Six Sassy Syntax Tips To Get you Grammar out of the Gutter

There are a lot of things in life I can be perfectly cordial about, but, honestly, I'm human–and a writer, so you've got to know that there are some syntax snafus are nails on the chalkboard to me. We all have our little quirks and fetishes–good grammar is one of mine.

Today I'd love to share with you Six Sassy Syntax Tips to Get you Grammar out of the Gutter

1) Never leave "this" standing alone.

This is why. This could lead to confusion. This is really common.

What the hell is "this?" Use "this" as an adjective. It should *modify* something. This *method* is a much clearer way of writing. This *type of communication* expresses its ideas more effectively. This *idea* should now be evident to you.

2) Don't confuse *that, who*, and *whom*.

Ok, I know we live in a commercial culture that thrives on objectifying humans for the sake of sales. But, *please*, do not bring that smut into your writing. People are *not* objects, no matter what the latest ads are telling you. "So what?" I hear you say. Well, let me tell you.

"That" refers to objects.

"Who" and "Whom" refer to people.

Therefore: "She is the girl that I asked out last week" does *not* work. Unless you are cavorting with inflatable plastic people– and frankly that's too much information.

Rather, I am going to make the potentially foolish assumption that you went out with a real live human girl and therefore need to refer to her as a human by using either who or whom.

What to do? "It's so confusing this whole who/whom conundrum," I hear you whine. Ok, here's the official skinny: who is a subject, whom is an object.

What does that mean for you? Here's the simple test: does your sentence already have a subject, then "whom" is probably your new knight in shining armor, the word of your dreams.
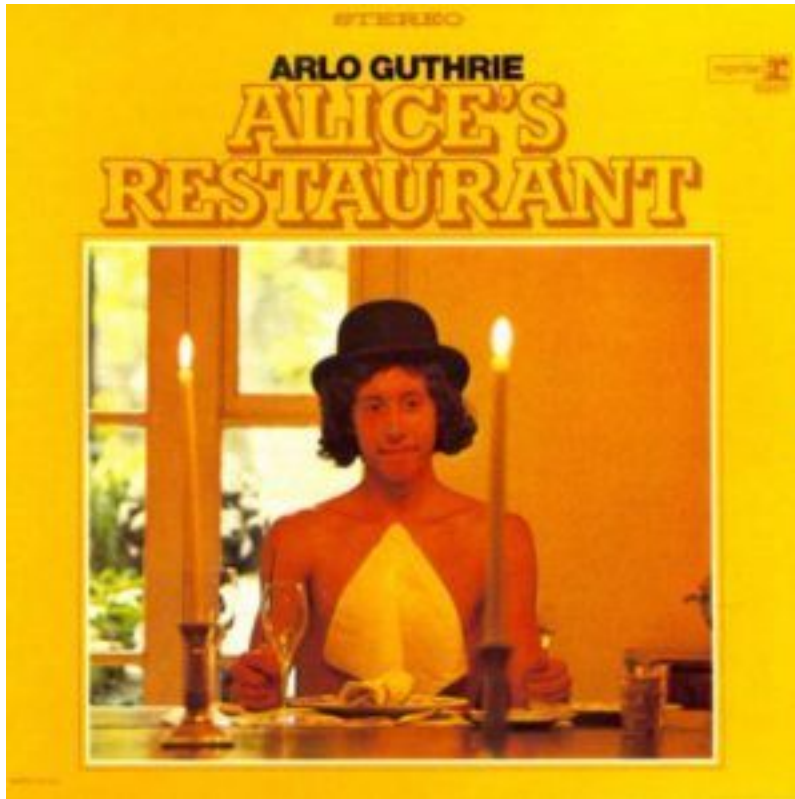
Let's take a look at our example.

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"She is the girl *that* I asked out last week." What's the subject? She. Very good.
Who is a subject. We already have a subject, therefore we don't need another one. Use *Whom.*
She is the girl *whom* I asked out last week.

3) "But that sounds so funny. Nobody talks that way." Seriously, are you whining again?

Yes, it is true– no one *does* talk that way. But just think– and not to get too "Alice's Restaurant" on you– but we could start a revolution here– if people *did* start to talk that way maybe we could start this whole uprising of people who actually spoke properly.

It could go viral!
Ok, ok, ok, I'll calm down.
It may not sound right, but it is, in fact, right. And as a writer, you should care about following grammar, usage, and mechanics rules.

4) You have a sacred role as a protector of the language. Don't abuse it.

So, let's get back to more important tasks in your role as safeguard. *Whom* is an object pronoun, ok, we've covered that. If you are referencing a human being and are tempted to use *that*, think twice, then opt for *who* or *whom*.
If you decide you can't choose between who and whom, or if you simply don't want to sound like you've stepped out of a Dickens novel,

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please at least err on the side of treating people with dignity and use *who* over *that.*

5) It's all relative

One last note: I am not one for labels– I am more concerned with proper usage than nomenclature. That said, here's a hint that might help you: the words *who, whom*, and *that* are called relative pronouns, thusly named because they *relate* to the noun they are describing. Therefore, just like in that preschool card game "memory," they have to match. "That" is no more a match for "person" than "strawberry" was for "lemon," no matter how much you tried to cheat when your brother wasn't looking.

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Besides, thinking of grammar like a card game makes it fun. Well, almost.

6) Your opinion matters
Ok, I've sassed about with my writing pet peeves. What are some of yours? What tips do you have for avoiding them? Let's chat during the Q&A. I always love to hear from you.

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