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You probably know that a noun is a person, place, or thing. But when a noun has possession of another noun, things can get a little tricky. We typically use apostrophes to show possession. However, it's easy to get confused about where to put those apostrophes. Today, we're doing a deep dive into possessive nouns. We'll cover exactly what they are and how to write them correctly.

Contents: A possessive noun is a noun that possesses (owns or has power over) something else. Before you start worrying about nouns possessing you like an angry ghost or jealous boyfriend, let me clarify what we mean by possessive. In this case, possessive nouns show ownership or belonging. In other words, if a noun has something that belongs to it, we need to turn that noun into its possessive form. Take a look at the following examples. The bolded nouns are the possessive one.

the dog's bone the baby's pacifier the students' exams Juan's mom The Smiths' vacation home The bone belongs to the dog, the pacifier belongs to the baby, and so on. The noun to which the object belongs is the one we write in the possessive form.

How Do I Write a Possessive Noun in the Singular Form? When it comes to a singular noun (i.e. only one person, place, or thing), we usually add an apostrophe plus the letter *'s*. The apostrophe follows the singular form of the noun, and the *'s* follows the apostrophe. Most singular nouns do not end in an *'s* so it feels natural to add the apostrophe plus *'s* at the end of the word. Here are some examples: the hen's egg a rat's tail my mom's recipe But even if a singular noun ends in an *'s*, we still add an apostrophe plus another *'s*. It might look or sound strange to have the extra *'s*, but this is often the grammatically correct way to write singular possessive nouns. What does this look like? Check out these examples of singular possessive nouns.

the bus's radiator the iris's petals an octopus's tentacle

The same rule applies to singular possessive proper nouns. A proper noun is a noun that has to be capitalized, like a person's name or a specific place. It doesn't matter if the proper noun ends in an *'s* or not. If you are only talking about one proper noun, add an apostrophe followed by an *'s*. These examples show you how to write singular proper nouns in the possessive form.

Michelle's book Mr. James's class Hawaii's capital Dallas's mayor

The rule never changes for singular possessive nouns, but things can get trickier with plural nouns.

How Do I Write a Possessive Noun in the Plural Form? Plural possessive nouns follow two different rules. It depends on how the word is written in the possessive form. When a noun is made plural by adding an *'s*, like most nouns in English, we write the possessive form by adding the *'s* and then an apostrophe. Nothing comes after the apostrophe in plural possessive nouns. It looks like this: my kids' toys the neighbors' yard the homes' occupants But some nouns do not end in an *'s* when they are plural. When this is the case, follow the same format as singular possessive nouns. You will add an apostrophe plus an *'s*. Here are a few examples.

the children's teacher the geese's nest people's rights

With proper nouns, we make them plural by adding an *'s* or, in the case of proper nouns that already end in *'s*, we add an *'es*. To make them possessive, add an apostrophe after the last *'s*. the Joneses' new dog the Dunns' anniversary the Obamas' organization

Only add an apostrophe to proper nouns if you are using the plural possessive noun to indicate that the noun possesses something. If you are just making a proper noun plural, no apostrophe is needed. Don't sign your Christmas cards using an apostrophe in your family's last name, or you'll leave people wondering, "The Blacks' what?" So, when you're writing a plural possessive noun, ask yourself if the plural form already ends in an *'s*. If so, just add the apostrophe at the end of the plural form. If not, treat it like a singular possessive noun and add an apostrophe plus *'s*. It's easy to slip up and put the apostrophe in the wrong place.

ProWritingAid's grammar report will make sure that you are writing your possessive nouns correctly.

We've looked at a few examples of possessive nouns, but you might be wondering how these are used in sentences. Let's take a look at some sentences that use possessive nouns.

I went over to my aunt's house for dinner last night. We played with my cousins' new Playstation. He helped pass the two junior senators' bill. The monkey's baby was so tiny! Have you seen Uncle Jerry's new motorcycle? The Martinezes' anniversary is tomorrow. Once you've mastered the three rules for writing possessive nouns, you'll have no trouble remembering where to put the apostrophe.

But what about pronouns? Pronouns are words that replace more specific nouns. I, he, she, and it are all pronouns. Possesive pronouns indicate ownership. They are words like mine, his, hers and its. Here's an example: That was the dog's ball. It was his to play with. See how "his" replaces "the dog's" in the second sentence? Possessive pronouns are words that show possession while replacing other nouns or proper nouns. Possessive pronouns follow their own set of rules, and they don't use any apostrophes. There are thirteen possessive pronouns. What Are the 13 Possessive Pronouns? There are two types of possessive pronouns. Independent possessive pronouns do not have a noun immediately following them. They are sometimes called strong possessive pronouns. Dependent possessive pronouns go before the noun and help to identify it in further detail. They are sometimes called weak possessive pronouns or possessive adjectives. The independent singular possessive pronouns are mine, yours, his, hers, and its. The independent plural possessive pronouns are ours, yours, and theirs. Notice that yours is both singular and plural. Its is very rarely used as an independent possessive pronoun in modern English. Dependent possessive pronouns function as determiners before another noun. The dependent singular possessive pronouns are my, your, his, her, and its. The dependent plural possessive pronouns are our, your, and their. You'll notice that your is used for both singular and plural forms, and that his is both independent and dependent. When it comes to its vs. it's, the possessive pronoun never uses an apostrophe. If the word is showing possession, use its. If the word is a contraction of "it is," use it's. Now that we know the different types of possessive pronouns, let's look at some examples.

Take a look at the sentences below. Can you identify which sentences use independent and dependent possessive pronouns? What about singular and plural possessive pronouns? The ball is mine. Give me back my sweater! I can't believe that is your name on the marquee! I told her the money is yours, not hers. His grandmother makes the best lasagne. The red coat? It was his. It's time for her appointment. Oops. I cracked its shell. We reminded him that the seats were ours. I think the car is theirs. Their dog is a basset hound.

Possessive nouns and pronouns can be tricky until you learn the rules. Fortunately, with a bit of practice, you can get them right, every time. And if you don't remember all the rules, that's fine too.

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Whether you are writing a novel, essay, article, or email, good writing is an essential part of communicating your ideas. This guide contains the 20 most important writing tips and techniques from a wide range of professional writers. Copyright © 2022 Cingletree Learning, LLC. All rights reserved. If you're seeing this message, it means we're having trouble loading external resources on our website. If you're behind a web filter, please make sure that the domains *kastatic.org and *kasandbox.org are unblocked. The apostrophe (') has three uses: contractions, plurals, and possessives. Contractions (e.g., let's, don't, couldn't, it's, she's) have a bad reputation. Many argue that they have no place at all in formal writing. You should, of course, observe your publisher's or instructor's requirements. An absolute avoidance of contractions, however, is likely to make your writing appear stilted and unwelcoming. If you are unsure where to insert the apostrophe when forming a contraction, consult a good dictionary. Avoid two of the most common contraction–apostrophe errors: the contraction of it is is it's, and the contraction of let us is let's; without the apostrophe, its is the possessive form of it, and lets is a form of the verb let, as in "to allow or permit." Examples It's often said that every dog has its day. Let's not forget that grandma lets the kids eat way too much junk food when they stay with her. In informal writing, it is acceptable to indicate a year with only the last two digits preceded by an apostrophe (e.g., the class of '85, pop music from the '80s). The apostrophe is seldom used to form a plural noun. Correct Since the 1980s, the Thomases, both of whom have multiple PhDs, have sold old books and magazines at the fair on Saturdays and Sundays. Incorrect Since the 1980's, the Thomas's, both of whom have multiple PhD's, have sold old book's and magazine's at the fair on Saturday's and Sunday's. The rare exception to the rule is when certain abbreviations, letters, or words are used as nouns, as in the following examples. Unless the apostrophe is needed to avoid misreading or confusion, omit it. Examples He received four A's and two B's. We hired three M.D.'s and two D.O.'s. Be sure to cross your t's and dot your i's. Do we have more yes's than no's? For this last example, the trend is to instead write yeses and noes. The formation of possessives is treated in different ways by different authorities. The rules below are based on The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition, and are appropriate for most writing. Associated Press style, used by most newspapers, is slightly different. See the essay on style for more information. The general rule is that the possessive of a singular noun is formed by adding an apostrophe and s, whether the singular noun ends in s or not. Examples the lawyer's fee the child's toy the girl's parents Xerox's sales manager Tom Jones's first album Jesus's disciples Aeschylus's finest drama JFK's finest speech anyone's guess a week's vacation Texas's oil industry The possessive of a plural noun is formed by adding only an apostrophe when the noun ends in s, and by adding both an apostrophe and s when it ends in a letter other than s. Examples excessive lawyers' fees children's toys the twins' parents the student teachers' supervisor the Smiths' vacation house the Joneses' vacation house the boys' baseball team the alumni's fundraising three weeks' vacation someone with twelve years' experience Use only an apostrophe for singular nouns that are in the form of a plural—or have a final word in the form of a plural—ending with an s. Examples Beverly Hills' current mayor the United States' lingering debt problem Cisco Systems' CEO the Beatles' first album Nouns that end in an s sound take only an apostrophe when they are followed by sake. Examples for goodness' sake for conscience' sake A proper noun that is already in possessive form is left as is. Examples McDonald's menu was simplified in response to COVID-19. Sainsbury's and Tesco's produce quality has never seemed to me as good as Waitrose's. Awkward Correct but awkward: Let's meet at St. Patrick's Cathedral's Fifth Avenue entrance. Better Better: Let's meet at the Fifth Avenue entrance for St. Patrick's Cathedral. The apostrophe should never be separated from the word to which it attaches by adjacent punctuation. Correct The house on the left is the Smiths', but the house at the end of the street is the Whites'. Incorrect The house on the left is the Smiths,' but the house at the end of the street is the Whites.'

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