Sentence Variety VII: Relative Pronouns: Whose/Who’s

Whose is the possessive of who, just as his is the possessive of he, and hers is the possessive of she. Notice that none of these possessives has an apostrophe.

She yelled at the man whose dog barked all night. Whose dinosaur is that? He called his grandpa, whose car wouldn’t start.

In all three cases, whose states or asks about ownership—of a dog, a dinosaur, and a car.

Sometimes writers confuse whose with who’s, but telling them apart is easy. Who’s is always a contraction for who is, who was, or who has:

Bob, who’s at the racetrack right now, won’t be back until after 6:00. (who’s = who is)

Harriet, who’s strapped in the rocking seat of the Tilt-A-Whirl, felt her stomach moving even before the ride began. (who’s = who was)

I told his wife, who’s been a member of Gamblers Anonymous for ten years, that he’s at the library. (who’s = who has)

Relative pronouns: whom/whomever vs. who/whoever
Choosing between the relative pronouns who/whoever and whom/whomever is often confusing.

If a verb does not immediately follow the relative pronoun in a statement, use whom or whomever. For example,

Jack doesn’t know for whom the message was intended.

In this case, “whom” is not followed by a verb; instead, a noun (“message”) follows it, which means that the relative pronoun is not functioning as a subject.

Here’s another example:

Gloria is going to fire whomever she sees first.

As in the previous example, the relative pronoun—in this case “whomever”—is not followed by a verb but by the pronoun “she.” This again means that the relative pronoun does not work as a subject; consequently, we use “whomever,” not “whoever.”
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However, if the relative pronoun is a subject—which means it is immediately followed by a verb—use “whoever”:

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Gloria is going to fire whoever is late for work.

In this case, “whoever” is the right choice because it is the subject of the verb “is.” Notice, however, that even though what precedes “whoever”—“Gloria is going to fire”—is the same as in the previous example, the verb after it makes the pronoun a subject.

Practice 1
Directions: Circle the correct pronoun in each sentence below.
1. (Whose/Who’s) going to the Aerosmith concert tonight?
2. (Whose/Who’s) car should we take?
3. Clyde, (who’s/whose) going to turn thirty on Sunday, is planning a trip to Hawaii.
4. On Saturday morning, Steve, (who’s/whose) head was throbbing, took three aspirins and went back to bed.
5. I’ll talk to Sandy, (who’s/whose) mother is a stock broker and (who’s/whose) investing in Starbucks.

Practice 2
Directions: Circle the correct pronoun in each sentence below.
1. Gary, (who/whom) took the last piece of chicken, was roundly criticized.
2. Val, to (who/whom) he lent his telescope, now has an unlisted phone number.
3. The IRS will audit (whoever/whomever) received an exceptionally large tax refund.
4. Her favorite poet, Walt Whitman, (who/whom) critics frequently attacked, is now considered a writer (who/whom) will be read for years to come.
5. He hoped his brother, to (who/whom) he had written, would arrive in San Antonio soon.

Practice 3
1. Write a sentence that contains the relative pronoun “whose.”
2. Write a sentence that contains the contraction “who’s.”
3. Write a sentence that contains the relative pronoun “whom” or “whomever.”
4. Write a sentence that contains the relative pronoun “whoever.”
5. Write a sentence that contains the relative pronouns “whom” and “whoever.”