

## WHO/WHOM WORKSHOP

### GUIDELINES

A. **Who/Whom.** Remember to be careful when *who* and *whom* appear in subordinate clauses. *Who* and *whoever* are nominative case forms that will ordinarily function as subjects. Those subjects may be the subject of the subordinate (dependent) clause as well as the subject of the main sentence.

EX:

Who will win the Olympics this year?

In this sentence *who* is the subject of the whole sentence since *will win* is the only verb.

EX:

Whoever picks the most strawberries will win a reward.

In this sentence *whoever* is the subject of the verb *picks*, but the whole noun clause *whoever picks the most strawberries* is the subject of the main sentence or the verb *will win*. *Whoever* is the subject of the verb *picks* in the subordinate clause.

EX:

Kodi welcomes whoever travels cross country with her.

*Whoever* is the subject of the verb *travels*. The whole noun clause *whoever travels cross country with her* is the direct object of the verb *welcomes*.

### **B. A subordinate who/whom clause may function as an object of a preposition.**

EX:

He worked with whoever needed him most.

*Whoever needed him most* is the object of the preposition *with*. *Whoever* is the subject of the verb *needed* in the subordinate clause.

### **C. The subordinate who/whom clauses may have other functions.**

EX:

Knowing (who, whom) would be the best candidate, the commissioner withdrew from the race.

*WHO* is the subject of the verb *would be*. The whole noun clause *who would be the best candidate* is the object of the participle *knowing*.

Give (whoever, whomever) wins the race a cold glass of water.

*WHOEVER* is the subject of the verb *wins*. The whole noun clause *whoever wins the race* is an indirect object of the verb *give*.

EX:

Eric Smith is a man (who, whom) greatly admires the music of Dave Barry.

This time the subordinate clause is an adjective clause. *Who greatly admires the music of Dave Barry* modifies the noun *man*. *WHO* is the correct choice because it is the subject of the verb *admires*.

**D. When the verb in a subordinate who/whom clause already has a subject, the correct choice is usually whom, functioning as a direct object of the verb in the subordinate clause.**

EX:

Whoever she wants will be appointed.

*WHOMEVER SHE WANTS* is the noun clause subject of the verb *will be appointed*. Within the noun clause *she* is the subject of the verb *wants*; she prefers whom? The answer is *whomever*. Once you realize that the verb *wants* already has a subject, you should see that *whomever* is the direct object.

EX:

The man (who, whom) Mary loves is a computer programmer.

*WHOM* is the correct choice because it is the direct object of the verb *loves* in the subordinate clause.

**E. Be careful with who/whom clauses in sentences that contain expressions such as I think, I feel, I believe, you may recall, etc. Such expressions are parenthetical interrupters and are not grammatically relevant. The expressions must be mentally ignored, or they can be repositioned before the words who or whom. Then change those pronouns to he/she or him/her to test for who or whom.**

EX:

Karen is the girl who I think earned the prize.

*Karen* is the subject of the verb *is*, and *who* is the subject of the verb *earned*.  
*I think she earned the prize.*

**F. Using care in your writing to make sure each verb has a subject, you will avoid sentences such as Karen is the girl whom I think earned the prize. If whom were considered the object of the verb think, the verb earned would not have a subject.**