

TAMIU
 University College
Writing
Center

Sentence variety exercise 7

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*)

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.

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,

S V V Prep. Art. Noun
 Jack doesn't know for *whom* the message was intended.

In this case, “whom” is not followed by a verb; instead, an article (“the”) and a noun (“message”) follow it, which means that the relative pronoun *is not* functioning as a subject, so use “whom,” not “who.” (Also, notice that “whom” follows the preposition “for,” and is, as a result, the object of the preposition.)

Here’s another example:

S V V Infin. Pron.
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.” (In addition, “whomever” also follows an infinitive—the base form of the verb “fire,” which makes it a direct object, not a subject.)

However, if the relative pronoun *is* a subject—which means it is immediately followed by a verb—use “whoever”:

S V V Infin. V
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 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” after an infinitive.
4. Write a sentence that contains the relative pronoun “whom” after a preposition.
5. Write a sentence that contains the relative pronoun “whomever” after either a verb or a preposition.