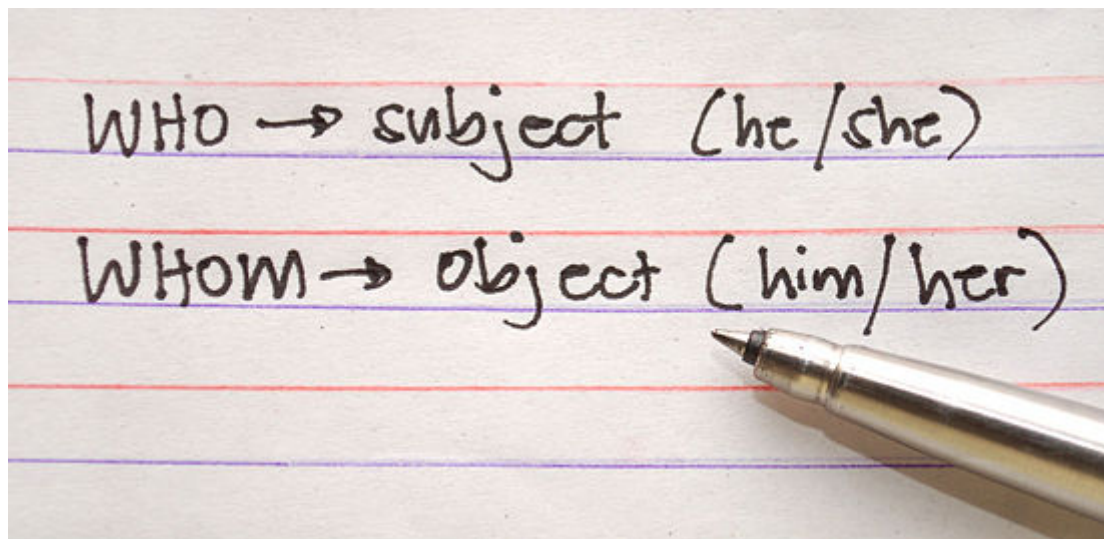


# How to use “Who” and “Whom” Correctly

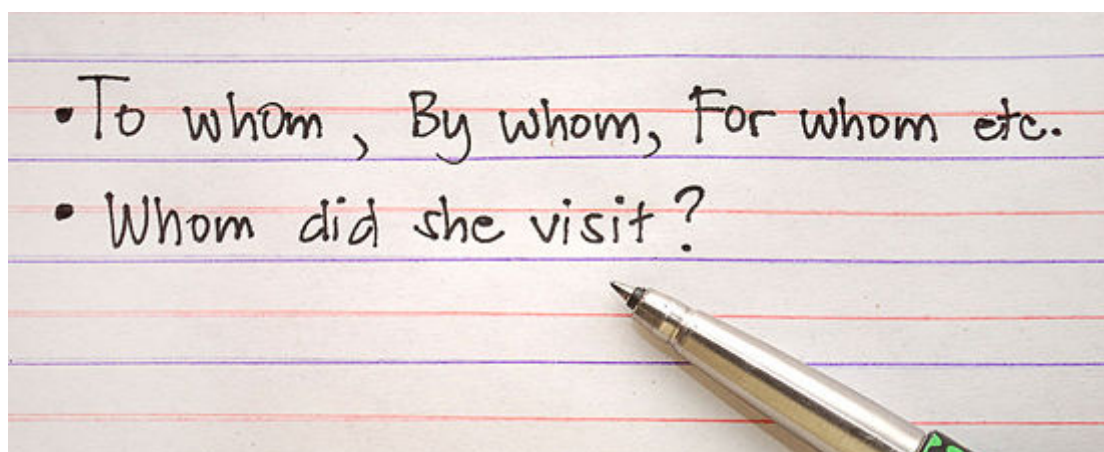
The correct use of *who* and *whom* in questions may seem like a lost battle, still joined only by punctilious English teachers, but the correct usage remains important in formal writing. Even careful speakers have not yet surrendered the distinction either! After reading this article, you will feel more comfortable using the distinction of "who" and "whom" correctly.

## Understand the difference between *who* and *whom*

Both *who* and *whom* are pronouns. However, "who" is used as the *subject* of a sentence or phrase, to denote who is doing something (like he or she). On the other hand, "whom" is used as the *object* of a verb, to denote who has something done to it (like him or her). While a preposition (at, by, for, in, with, etc.) often comes before "whom", this is not always the case, so the key question is to ask "who is doing what to whom". What follows is a quick way to determine which pronoun to use in a particular question.

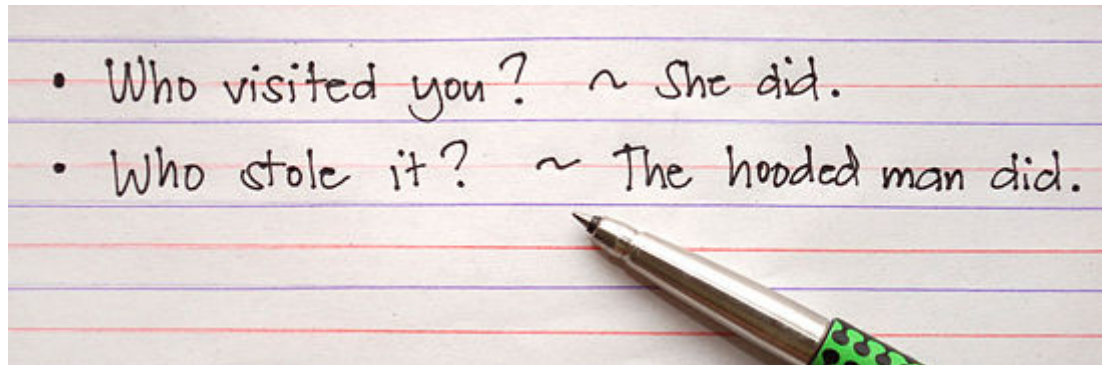


## Use *whom* when referring to the object of a verb



- To whom it may concern:
- To whom did you talk today?
- Whom does Sarah love?

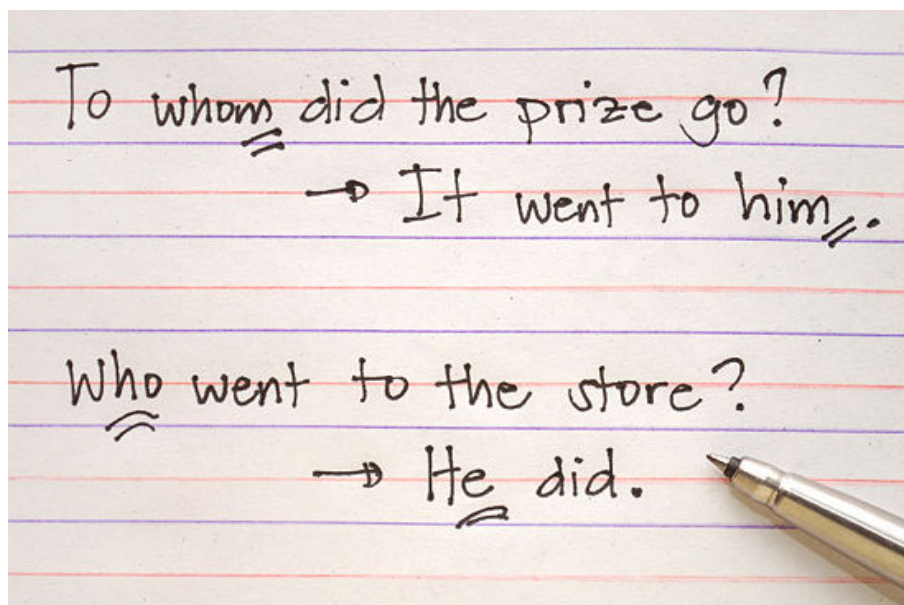
## Use *who* when referring to the subject of a sentence or phrase



- Who brought the paper inside?
- Who talked to you today?
- Who went to dinner?
- Who ate the cake?

## Ask yourself if the answer to the question would be *he* or *him*

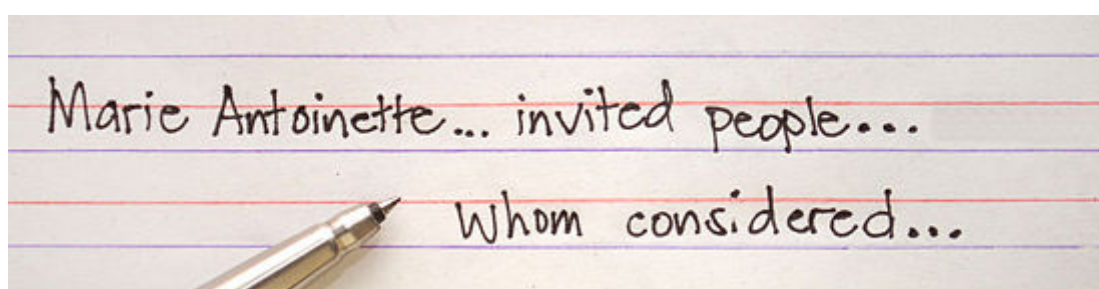
If you can answer the question with *him*, then use *whom*. It's easy to remember because they both end with "m". If you can answer the question with *he*, then use *who*.



- Example: A suitable answer to the question, "To [**who** or **whom**] did the prize go?" is, "It went to him." (It is improper to say "It went to he.") The correct pronoun for the question is *whom*.
- Example: A suitable answer to the question, "[**Who** or **Whom**] went to the store?" is, "He went to the store." (It is improper to say "Him went to the store.") The correct pronoun for the question is *who*.

## When trying to decide whether *who* or *whom* is correct, simplify the sentence

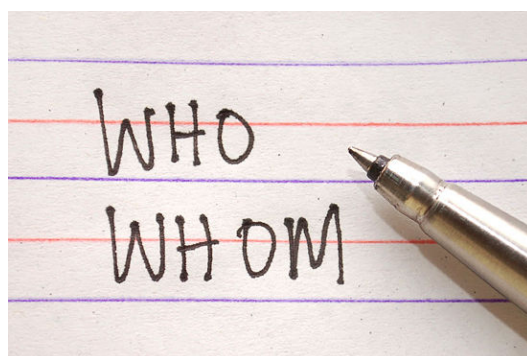
Where other words in a complex sentence might throw you off track, simplify the sentence to include just the basic subject, verb, and object. It helps to move the words around in your head to identify the word relationships. For example:



- "Marie Antoinette and her ladies-in-waiting only invited people to their party [**who** or **whom**] they considered to love parties as much as they did." The simplified mental version becomes: "**whom** they considered."
- "Marie Antoinette prevented her mother from knowing [**who** or **whom**] she invited to the Petit Trianon." The simplified mental version becomes: "[**who** or **whom**] she invited." Then, you could rearrange it again to say: "she invited **whom**", clarifying that she did something to (invited) *whom*.

## The distinction between *who* and *whom* is less important in informal spoken language than it is in formal written language.

It's possible that the distinction might someday erode away altogether. For now, though, it is important to keep the clear in written language.



## Tips

- Ask yourself "who did what to whom?"
- It is possible to write around problems involving *who* and *whom*, but the result is almost always clumsy. If you write "To which person did the prize go?" because you can't remember that *whom* is the correct pronoun for such a question, you will have avoided a grammatical error at the expense of elegance.
- Here's a useful mnemonic for remembering about objects and subjects; If you say "I love you", then "you" is the object of your affection and the object of the sentence. "I" is the subject. "[Whom or Who] do I love?" is "Whom do I love?" because the answer, "you", is an object.
- Learning another language can help greatly. In most languages, using "who" in the place of "whom" can cause great confusion. A great example of this is German or Spanish.

## Warnings

- There is much confusion and misuse on this topic. Just as correctly using *whom* may make others think that you are intelligent, misusing it may make you seem pompous. Never use *whom* as a subject pronoun. This is as incorrect as using *who* where *whom* is required. Many people will mistakenly believe that you are trying to be formal.
  - "Whom are you?" is wrong. It is meant to be "Who are you?"

