POSSESSIVE NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, AND PRONOUNS

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Possessives indicate ownership. This tutorial discusses how to form possessives with three types of words: nouns, pronouns, and adjectives.

Nouns

Singular Nouns

To make a singular noun into a possessive noun, add an apostrophe and an "s."

> *Examples*: the cat's pajamas; a day's journey

Personal names and collective nouns also use the singular form, adding apostrophe and "s."

> *Examples*: my family's house; Nike's slogan; Taylor's restaurant

When a singular noun already ends in "s," some style guides require adding apostrophe and an "s." Others require adding only an apostrophe, without an additional "s."

> *Examples*: the boss's car *or* the boss' car; Lucius's words *or* Lucius' words

Plural Nouns

For regular plural nouns (ending in "s" or "es"), add only an apostrophe to show possession.

> *Examples*: scholars' arguments; societies' laws; birds' feathers

For irregular plural nouns, add an apostrophe plus "s" to show possession.

> *Examples*: children's laughter; the people's representative; women's careers

Compound Nouns

To make a singular compound noun possessive, add an apostrophe plus "s."

> *Examples*: my brother-in-law's party; her grandmother's memories

Making a plural compound noun possessive changes depending on whether or not the plural ends in "s."

> *Examples*: my brothers-in-law's party; her grandmothers' memories

Joint vs. Separate Possession

When two or more possessors share joint possession of a noun, add an apostrophe only to the word closest to that noun.

> *Examples*: Adrian and Gale's essays [= *"the essays of Adrian and Gale." Multiple essays have been written jointly by Adrian and Gale.*]

If there is separate possession of the same noun, add an apostrophe to each possessor word.

> *Examples*: Adrian's and Gale's essays [= *"the essays of Adrian and the essays of Gale." Adrian and Gale each separately wrote more than one essay.*]

Possession with "Of"

You can also use "of" to show possession. In this very common construction (called *genitive possession*), the possessed noun is followed by "of" and the possessor noun. In principle, genitive possession is interchangeable in usage and meaning with apostrophe plus "s" possession. However, in practice, when the possessor is a **thing** (rather than a **person**), genitive possession with "of" is more commonly used.

> *Examples*:   the queen's speech = the speech of the queen
>
>   a scientist's opinion = the opinion of a scientist
>
>   the top of the page [more common] = the page's top [less common]

the corner of the room [more common] = the room's corner [less common]

Adjectives and Pronouns

Each subject pronoun has a corresponding possessive adjective and possessive pronoun. Possessive adjectives modify a noun; possessive pronouns take the place of a noun.

Subject Pronoun	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Examples
I	My	Mine	This is *my car*. This is *mine*.
You	Your	Yours	I like *your phone* better. I like *yours* better.
He	His	His	Which one is *his child*? Which one is *his*?
She	Her	Hers	I agree with both his opinion and *her opinion*. I agree with both his opinion and *hers*.
It	Its	[Its]	I felt the machine and *its vibrations*. I didn't know whether the machine's vibrations were *its* or mine. [*Note: "its" used as possessive pronoun is rare*]
We	Our	Ours	Give us *our rights*! Give us *ours*!
They	Their	Theirs	What happened to *their project*? What happened to *theirs*?

Commonly Confused Words

Its vs. It's

Just like "his," "her," and "their," the possessive adjective "its" **has no apostrophe**. Yet, English speakers sometimes confuse this word with "it's," which is a contraction of "it is" or "it has." Be careful: the apostrophe in "it's" **always** signifies contraction, not possession.

Examples: This book and *its* author. [no apostrophe = possessive adjective]

Read this book. *It's* very interesting! [apostrophe = "It is very interesting!"]

Whose vs. Who's

Similarly, "whose" (no apostrophe) is the possessive form of the pronoun "who." "Who's" (with apostrophe) is a contraction of "who is" or "who has."

      *Examples***:** Whose is this? [= "to whom does this belong?"]

        Who's this? [= "<u>Who is</u> this?"]