun *who*. However, the verb *invited* has a subject - the pronoun *we*. Therefore, I have to use the object pronoun *whom*.



Try this trick: if there is already a noun or pronoun that is functioning as the subject of the verb or verb phrase, then use **whom!**