

Who, Whom, Whose, & Who's: Sorted

Confused by who, whom, whose, and who's?

You're not alone. These four words look and sound similar, but they play very different roles in a sentence. Get them wrong, and your writing can feel clumsy or unclear. Get them right, and your grammar instantly sounds more polished and professional.

This quick guide breaks down what each word means, when to use it, and how to check you've got it right.

Who: The subject (the one doing the action)

Use **who** when the word is the subject of the sentence – the person doing something, not having something done to them.

Tip: If you can replace it with he, she, or they, use **who**.

Examples:

- *Who is coming to the meeting?* (She is.)
- *The student who won the award is from Brazil.* (He won.)
- *Do you know who called me last night?* (They called.)

Whom: The object (the one receiving the action)

Use **whom** when the word is the object of the sentence – the person the action is being done to.

Tip: If you can replace it with him, her, or them, use **whom**.

Examples:

- *Whom did you invite to dinner?* (You invited them.)
- *The professor whom I emailed hasn't replied.* (I emailed him.)
- *To whom should I address the letter?* (To her.)

Note: In formal writing, *Whom did you invite?* is correct. But in everyday speech, *Who did you invite?* is much more common, and widely accepted.

Whose = possession

Use **whose** to ask about or show ownership – it shows that something belongs to someone.

Tip: If you can rephrase using his, her, or their + noun, use **whose**.

Examples:

- *Whose backpack is this?* (His backpack? Her backpack?)
- *That's the student whose laptop was stolen.* (Her laptop was stolen.)
- *I met a man whose car broke down.* (His car broke down.)

Who's = who is or who has

Who's is a contraction. It's short for "who is" or "who has."
It's never used to show possession.

Tip: If you can expand it to "who is" or "who has," use **who's**.

Examples:

- *Who's coming to the lecture?* (Who is coming?)
- *Who's finished the homework?* (Who has finished?)
- *I wonder who's at the door.* (Who is at the door?)

Watch out: Don't confuse it with **whose**.

Whose = possession,

- Who's = who is / who has

Word	Meaning	Use when...	Tip/Test
Who	Subject of the sentence	Someone is doing the action	Replace with he/she/they → <i>Who called?</i>
Whom	Object of the sentence	Someone is receiving the action	Replace with him/her/them → <i>Whom did you call?</i>
Whose	Shows possession	You're showing ownership	Replace with his/her/their + noun → <i>Whose laptop?</i>
Who's	Contraction of who is/who has	You mean who is or who has	Expand it → <i>Who's = Who is / Who has</i>

Still unsure?

- If your sentence makes sense with **he/she/they**, use **who**.
- If it works with **him/her/them**, use **whom**.
- If it shows **ownership**, use **whose**.
- If it means **who is** or **who has**, use **who's**.