

How to Use *Who* and *Whom*

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Who and **whoever** are subject forms:

Who ate all the cake?

Whoever ate it.

Whom and **whomever** are object forms:

Whom do you favor?

Whomever I favor.

Linking verbs take subjects and subject complements:

Who is **who**?

You are **who**?

Prepositions take objects:

To/From **whom** is the letter addressed?

Of **whom** do you speak?

The adverb **about** functions similarly to a preposition:

About **whom** are you gossiping?

As Conjunctions

When **who** or **whoever** is used as a subordinating conjunction, the form of the pronoun is determined by its role in the subordinate clause:

I do not care **who** wants what.

I do not care **whom** the dragon eats.

Whoever ate all the cake is selfish.

Whoever you favor probably favors you.

When the subordinate clause is introduced with a preposition or **about**, that word with **whom** forms a modifier in the subordinate clause:

This is my robot servant **without whom** I would be nothing.

This is my robot servant **about whom** you have heard so much.

Whom is neither the subject nor the object in the subordinate clause. **Whom** is the object of the preposition.

Occurring Near to *To Think*

When it occurs near **who**, the verb **to think** confuses:

He is not the leader **whom** we think will bring stability to the region.

The speaker of the preceding sentence has mistakenly determined that **whom** is the object of **to think**. To use **to think** transitively, you must pair it with something noun-like:

I thought good thoughts.

I thought my creations into being.

The only situation in which **whom** can be the object of **to think** is that in which **whom** is literally what the speaker is thinking:

He said, "I hate him."

I thought, "**Whom?**"

We tend to modify **to think** with prepositions, adverbs, and restrictive clauses:

I thought of him.

I thought highly of him.

I thought that he would make a good leader.

Consider the following sentence:

I thought “**whom**” was the word you were looking for.

In the preceding sentence, **whom** is not a subordinating conjunction but part of a restrictive clause with an elided **that**:

I thought **that** “**whom**” was the word **that** you were looking for.

In our original sentence, then, **whom** cannot be the object of **we think**. **Who** must be the subject of **will bring**, or that verb does not have a subject. This is clear if you punctuate **we think** as an appositive clause:

He is not the leader **who**, we think, **will bring** stability to the region.

However, **he is not the leader who will bring stability to the region** modifies **we think**. Therefore, **we think** is the main clause of the sentence. This is clear if you place the clause at the beginning of the sentence:

We think (that) he is not the leader **who will bring** stability to the region.

Consider another example:

He was not **whom** we thought he was.

In preceding sentence, there are two restrictive clauses with elided **thats**:

He was not **who that** we thought **that** he was.

Questions confuse when they use the auxillary verb **to do** with **to think**:

Whom do you think you are?

Whom does he think he is?

To think is modified by restrictive clauses in the preceding sentences, and **who** is the subject complement of **to be** in the restrictive clauses:

Who do you think (that) you are?

(You are who?)

Who does he think (that) he is?

(He is who?)

If the restrictive clause has a transitive verb, **whom** is correct:

Whom does he think (that) he hates?

(He hates whom?)