I'm not a bot

Who's is a contraction of "who is," as in "who's there? and "the friend who’s calling," or of "who has," as in "who's got the time?" and "the friend who’s helped before." Whose shows possession, as in "whose shoes are these?" or identifies or specifies someone or something, as in "the doctor whose name I forget" and "the book whose cover is torn." Much like it’s and its, who’s and whose are two words that are confused very frequently. Let’s start by breaking it down simply: Who’s is a contraction of who is or who has. It can be found at the beginning of a question: Who’s [=who is] at the door? Who’s [=who has] got the remote? as well as with who functioning as a relative pronoun a teacher who’s [=who is] admired by everyone a teacher who’s [=who has] inspired thousands of students. How to Use 'Whose' Whose is a possessive adjective meaning “of or relating to whom or which.” Grammatically speaking, we use the term possessive to refer to relationships beyond simple ownership. As with other words of possession, it can also be used to express association, agency, or the receiving of an action: Whose sunglasses are these? Jake, whose sister is an archeologist, is considering studying the subject as well. The firefighter, whose brave actions saved dozens, was presented with a medal. They live in a port city whose economy relies heavily on fishing. a novel whose publication paved the way for a burgeoning genre I ran into Mark, whose house I painted last year. a building whose demolition had been in the works for years The most well-known demonstration of possessive whose might be in the title of the comedy show Whose Line Is It Anyway? Whose can also function as a pronoun meaning “that which belongs to whom”: I found a hat, but I didn’t know whose it was. We all submitted great ideas, but whose was the best? Tricks for Keeping Them Separate The confusion between whose and who’s is very similar to the confusion that occurs between it’s and its, where it's serves as a contraction of it is and its as the possessive form of it. That is mainly due to the fact that we are inclined to interpret automatically any word ending in apostrophe-s as possessive. Instead of saying, “I really like the paintings of Bob,” you’re more likely to say, “I really like Bob’s paintings.” So when we need a possessive form for who, it’s natural for one to gravitate toward the possessive-s form, so “an artist whose essays I really like” becomes “an artist who’s essays I really like.” But that would not be correct. One thing to remember is that possessive adjectives usually don’t contain an apostrophe: my, your, his, her, its, our, their. Remembering that whose falls into the same category might help to steer you away from the apostrophe. It's is a contraction and should be used where a sentence would normally read "it is" or "it has." The apostrophe indicates that part of a word has been removed. Its with no apostrophe, on the other hand, is the possessive word, like "his" and "her," for nouns without gender. For example, "The sun was so bright, its rays blinded me." It's happened to all of us: you type it's and later realize you meant its. (And by "realize" we occasionally mean, "got flamed in the comments section.") The rule is actually pretty simple: use the apostrophe after it only when part of a word has been removed: it's raining means it is raining; it's been warm means it has been warm. It's is a contraction, in the style of can't for cannot and she's for she is. But this rule wouldn't have worked a few centuries ago. History of It's vs. Its Long ago, English was like many other languages in that every noun had a gender: masculine, feminine, or neuter. Pronouns—those efficient little words we use to stand in for nouns, like I, you, he, she, we, they, and it—also had gender; the gender of a pronoun was determined by the gender of the noun it referred to. The possessive pronoun for neuter nouns was his: "April with his sweet showers." But when English began to link his and her only to actual males and females, his for objects seemed increasingly wrong, and it—with no s—began to be used: "April with it sweet showers." Around 1600 it's began to be used: "April with it's sweet showers." The it's had an apostrophe, just like a possessive noun like April's would. This apostrophe form of the possessive remained extremely common throughout the 17th century. The version without the apostrophe only became dominant in the 18th century, probably because it's was taking on a new role: replacing the contraction 'tis. It's here had arrived and 'tis here was fading away. We still see the possessive it's in dashed-off emails and advertisements, but the fact that it was right 300 years ago doesn't make it correct today. For those of us who live—and write—in the here and now, use it's only when you mean it is or it has. And drop that apostrophe everywhere else. Want to communicate some important information in writing? If you want your reader to easily navigate the content, you might want to use some bullet points. What are bullet points? Bullet points are symbols that mark items in a list. Most of the time they look like this: • Bullet points (also called simply “bullets”) draw the reader’s attention. They provide an easy way for you to present the most important ideas. The information following each bullet should be brief: you want a person to be able to understand the content quickly. When to Use Bullet Points Use bullet points when the information you want to provide can be presented in the form of a list. They can be used in both formal and informal writing. What a Bulleted List Should Look Like Here are some features of a bulleted list: A bulleted list is typically preceded by some introductory words that tell the reader what they’re in for, as done in the sentence above. The bullet points should have the same basic structure, i.e., they should all be complete sentences, or all be phrases or single words; they should not be a mix. If bullet points are in sentence form, they should begin with a capital and end with punctuation. If bullet points are in phrase form, they don’t need ending punctuation and can begin with a capital or lowercase letter. Bullet points should be about the same length; you don’t want one to be super short, while the others are all long. You can use any symbol: dots, squares, or something else (as long as it doesn’t distract from the points you are making). The bulleted list above was all sentences; here is an example of a phrase-based bulleted list, informing you that the word bullet: first referred to the missile-fired-from-a-firearm kind of bullet has been used in English since the late 16th century is from the Middle French words boulette, meaning “small ball,” and boulet, meaning “missile” has referred to the symbol(s) addressed in this article since the mid 20th century has appeared in the longer term bullet point since the early 1980s Note that in this second bulleted list, each item completes the sentence begun in the introductory text. Consistency is important: use all complete sentences, or all phrases that complete part of the introduction. Shortcuts and How to Type Bullet Points How you insert bullet points depends on what word processing format or program you’re using. In Microsoft Word, Google docs, Gmail, Outlook and other PC email and word processing programs, look for the symbol that is three horizontal lines preceded by squares or dots. In Word, this symbol is in the Paragraph section under the Home tab. There’s a Word shortcut too: Ctrl + Shift + L. In Google docs the symbol is on the main navigation page. The Google/Gmail shortcut is Ctrl + Shift + 8. In Apple, use the Format sidebar to find the Style button; click the Bullets & Lists menu near the bottom of the sidebar. The Apple shortcut is Cmd + Shift + 8. Bullet Indents Note that the bullet points will be inserted at an indented point. If you want the bullet point to be further indented, put your cursor just before the first letter of the first item and hit the tab key. If you want an item in your bulleted list to be indented further (maybe you want to have a sub-item or two under an item), put your cursor just before the first letter of the sub-item and hit the tab key. Choosing Bullets You can choose from a basic selection of bullet points at the basic three horizontal lines icon by clicking on the arrow beside it. In some programs, such as Microsoft Word, you can also add other symbols to use as bullet points. Go to “Define new bullet” and select from the options there. You can also copy a bullet symbol • and paste it into your document. Which one should you choose? That and which can both introduce a restrictive clause, i.e., a clause that can't be removed without changing the sentence's meaning substantially or making the sentence incomplete or difficult to understand: The cake that/which they served was pink. Which is the word used to introduce a nonrestrictive clause, i.e., a clause that adds information but isn't essential for understanding the sentence's basic idea: The cake, which was delicious, was pink. Some grammarians feel restrictive clauses should only use that, but using which in these cases is now common and accepted. Do you suffer from ambivalence? Do you have bouts of ennui or difficulty making decisions? Do you find yourself unable to decide whether you should use that or which when composing a sentence? In the event that you answered “yes” to either of the first two questions you have our sympathies, but as a dictionary we can offer little else. However, if the source of your trouble is the issue of that and which we may be of some small assistance. Use 'which' or 'that' to introduce a restrictive clause, and 'which' to introduce a nonrestrictive clause. Restrictive and Unrestrictive Clauses Before we begin, you should be warned that it’s time to put your grammar pants on, since we’re about to dive into the world of restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. (If you don’t know what grammar pants are, they are itchy woolen slacks that are too tight, and magically make you mildly dissatisfied with the choices of everyone around you.) Once upon a time, long ago, when the English language was still basking in its Edenic youth, that and which were freely interchanged. Everyone was very happy. Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesars; and unto God the things which are Gods. —Joseph Hall, A Plaine and Familiar Explication, 1633 Render therefore unto Caesar, the things that are Caesars; and unto God, the things that are Gods. —Robert Grosse, Royalty and Loyalty, 1647 Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's. —Samuel Sturmy, The Mariners Magazine, 1669 Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesars: and unto God the things that are Gods. —Richard Hollingworth, An Exercitation Concerning Usurped Powers, 1650 The careful reader may have noticed that in the four examples given above, all published within a span of four decades, each of the authors writes what is essentially the same sentence, but uses that and which in a manner that is different from each of the others. The mid-17th century was apparently a period of syntactical free love. Then the rules on restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses came along. If you are not a copy editor, or someone who is deeply interested in grammar, you may have forgotten what restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses are. A restrictive clause is a part of a sentence that may not be removed without rendering that sentence incomplete, difficult to understand, or with its meaning substantially changed. “The essay that covers grammar is very boring“ contains a restrictive clause (“that covers grammar”) that is important in making the sentence understood. “The essay that covers grammar, which I read while I was supposed to be working, is very boring,” contains the same restrictive clause, but also has a nonrestrictive clause (“which I read while I was supposed to be working”). This nonrestrictive clause adds information to the sentence, but it is not imperative to include it. If you would prefer a sartorial analogy, the nonrestrictive clause functions like a silk scarf; you may wish to wear one when leaving the house, but your day won’t really be affected if you decide to leave it at home. The restrictive clause, however, is more akin to pants; your day will have a decidedly problematic tone if you leave home without them. That underwent a period of decline at the end of the 17th century, then made a comeback several decades later. When it reappeared, that was used for nonrestrictive clauses much less frequently than it had previously been (although some writers, such as Thackeray and Tennyson, still used it in this way quite often). Rules for 'Which' and 'That' Soon, grammarians tried to establish a set of rules to govern the use of these words. As is so often the case when a grammatical rule is established based on the preference of usage writers, rather than actual usage, there was a great deal of disagreement as to what the rules should actually be. In 1906 the Fowler brothers (Henry Watson and Francis George) published The King’s English, and came up with a firm set of guidelines which were adopted by many subsequent usage guides (the Fowlers used the terms defining and non-defining instead of restrictive and nonrestrictive). That should never be used to introduce a non-defining clause. …Which should not be used in defining clauses except when custom, euphony, or convenience is decidedly against the use of that. —Fowler, F.G. & H.W., The King’s English, 1906 There are some problems with these rules. The main one is that they don’t really work. Some twenty years after the brothers first issued them, Henry Watson wrote another book on usage. He plaintively expressed his feelings on the way that people were treating that and which: …if writers would agree to regard that as the defining relative pronoun, & which as the non-defining, there would be much gain both in lucidity & in ease. Some there are who follow this principle now; but it would be idle to pretend that it is the practice either of most or of the best writers. —H. W. Fowler, A Dictionary of Modern English Usage, 1926 It has been pointed out that if most of your language’s writers do not follow a rule (and the best writers seem to disregard it as well) then you may have to accept that it’s not much of a rule. Another issue with the Fowler’s dicta is that if you say that your rule can be ignored for reasons of “custom, euphony, or convenience”, it would appear to be more of a mild suggestion than a rule. It is true that that is rarely found today used in nonrestrictive clauses (although poets still use it thusly), but which seems to have a fair degree of flexibility to it, and can perform very nicely in restrictive clauses, nonrestrictive clauses, and in annoying people who feel that it should never be found outside of a nonrestrictive clause. Here is what our own usage guide, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage, has to say on the matter: We conclude that at the end of the 20th century, the usage of which and that—at least in prose—has pretty much settled down. You can use either which or that to introduce a restrictive clause—the grounds for your choice should be stylistic—and which to introduce a nonrestrictive clause. Another way of looking at this is that if your clause is bracketed by commas (“the article on grammar, which I started while eating lunch, seemed to never end”) it is likely a nonrestrictive clause, and you can give it a which. If it is not surrounded by commas, then it is most likely a restrictive clause, and you can choose to give it a that or a which. If anyone questions your decision, you can say that you are following the advice of the Fowlers, and are making a decision based on custom, euphony, and convenience. We'll get to semicolons later. Colons (:) introduce clauses or phrases that serve to describe, amplify, or restate what precedes them. Often they are used to introduce a quote or a list that satisfies the previous statement. For example, this summary could be written as "Colons can introduce many things: descriptors, quotes, lists, and more." We all know the colon, right? It's a punctuation mark that looks like two dots stacked, like a period with another period hovering above it : It's typically a mark of introduction, used to let the reader know that what follows the colon has been pointed to or described by what precedes the colon. (This is quite a different function from that of the semicolon, which is mostly used to separate two independent sentence parts that are related in meaning.) In the running prose that we encounter in books, magazines, articles, and the like, colons are mostly used to introduce a clause or a phrase that explains, illustrates, amplifies, or restates what precedes them. (Reminder: clauses and phrases are both groups of words within a sentence; the basic difference between them is that a clause has its own subject and verb, while a phrase does not.) Colons are also hard to find in stock photography, so just go with it. Colons Introduce Clauses and Phrases Let's first look at some colons introducing clauses and phrases that explain, illustrate, amplify, and restate what's come before: Harry the Dog and Mabel the Cat were having an impassioned argument about umbrellas: are umbrellas properly to be used only for rain? In this example, what comes after the colon explains just what the argument referred to in the first part of the sentence is all about. Note that what follows the colon is not capitalized, but it could be. As a clause—it has its own subject and verb and could in fact function alone as its own sentence, albeit a sentence of the question variety—it certainly looks like something that can start with a capital letter, but whether it does or not is simply a matter of style. (Note that in British English the style is typically to go lowercase. Lowercase also happens to be Merriam-Webster's style.) Be consistent: capitalize the first letter in every clause that follows a colon, or always use lowercase. Mabel the Cat was adamant that Harry recognize the usefulness of umbrellas for all wet weather: as protection against rain, sleet, and snow. Here, the phrase following the colon illustrates what comes before it. Being a phrase and all, there is no capital letter. (There of course would be a capital letter if the first word of the phrase were a proper noun or acronym.) "But why limit it, then, to wet weather?" Harry wanted to know. "Sun too beats down: is not an umbrella also appropriate protection against sun?" Harry's clause, which would begin with a capital "I" if that were our style, amplifies what precedes it. Mabel was having none of it: she remained unmoved. Here, the clause following the colon restates what precedes it. A colon can also introduce something that acts as an appositive. (Reminder: An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that refers to the same thing as another noun or noun phrase in the same sentence, and is usually right next to that other noun or noun phrase, like in "my neighbor the doctor." The two nouns/noun phrases—in this case "my neighbor" and "the doctor"—are said to stand "in grammatical apposition," which means that they have the same syntactical relation to the rest of the sentence.) The appositive that follows the colon can be an amplifying word, phrase, or clause: "Harry," said Mabel, "umbrellas are about one thing: dry fur." The noun phrase "dry fur" is in apposition to the "one thing" noun phrase on the other side of the colon. "But Mabel," Harry pressed, "isn't the crux of it all in truth this: an umbrella is a collapsible shield for protection against weather generally?" The clause following the colon is in apposition to "this" (which is a pronoun referring to "the crux of it all," if we're going to get technical about it). "Oh Harry," replied Mabel, "a similar object that protects against sun has another name altogether: parasol." The word "parasol" is in apposition to the noun phrase "another name altogether." How NOT to Use Colons We note in this aside that a colon is not used to separate a subject from its predicate; a noun from its verb; a verb from its object or complement; or a preposition from its object: avoid - The sheer size of Mabel's umbrella collection: is stunning. avoid - Harry's favorite umbrella: broke. avoid - The umbrella's opening mechanism was: hopelessly jammed. avoid - Mabel presented Harry with a choice umbrella of: her own. Colons Can Introduce Lists and Series And then there is the colon that introduces a list or series. What follows the colon is typically a word or phrase, so capitals are not be expected unless there's a proper noun or acronym: Harry was not about to abandon his position. If Mabel was going to insist that umbrellas be conceived as appropriate for more than rain, then he was going to insist that they be deemed appropriate in all weather conditions: rain, sleet, snow, hail, and sun. The list or series can also be composed of phrases: Mabel's reply was emphatic. "You may be eternally encumbered by an umbrella then, Harry, but I will bear the following: an umbrella for wet weather, a parasol for hot sun, and a beret whenever I feel like it." The list or series can also come before a summary statement: Harry's rejoinder was equally emphatic. "Rain, sleet, snow, hail, sun: an umbrella will work for me, Mabel." Colons Can Introduce Quotations Colons are also commonly used in prose to introduce quotations. When the quoted material is lengthy, it's usually set off from the rest of the text by indentation but not by quotation marks: Mabel was suddenly inspired to recite a bit of Lewis Carroll—specifically an excerpt from his 1871 Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There: All this time Tweedledee was trying his best to fold up the umbrella, with himself in it.... But he couldn't quite succeed, and it ended in his rolling over, bundled up in the umbrella, with only his head out: and there he lay, opening and shutting his mouth and his large eyes—'looking more like a fish than anything else,' Alice thought. A colon can also be used before a quotation in running text, especially when the quotation is lengthy; or when it is a formal statement or a statement being given special emphasis; or when a full independent clause precedes the colon. Here's an example of the first kind: "You know, Mabel," mused Harry, "while an avalanche perhaps does not quite qualify as 'weather,' an umbrella can also be used as protection against it. According to Mark Twain, anyway: 'We might have made the summit before night, but for a delay caused by the loss of an umbrella. I was allowing the umbrella to remain lost, but the men murmured, and with reason, for in this exposed region we stood in peculiar need of protection against avalanches; so I went into camp and detached a strong party to go after the missing article.' That's from A Tramp Abroad." And here's an example with a formal statement, or statement given special emphasis: "I'll remind you, Harry," stated Mabel somewhat imperiously, "that this same text poses the absurd rhetorical question: '… what is an umbrella but a parachute?'" And here's an example in which a full independent clause precedes the colon: Harry, nonplussed, lunged toward a non sequitur. "I recently learned," he averred, "that the word 'umbrella' appears 26 times in James Joyce's Ulysses, and that three of those appearances occur in a single sentence: 'She disliked umbrella with rain, he liked woman with umbrella, she disliked new hat with rain, he liked woman with new hat, he bought new hat with rain, she carried umbrella with new hat.'" Mabel's response is unknown, which is just as well: the fact is that we've got nothing more to say about colon use in prose. MORE TO EXPLORE: A Guide to Using Semicolons You too can become a semicolon master! Semicolons (;) separate independent clauses that are related in meaning, and they separate items in a list when those items themselves are long or include commas. For example, this summary could say "Semicolons are useful; they show that clauses are related in meaning." The semicolon is the colon's quirkier sibling. While the colon is simply two dots stacked : the semicolon is a dot hovering over a comma ; The semicolon does jobs that are also done by other punctuation marks, but puts its own spin on the task. Like a comma, it can separate elements in a series. Like a period or colon, it often marks the end of a complete clause (that is, a sentence part that has its own subject and verb). And like a colon, it signals that what follows it is closely related to what comes before it. Each semicolon brings us closer to the top. Semicolons Separate Independent Clauses A semicolon separates related independent clauses that are joined without a coordinating conjunction, such as and: Mabel the Cat had made a big pot of goulash; it was simmering on the stove. Goulash was Harry the Dog's favorite; the scent drew him to the kitchen. A semicolon can also replace a comma between two clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction like and in cases where the sentence might otherwise be confusing—for example, because of particularly long clauses, or the presence of other commas: As Mabel's culinary efforts continued, with bread baking in the oven and a cabbage dish just begun, she admonished Harry to keep out of her way; but Harry's ability to remain at a decent distance from the stove was severely challenged. Semicolons are used especially when the second clause is introduced by an adverb or a short phrase, such as however, indeed, thus, in that case, as a result, on the other hand, for example, or that is: Mabel did not take kindly to the encroachment of Harry into her personal cooking space; indeed, she at one point responded to the sudden appearance of his muzzle at her elbow with a distinct and species-appropriate hiss. Such an adverb or phrase can also appear elsewhere in the second clause: Harry was an animal driven by primal need to gain immediate access to the goulash; his options for achieving that aim were, however, limited. A semicolon can also join two statements when the second clause is missing some essential words that are supplied by the first clause. In short sentences, a comma often replaces the semicolon: Mabel's cooking prowess, honed through years of complex feasts, was formidable; the interruption of its application ill-advised. The scent of the baking bread was sublime, the perfume of the goulash intoxicating. A semicolon is also often used before introductory expressions such as for example, that is, and namely, in place of a colon, comma, dash, or parenthesis: On one important point Harry and Mabel agreed; that is, it would be better for all if Harry found somewhere else to be while Mabel finished cooking. Semicolons Separate Phrases or Items in a List or Series A semicolon is used in place of a comma to separate phrases or items in a list or series when the phrases or items themselves contain commas or are especially long: Harry set out to find a dessert that would demonstrate his deep appreciation of Mabel's meal. Ideally, it would be sweet, salty, and chocolatey; would feature the soft, creamy texture that Mabel adored; and be suitable for breakfast as well as dessert. Harry's three favorite bakeries are in Pittsburgh, PA; Phoenix, AZ; and Walla Walla, WA. When the items in a series are long or are sentences themselves, they are usually separated by semicolons even if they lack internal commas: In the end, the meal Mabel and Harry shared was first-rate: the bread and cabbage dish complemented the goulash exquisitely; the chocolate croquembouche was divine; and the conversation was lively and amicable. Note that, unlike commas and periods, a semicolon that punctuates the larger sentence is placed outside quotation marks and parentheses: For her birthday, Harry gave Mabel an apron that said "Number 1 Cook"; Mabel cordially accepted it but has yet to wear it. She appreciated the sentiment (which she knows Harry feels sincerely); but the apron is simply not her style. Trust your instincts (but when in doubt you can generally just use who). The choice between who and whom can sometimes be confusing, and this has always been the case. But English is extremely flexible, and actual usage doesn’t always follow the strict rules of grammar. Our ears are our guides, and there are many constructions (like "Whom did you speak to?" vs. "Who did you speak to?" and "It depends on whom you ask" vs. "It depends on who you ask") in which whom may be technically correct but still feels fussy or unnatural. In these cases, it is perfectly standard to use who. A Detailed Guide for Hardcore Grammar Fans Whom is both simple and complicated. It is simple in that it is simply the objective case of who, which means that it's the form of who that is in the object position in a sentence. What exactly constitutes the object position in a sentence is where things get complicated. An object, in grammatical terms, is a noun or noun equivalent (such as a pronoun, gerund, or clause) that receives the action of a verb or that completes the meaning of a preposition—so, for example, sandwich in "They bought a sandwich"; it in "My dog ate it"; apologizing in "an appropriate time for apologizing"; and that it was true in "I was afraid that it was true." Who is a pronoun, which means that it's used instead of a noun or noun phrase to refer to a noun/noun phrase that has already been mentioned or that does not need to be named specifically. Whom replaces who in spots where that word would receive the action of the verb or complete the meaning of a preposition. 'Who' vs 'Whom' Examples Let's look at some of the grammatical places who tends to appear and see whether whom ought to go there instead. Who often functions as an interrogative pronoun, which means that it introduces questions that have nouns as the answer: Who told my dog about that sandwich? Who should my dog apologize to? Both of these sentences sound natural with who, but if we want to know whether whom is the grammarian's choice in either of them, we'll have to determine if each who is in the object position. With questions, the easiest way to do this is to reimagine the question as a statement. "Who told my dog about that sandwich?" becomes "X told my dog about that sandwich," with "X" standing for the unknown divulger of sandwich existence. "X" is the subject of the verb told, since "X" has done the telling, so who is indeed correct. Reimagining the second question as a statement, "Who should my dog apologize to?" becomes "My dog should apologize to X." "X" is the object of the preposition to, so who should technically be whom: "Whom should my dog apologize to?" (If you don't like the terminal preposition—which is ancient and perfectly grammatical—you may prefer "To whom should my dog apologize?") We'll highlight the preferred versions: Whom should my dog apologize to? OR To whom should my dog apologize? Relative Pronouns and Subordinate Clauses Who and whom also frequently function as relative pronouns, which means that they refer to a noun or noun phrase that was mentioned earlier: The person who told my dog about the sandwich was unhelpful. The sandwich's owner, who my dog apologized to, requires a replacement sandwich. Again, some analysis is required to determine if who here is in the object position and should therefore technically be whom. Relative pronouns introduce subordinate clauses, a subordinate clause being a group of words that has a subject and predicate but that doesn't by itself form a complete sentence. In the sentences above, the subordinate clauses are "who told my dog about the sandwich" and "who my dog apologized to." To determine whether whom is the preferred pronoun, we need to figure out if the noun or noun phrase that who refers to is in the object position or not. We'll replace who with the noun/noun phrase it refers to, and split the whole thing into two sentences for clarity: The person told my dog about the sandwich. The person was unhelpful. In "The person who told my dog about the sandwich was unhelpful," who refers to "the person," which is the subject of both predicates: "told my dog about the sandwich" and "was unhelpful." Therefore, who is indeed the preferred choice. Now we'll look at the second relative pronoun example, replacing who with the noun/noun phrase it refers to, again splitting the original into two sentences: The sandwich's owner requires a replacement sandwich. The sandwich's owner my dog apologized to. To make that second one grammatical, we have to do some rearranging, as we did with the questions: My dog apologized to the sandwich's owner. In "The sandwich's owner, who my dog apologized to, requires a replacement sandwich," the subject of the verb apologized is "my dog"; who is actually the object of the preposition to, which means that whom is the preferred pronoun here: The sandwich's owner, whom my dog apologized to, requires a replacement sandwich. More Tricky Examples These can be tricky so we'll analyze a few more examples. Plus, this sandwich–dog drama goes deeper. According to my cat, who was among those witness to the sandwich consumption, the sandwich appeared to have been abandoned. Is who here correct? Yes: because who, while referring to "my cat," is the subject of the predicate "was among those witness to the sandwich consumption." My cat, who I was eager to believe, has been known to fib. How about here? In this case, who refers again to "my cat," but is the object of the verb believe: "I was eager to believe my cat." Therefore the sentence should technically in fact be: My cat, whom I was eager to believe, has been known to fib. Sometimes the who/whom is quite buried, syntactically speaking, making analysis especially difficult. See here: I know that who is on the cat's good side always matters in such cases. Here, we have the conjunction that introducing a subordinate clause headed by the pronoun who. The first part of our analysis is determining the subject and predicate of the entire sentence. The subject is I; the predicate is everything else. Know is the main verb, and everything else is actually the object of that verb: "I know x." Now that we know that much, we can focus on what who is doing in that very long subordinate clause: Who is on the cat's good side always matters in such cases. Who here is a relative pronoun referring to an understood noun/noun phrase along the lines of "which person/creature." Since the sentence is still quite complex, we'll simplify again, finding the main subject and predicate. Stripped down to its most essential meaning, the sentence can be understood as "Who (aka, which creature) always matters," which tells us that the subject is the entire bit "Who is on the cat's good side," and the predicate is "always matters in such cases." Note, though, that the subject is itself a clause with its own subject and predicate: "Who is on the cat's good side." Who is the subject of the verb is: "X is on the cat's good side." This means that our original sentence is indeed technically correct, despite the fact that who appears in what looks like an object position, after the verb know: I know that who is on the cat's good side always matters in such cases. After all that, surely no one can claim that keeping who and whom in their prescribed places is easy to do. In fact, it's about as easy as keeping a dog from eating an unguarded, and ostensibly abandoned, sandwich. Want More Commonly Confused Words? Who's vs. Whose Soever, Whomsoever, and Wheresoever Than I vs. Than Me The em dash (—) can function like a comma, a colon, or parenthesis. Like commas and parentheses, em dashes set off extra information, such as examples, explanatory or descriptive phrases, or supplemental facts. Like a colon, an em dash introduces a clause that explains or expands upon something that precedes it. The Em Dash Indicates a New Direction An em dash can mark an abrupt change or break in the structure of a sentence. Mabel the Cat was delighted with the assortment of pastries the new bakery featured, but Harry the Dog—he felt otherwise, for the bakery did not offer cheese Danishes at all. An em dash can indicate interrupted speech or a speaker’s confusion or hesitation. “Of course you have a point,” Mabel murmured. “That is—I suppose it is concerning.” The Em Dash as Comma or Parenthesis Em dashes are used in place of commas or parentheses to emphasize or draw attention to parenthetical or amplifying material. In this particular task, em dashes occupy a kind of middle ground among the three: when commas do the job, the material is most closely related to what’s around it, and when parentheses do the job, the material is most distantly related to what’s around it; when dashes do the job the material is somewhere in the middle. The bakery's significantly broad hours of operation—6 a.m. to 6 p.m.—certainly showed concern for customers’ manifold circumstances. Dashes set off or introduce defining phrases and lists. A regular selection of three kinds of croissants—plain, almond, and chocolate—was heartening, both Mabel and Harry agreed. An em dash is often used in place of a colon or semicolon to link clauses, especially when the clause that follows the dash explains, summarizes, or expands upon the preceding clause in a somewhat dramatic way. Harry would never forget the Tuesday that Mabel called him from the bakery, her voice brimming with excitement—the bakery had added cheese Danishes to its selection. An em dash or pair of dashes often sets off illustrative or amplifying material introduced by such phrases as for example, namely, and that is, when the break in continuity is greater than that shown by a comma, or when the dash would clarify the sentence structure better than a comma. The bakery was truly phenomenal. Although they did miss the mark somewhat with the pineapple upside-down cake Mabel ordered—that is, the cake had clearly been baked right-side up. An em dash may introduce a summary statement that follows a series of words or phrases. Chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, peanut butter, snickerdoodle, both macarons and macaroons—the panoply of cookie varieties was impressive as well. A dash often precedes the name of an author or source at the end of a quoted passage—such as an epigraph, extract, or book or film blurb—that is not part of the main text. The attribution may appear immediately after the quotation or on the next line. “One cannot overestimate the effect that a good bakery can have on a person’s well-being.” —Mabel the Cat, quoted in The Websterburg Reporter The Em Dash in the Company of Other Punctuation Marks If an em dash appears at a point where a comma could also appear, the comma is omitted. Within its first year, Mabel and Harry had sampled all of the bakery’s offerings—all 62 items—and had also decided that the exercise was worth repeating. When a pair of em dashes sets off material ending with an exclamation point or a question mark, the mark is placed inside the dashes. When the bakery closed for the month of August Mabel tried, despite her dolefulness—for how could she be otherwise?—to bake her own bread but each loaf that emerged from her oven tasted vaguely of tears. Dashes are used inside parentheses, and vice versa, to indicate parenthetical material within parenthetical material. The second dash is omitted if it would immediately precede the closing parenthesis; a closing parenthesis is never omitted. The bakery’s reputation for scrumptious goods (ambrosial, even—each item was surely fit for gods) spread far and wide. Em dash vs en dash Remembering that the em dash is the length of a capital M, it will surprise no one that the so-called “en dash” is the approximate length of a capital N, –. The en dash is the least loved of all; it’s not easily rendered by the average keyboard user (one has to select it as a special character, whereas the em dash can be conjured with two hyphens), so it’s mostly encountered in typeset material. (A hyphen does its job in other text.) It is most often used between numbers, dates, or other notations to signify “(up) to and including.” The bakery will be closed August 1–August 31. The bakery is open 6:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. The exceedingly complex recipe spans pages 128–34. Mabel and Harry lived elsewhere 2007–2019. Note that one does not need words like from and between in these cases. The phrase “open 6:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.” can be read as “open between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.” or as “open from 6:00 a.m. to/until 6:00 p.m.” If you want to be official about things, use the en dash to replace a hyphen in compound adjectives when at least one of the elements is a two-word compound. the pre–Websterburg Bakery era The thinking is that using a hyphen here, as in “the pre-Websterburg Bakery era,” risks the suggestion that pre attaches only to Websterburg. It’s unlikely, though, that a reader would truly be confused. The en dash replaces the word to between capitalized names, and is used to indicate linkages such as boundaries, treaties, and oppositions. a Springfield–Websterburg train the pie–cake divide A two-em dash, ——, is used to indicate missing letters in a word and, less frequently, to indicate a missing word. The butter-stained and crumb-embedded note was attributed to a Ms. M—— of Websterburg. A three-em dash, ———, indicates that a word has been left out or that an unknown word or figure is to be supplied. Years later it was revealed that the Websterburg bakers had once had a bakery in ———, a city to the south. But the water quality there was prohibitive to the creating of decent bagels. Hyphen use While we said above that the em dash, also called the “common dash,” is the most common of the true dashes, hyphens show up more frequently in text. They have a variety of uses. Hyphens are used to link elements in compound words. a baker-owner In some words, a hyphen separates a prefix, suffix, or medial element from the rest of the word. Websterburg’s pre-bakery days a bread-like scone jack-o'-lantern sugar cookies As we noted above, a hyphen often does the job of an en dash between numbers and dates, providing the meaning "(up) to and including." pages 128-34 the years 2007-2019 A hyphen marks an end-of-line division of a word. Mabel and Harry don’t like to linger on their memories of Webster- burg’s pre-bakery days. A hyphen divides letters or syllables to give the effect of stuttering, sobbing, or halting speech. "M-m-mabel, the cheese Danish is divine!“ Hyphens indicate a word spelled out letter by letter. Let’s not even talk about August, when the bakery is c-l-o-s-e-d. The em dash is sometimes considered a less formal equivalent of the colon and parenthesis, but in truth it’s used in all kinds of writing, including the most formal—the choice of which mark to use is really a matter of personal preference. Spacing around an em dash varies. Most newspapers insert a space before and after the dash, and many popular magazines do the same, but most books and journals omit spacing, closing whatever comes before and after the em dash right up next to it. This website prefers the latter, its style requiring the closely held em dash in running text.