Who or Whom?

Choosing between the various forms of the pronoun who, (who, whose, whom, whoever, whomever) can be very confusing. Knowing the difference between subjective, objective, and possessive pronouns can help one determine which form of who to use.

Pronoun Forms

To say that a pronoun is subjective is to say that it is acting as the subject of a sentence or clause.

Ex: He went to the movies last Friday. She stayed home.

To say that a pronoun is objective is to say that it is acting as the object of a sentence or clause. In other words, it is receiving the action of the sentence rather than participating in it.

Ex: Tom called her yesterday. Tina sent a text message to him the next day.

Finally, a pronoun is possessive when it indicates ownership. Possessive pronouns often replace names.

Ex: This is Dan’s laptop. This is also his cell phone. This is the Smiths’ house. That is their fence.

Parallels in Form

The pronoun forms of he, she, and they are parallel to the forms of who. If a sentence would require the objective form of “he,” it would require the objective form of “who.” Consider the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subjective</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>he / she</td>
<td>him / her</td>
<td>his / hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
<td>whose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
<td>whose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To choose correctly among the forms of who, one can simply re-phrase the sentence in order to choose between he / she and him / her.

If the pronoun is him or her, write whom. If the pronoun is he or she, write who.

Ex: Who is responsible? (He is responsible?)
Whom shall they ask to the party? (Shall they ask her to the party?)
Give the book to whomever. (Give the book to him.)
Give the book to whoever wants it. ("She wants it.")
Whoever shows up first will win the prize. (He shows up first.)

“Whose” versus “Who’s”

Who’s, which is often mistakenly used in the place of the possessive form of who, is actually a contraction of who is. Whose is the only correct possessive form of who. It can be used to refer to people as well as inanimate objects.
Ex:  *Who’s* that standing on the corner? *(Who is that standing on the corner?)*  
*Whose* book is this?  
This book, *whose* title is *A Wrinkle in Time*, is easy and enjoyable to read.