

Apostrophes—Contractions and Possession

Let's get it straight from the very beginning:

You DO NOT use an apostrophe every time you write the letter "s."

Having said that, let's look at what the apostrophe does.

There are two major reasons to use an apostrophe. Either you want to do what we Americans do best—talk fast even in our writing—or you want to indicate possession.

In the first case, we have these nifty words called *contractions*, which are really two words rolled into one. In the second case, we need a way to show that a noun owns something. In both cases, we need an apostrophe. (Only nouns use apostrophes to show ownership. Pronouns don't. Instead, what we do with pronouns is create whole new words to show ownership, like *his*, *hers*, *theirs*—more on that later.)

The Apostrophe in Contractions

When you want to run two words together and create one quick word, you use an apostrophe to indicate some letters are missing. Instead of saying "It is my day off," we can shorten it to "It's my day off." The

apostrophe is just there to show the reader we're smart enough to know we left out the letter "i." It's critical to **put the apostrophe where the missing letters should be.**

Below is a list of some common contractions:

she's = she is *or* she has

let's = let us

won't = will not

he'll = he will

it's = it is *or* it has

doesn't = does not

they're = they are

who's = who is *or* who has

There are a gazillion more of 'em. The important things to remember are to put apostrophes in the right place and to make

sure you really mean two words. Can you tell why the following sentence does *not* need an apostrophe in the word "its"?

In the book I'm reading there is a reference to a dog and *its* owner.

If I had put in the apostrophe, I would have been saying "the dog and *it is* owner," and that just plain doesn't make sense. As a general hint, when you're wondering if you are writing a contraction (particularly for

the tricky ones like *it's*, *who's*, *they're*, *you're*) say the original words aloud or in your head to see if that's what you want. If you don't, you probably want the pronouns of ownership: *its*, *whose*, *their*, *your*.





Exercise 4.4

Let's practice what we just learned. In the following sentences, circle the correct word. Remember, say the contraction aloud to test whether or not you need an apostrophe.

1. (*It's, Its*) flavor is delicious when (*it's, its*) ripe.
2. (*Who's, Whose*) been eating all the Halloween candy?
3. (*You're, Your*) eyes look bloodshot . . . what have you been doing?
4. Paul (*is'nt, isn't*) happy when he (*doesn't, dosen't*) win every game.
5. (*You're, Your*) notified by mail if (*you're, your*) the winner.
6. Donny and Matt have devoted (*their, they're, there*) lives to the study of basketball.
7. (*It's, Its*) light goes on when (*it's, its*) overheated.
8. (*They're, Their, There*) mother worries whenever (*they're, their, there*) late.
9. (*Let's, Lets*) close the window if it (*let's, lets*) in too much air.
10. (*Who's, Whose*) mother is the lady (*who's, whose*) driving us to practice?
11. (*They're, Their, There*) usually sold before (*they're, their, there*) in the store an hour.
12. Mahin (*can't, ca'nt*) relax unless (*you're, your*) relaxed.
13. "(*You're, Your*) a wonderful teacher," said the student who hoped to gain favor in class.
14. (*It's, Its*) fur is thick.
15. (*They're, Their, There*) house burned down in a suspicious fire.

That was the easy part of the apostrophe. Let's forge ahead to the place where this stuff gets a bit more complicated.

Apostrophes Showing Ownership

Remember what was mentioned above? Apostrophes of ownership are used only with nouns. When a pronoun owns some-

thing we use new words to show possession, and they do not require apostrophes.

Examples	<p>His car still has that great "new car" smell.</p> <p>Their house was built just last year.</p> <p>Her friend is a Buddhist.</p> <p>Ours is a unique country.</p>
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The boldfaced words are all pronouns of ownership. Now, let's look at what happens when the owner is indicated not by a pronoun, but a noun.



Possession with Singular Nouns

Don't be afraid of all those English-teacher words. All we're talking about here is what happens when one noun owns something. Somewhere back in the recesses of our mind we remember being told that with ownership we need to use an apostrophe, but we can't remember where it goes. Is it

before the "s" or after it? Many indecisive souls solve this problem simply by placing the apostrophe on top of the letter "s." That way they look as if they know what they're doing, but in reality they're just copping out. Well, no more. Today you're going to figure this problem out. Let's get going.

When one noun owns something, the basic rule is: Add 's.

Examples	<p>The boy's hat is blue. (The hat <i>of the boy</i>—that's what we're really saying.)</p> <p>My friend's house smells like dirty diapers. (One friend, one house—which happens to have a distinct odor.)</p> <p>Amelia's books are falling off the shelf. (Here we have one girl—Amelia, who happens to own many books, but we still use just the 's because the noun is singular. After all, one person can own many things. Remember the basic rule: if the noun is singular, use 's.)</p>
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In each of the above examples we're really using the 's so we don't have to use the phrase "of the." It's really an easier, faster way of saying *the house of my friend* or *the books of Amelia*. The apostrophe is a short cut, but like all short cuts it occasionally includes bumps in the road.

Charles's unnecessary gadgets OR **Charles' unnecessary gadgets**

Both are correct. The first one is more common, but most textbooks indicate the second is more correct. Actually, what the grammar "bibles" say is something like this: "To show the singular possessive form of a

One little complication with the rule: What happens if the singular noun already ends in the letter "s"? For instance, what if we know someone named Charles who happens to be a big spender with many gadgets? Well, you've got one of two choices. You can say

noun of *one syllable* ending in an *s*, *x*, *ch*, or *sh* sound, write *s's*. However, if the noun is *more than one syllable* and ends in those same letters, add only the apostrophe (s')."

Possession with Plural Nouns

Sometimes more than one noun can own something. Usually a plural noun already ends in s, so the rule is simple:



When a plural noun owns something or several things, just add an apostrophe after the s.

Examples	<p>The babies' diapers were fully loaded. (Obviously I'm back at the friend's house with the odor problem, and this poor caregiver has more than one baby with a diaper problem. I can tell because it's not "<i>the baby's</i> diaper" (which would mean only one baby), but it's the "<i>babies'</i> diapers.")</p> <p>Both speakers' comments were greeted with applause. (Again, I have more than one speaker. That's obvious because "speaker" ends in "s." But if you weren't 100% sure, the word <i>both</i> is the dead giveaway that there's more than one person exciting this crowd.)</p> <p>Several girls' boyfriends stood them up for the prom. (More than one girl had this problem.)</p>
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A complication for this rule: Sometimes plural nouns don't end in "s." In that case, flip back to the first rule and just add 's.

Examples	<p>The children's game ended up as a free-for-all on the playground. (It's not just one child's game, but the <i>game of the children</i> that's wreaking havoc. Since the plural of child is "children," and that word doesn't end in "s," we just add 's.)</p> <p>The women's room at the local ballpark needs to be repainted. (Since this is a public facility that doesn't belong to just one woman, we need to use the plural, "women," and so we add 's.)</p>
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One More Bit of Advice: After an intense review of apostrophes, students often begin using an apostrophe whenever they see the letter "s." DON'T DO THAT! Remember, sometimes you have sentences with just

plain old plurals in them. You use apostrophes with the letter "s" only when the issue of **ownership** is involved. The following sentence does not need any apostrophes. Why?

The girls rode their bikes to school.

Before placing an apostrophe before or after the letter "s," always ask yourself: "Is something being owned here?" You check yourself by inserting the phrase "of the" between the noun and what you think is being owned.



Possessive Nouns

Tell whether each underlined possessive noun is singular or plural.

examples: The penguins' home is in Antarctica. *plural*

The tree's leaves are yellow. *singular*

1. That book's pages are wrinkled. _____
2. The girls' ball went over the fence. _____
3. My jacket's button needs to be fixed. _____
4. The horses' riders were dressed in red. _____
5. We can't find our cat's toy. _____
6. The author's books were very popular. _____
7. The artists' paintings quickly sold out. _____
8. Can you see the lion's paws? _____
9. The teachers' copy machine never works. _____
10. Can you come to my brother's house? _____

Name: _____

Possessive Nouns

Possessive nouns show who or what owns something. Singular nouns are made possessive by adding an apostrophe and then an s.

example: The boy's kite flew high in the sky.

Plural possessives are formed by adding an apostrophe after the s.

example: The girls' kite flew high in the sky.

When a plural noun does not end with an s, an apostrophe and then an s are added.

example: The men's truck was dirty.

Directions: Rewrite the underlined nouns in the sentences below to make them possessive.

1. The baby toy fell on the floor. _____
2. Suzy doll had red hair. _____
3. Those boys shoes are in the locker. _____
4. The women computer was broken. _____
5. The dog ball went into the street. _____
6. Ben mom brought his snack to school. _____
7. The children toys were left out in the rain. _____
8. The girl milk spilled on the floor. _____
9. Tony sister fell off the swing. _____
10. The pan handle was very hot. _____

Possessive Nouns in Sentences

Name: _____ Date: _____

Write the correct form of possessive noun in the blanks to correctly complete the sentences.

- (1) None of the _____
(computers)
processors are fast enough for this game.
- (2) The lawyer proved that his
_____ rights were violated.
(client)
- (3) The _____ pages had
(textbook)
been extensively marked up.
- (4) The _____ glass was
(windows)
shattered by the earthquake.
- (5) You also need to paint the
_____ frames.
(windows)
- (6) The _____ manuals can
(programs)
be found on the shelf.
- (7) The _____ surfaces need to
(desks)
be cleaned with soap and water.
- (8) The _____ lecture
(professors)
notes are available online.
- (9) Be careful, the _____ edges
(knives)
are very sharp.
- (10) Our _____ batteries
(cellphones)
only last for a couple of hours.
- (11) There is a telephone in my
_____ bedroom.
(parents)
- (12) When the _____ long hand
(clock)
reaches six, put down your pencils.
- (13) Shelby pulled back the drapes to let
the _____ light in.
(sun)
- (14) All of the _____
(restaurants)
menus can be found in this book.
- (15) The _____ bindings are
(books)
starting to fall apart.
- (16) The _____ solutions are
(problems)
staring us in the face!

Possessive Nouns in Sentences

Name: _____ Date: _____

Write the correct form of possessive noun in the blanks to correctly complete the sentences.

- (1) the stairs' steep angle made it
(stair)
difficult to climb.
- (2) Those _____ cellphones
(women)
are bothering the other people in
the library.
- (3) The _____ hands are
(children)
very dirty.
- (4) After a few days, the _____
(babies)
responsiveness to voices improved
dramatically.
- (5) Your _____ enamel is much
(teeth)
more prone to decay when you
drink sugary sodas.
- (6) By the end of the experiment, the
_____ smell was unbearable.
(fungi)
- (7) Ryan stopped suddenly when he
noticed the _____ bright
(pennies)
glimmer at the bottom of the pond.
- (8) _____ exams have
(everyone)
now been graded.
- (9) You can really taste the
_____ rich flavor in this
(tomatoes)
spaghetti sauce.
- (10) I really want the _____
(shelves)
color to match the rest of the
bedroom furniture.
- (11) The _____ direction
(torpedos)
changed to match our evasive
maneuvers.
- (12) You can find the _____ room
(men)
down the hall and to the left.
- (13) The idea that you can catch a cold
from cold weather is an old
_____ tale.
(wives)

Name: _____

Singular and Plural Possessive Nouns

Possessive Nouns

Fill in the two blank lines with the correct possessive noun and a common noun.

examples: There is one tiger. Its body has stripes.
The tiger's body has stripes.

There are two woodchucks. Their teeth are long.
The woodchucks' teeth are long.

1. There is one shark. Its teeth are sharp.
The _____ are sharp.
2. There are two spiders. Their webs catch insects.
The _____ catch insects.
3. There are six lizards. Their tails have stripes.
The _____ have stripes.
4. There is one pig. Its tail is curly.
The _____ is curly.
5. There are two bears. Their fur keeps them warm.
The _____ keeps them warm.
6. There is one giraffe. Its baby is called a calf.
The _____ is called a calf.



Exercise 4.5

Let's practice some of these apostrophe rules. First of all, let's make sure you understand the basic concept of ownership by turning the following phrases into possessives. Form both the singular and plural possessive of each expression. Make both nouns plural in the plural possessive. Explain to a partner what each phrase means. The first few have been done for you.

Example	Singular Possessive	Plural Possessive
1. the studio of the artist	<u>the artist's studio</u> (one artist, one studio)	<u>the artists' studios</u> (the studios of many artists)
2. the hope of the man	<u>the man's hope</u> (something one man wants)	<u>the men's hopes</u> (the hopes of many men)
3. the belief of the family	_____	_____
4. the hoof of the ox	_____	_____
5. the flag of the country	_____	_____
6. the earring of the teacher	_____	_____
7. the magazine of the woman	_____	_____
8. the skill of the player	_____	_____
9. the desk of the child	_____	_____
10. the toy of the baby	_____	_____



Grammar

Name _____ Date _____

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

Possessive pronouns show ownership – something that belongs to someone or something else.

Example: The ball belongs to me. The ball is *mine*.

Possessive pronouns are: *mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs*

Complete each sentence using the correct modifying possessive pronoun.

1. The pencil belongs to the girl. It is _____.
2. I ride a bike to school. The bike is _____.
3. The lady wore a beautiful dress. The beautiful dress was _____.
4. The children played with the computer. It was _____.
5. You can choose any food to eat. The choice is _____.
6. My friends love reading. It is a favorite pastime of _____.
7. My sister and I walk the dog because it is _____.
8. Her coat is prettier than mine. Her coat is blue; _____ is brown.
9. Be more careful with John's toys, because _____ are breakable.