

tipsheet

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Using Who, Whom and That

When drafting written business communications, make sure to properly use who, whom, and that. People often interchange who, whom, and that when speaking. However, in written communication, use these pronouns correctly to ensure that your audience understands the message.

Specifically, keep the following rules in mind:

1. Use **who** as a substitute for he, she, or they.

Example: Who founded Starbucks? "Who" is the main person (the subject) of the sentence.

2. Use **whom** as a substitute for him, her, or them.

Example: The divisional directors, four of whom lived in Europe, left the conference early to catch their flights. "Four of whom lived in Europe" is used as a substitute for divisional directors or "them."

3. Use **that** as a substitute for a thing (never a person).

Example: The team that built the most stores received an award. "That" clarifies the team that won.

Rules and Guidelines

To determine when to use who, whom, and that, use the following steps:

1. Recognize that every verb in a sentence must have a subject.
2. If you encounter issues determining whether to use who, whom, or that, isolate this information from the rest of the sentence.
3. Try to rephrase the sentence using that, she/he, or her/him. If the sentence refers to a thing, use "that." If the sentence refers to a person or people, use "who" or "whom."
4. To determine whether to use who or whom, try substituting she/he or her/him in place of who/whom in the sentence. If she/he sounds better, then use "who." If her/him sounds better, then use "whom."

An Example

Abigail Jones, the Accenture Partner who/whom successfully led the project, received a promotion for a job well-done.

- Step 1.** Realize that a subject must accompany each verb in this sentence.

Verb: led

Verb: received

- Step 2.** Isolate the part of the sentence containing who/whom.

"Who/whom led the project"

- Step 3.** Rephrase the sentence using she or her.

"She led the project"

"Her led the project"

- Step 4.** Determine which sounds better: she or her.

Correct Answer: She led the project. She = who.

Consequently, the right sentence looks like this: Abigail Jones, the Accenture Partner who successfully led the project, received a promotion for a job well-done.

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