18 Possession

1. THREE WAYS TO SHOW POSSESSION

In writing and speaking, we have several ways to show that people own things. To show ownership:
- Use an apostrophe: the nail's head.
- Use a pronoun: its head.
- Use the words of the: the head of the nail.

In speech and writing, the first two ways are used most frequently. The words of the are used most often to show ownership for nonliving things: the cover of the book, the leaves of the tree.

Since the apostrophe is the most convenient method of showing possession, we will look first at some rules explaining that use. But before we focus on that skill, you must remember that possession suggests two important things: (1) someone owns something, and (2) something specific is being owned. Usually we express both the owner and the thing that is owned.

2. ONLY THE OWNER CARRIES THE APOSTROPHE

The owner is italicized in the following:
- the boy's bicycle (the boy is the owner and the bicycle is owned)
- the girl's skates (the girl is the owner and the skates are owned)
- the woman's job (the woman is the owner and the job is owned)

EXERCISES

Circle the owner and underline the thing being owned in the following sentences.
1. Tom's eager hands stretched out for Jill's gift.
2. The customer's yell blew the thief's cover.
3. The cat's velvet paws brushed against Bob's legs.

3. HELPER I:

POSESSION WITH APOSTROPHES

If a word does not end in s, show possession by adding an apostrophe and s ('s): baker, baker's shop; student, student's desk; woman, woman's notebook.
- Even plural words that do not end in s follow this rule: men, the men's organization; children, the children's toys.

Note: Do not use apostrophes to form plurals. Plurals are formed according to their own set of rules (see Card 17).

EXERCISES

Using Helper I, form the possessive for each word in italics.
1. the dancer's shoes
2. the men's tournament
3. an apple's core
4. a dieter's delight
5. the woman's rake

4. HELPER II:

POSESSION WITH APOSTROPHES

If a word ends in s, show possession by adding only an apostrophe ('): boys, boys' playground; boss, boss' telephone; Dickens, Dickens' writing; ladies, ladies' department.

EXERCISES

A. Using Helper II, form the possessive for each word in italics.
1. Aunt Doris' trip
2. those students' cars
3. Mr. Jones' house
4. the babies' diapers
5. Moses' march to the Red Sea

EXERCISES

B. Circle the correct word in parentheses.
1. Those (tree, tree's, trees') leaves are all yellow.
2. One (men, man's, men's) ideas often mean many (men's, men's, man's) actions.
3. (Lois, Lois', Lois') cap blew off in the car.
4. Several (boy's, boys', boys') books lay on the den floor, making it hard for (Thomas', Thomas, Thomas') mother to find her (sons', son's, history text).
5. Five (professors, professors', professor's) wives arrived at Dean (Jones, Jones') house.

5. SPECIAL SITUATIONS

- When a word is made up of several parts—hyphenated or not—make a possessive of the last element in the word: brother-in-law's house, counterman's job, stockholders' meeting, secretary-treasurer's responsibility, vice-president's speech, attorney general's actions.

Reminder: To form the plural of these types of words, add s to the first element in the word. (See Card 16.)

- For names of companies or individuals, make a possessive by changing the last element of the word: Smith-Thompson's advertisement, Barclay and Company's sales, Abraham and Strauss' restaurant.

EXERCISES

Form the possessive for each word in italics.
1. my sister-in-law's car
2. the deputy sheriff's job
3. Arm and Hammer's box
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4. William and Mary _______ campus
5. Ginn and Company _______ stock

6. TIME AND MONEY
   • Another special use of the possessive deals with time and money: (1) an hour's rent, (2) a day's pay, (3) three months' notice, (4) a quarter's worth, (5) five dollars' worth.
   If those examples seem strange to you, remember that the apostrophe is used in place of an "of a" or "of the" statement.
   The item in (1) above means the rent of an hour, (2) means pay of a day, (3) means notice of a month, (4) means the worth of a quarter, (5) means the worth of five dollars.

7. HOW PRONOUNS SHOW POSSESSION
   • Some words—pronouns—show possession without apostrophes: his house, her tablecloth, whose book?
your professor, its fur.
   Hint: Never use an apostrophe to show ownership with pronouns. Whenever a pronoun appears with an apostrophe, it indicates a contraction. Study these lists.
   (See Card 19 for more information.)
Pronouns Showing Possession
1. Watch its spin!
2. The dog is theirs.
3. Their death was tragic.
4. Your bravery was evident.
5. Whose song was performed?
Contractions
1. It's spinning! (It is)
2. There's a dog! (There is)
3. They're dying. (They are)
4. You're brave. (You are)
5. Who's singing tonight? (Who is)

8. SOMETIMES WHAT IS OWNED IS OMITTED
   • Sometimes the thing being owned is omitted from the sentence: (1) She was staying at Aunt Mary's. (We understand that she stayed at Aunt Mary's house, but the sentence makes sense even if house is omitted.)
   (2) That red car is older than Ellen's. (We understand that the red car is older than Ellen's car, but the sentence makes sense even if car is omitted.)
   • Sometimes—when the thing being owned is left out of the sentence—a pronoun is used to show the owner. In that case, we usually add an s (no apostrophe) to the pronoun: (1) her becomes hers. (The broken earring was hers.)
   (2) your becomes yours. (That dog is uglier than yours.)
   (3) our becomes ours. (His boat is faster than ours.)
   (4) their becomes theirs. (Our house is smaller than theirs.)

9. EXCEPTIONS
   • The pronoun my changes to mine.
   • Mine never adds an s. (That desk is mine—not mines.)
   • The pronoun his remains the same. (That shirt is his.)

EXERCISES
A. Add any apostrophe needed according to the number in parentheses which indicates the total apostrophes required in each sentence.
1. Dave had the job finished in one day's time. (1)
2. If the loss is hers, it is only a few dollars worth; in any case, you can reach her at her mothers. (2)
3. Theirs is a happy family, as happy as mine, but it seems that at a moments notice they will fight about anything! (1)
4. My mother-in-law's arguments were more convincing than his. (1)
5. Mr. Ross boat is larger than Mr. Griffiths. (2)
B. Underline the correct word in parentheses.
1. One (waitress, waitress', waiters') tips were very small.
2. The (commander-in-chief, commander-in-chief', commander's-in-chief) orders for a (day's, days) rest in battle excited the (men's, men's, men') interest in peace.
3. Mr. (Lewis, Lewis') comment suggested that (it's, its) not too late for the company to rehire (it's, its) president with just a few (day's, days', days) notice.
4. It must come from (Standard and Poor, Standard's and Poor, Standard and Poor's) report: this bulletin sounds like one of (their's, theirs, theirs').
5. A man (who's, whose) family is hungry will do anything for an (hours, hour's, hours') work.
C. The following paragraphs contain ten errors in possession. Correct each error and write the correction in the spaces provided.

   Because Edwin Jones's wife failed to pick him up on time at Pennsylvania Station, he arrived ten minutes late for his company's stockholders meeting. As he raced up the stairs, he heard Higgins booming voice addressing the audience.

   "Ladies and gentlemen, three months ago, our secretary-treasurers report was a negative one, caused in part by this country's high inflation rate. However, thanks to our management's ingenuity and foresight, Seely and Company's sales are at a record high. Our management people must be congratulated. They're investments have made us the largest company in our field, according to the latest survey."

1.  ______________________  6.  ______________________
2.  ______________________  7.  ______________________
3.  ______________________  8.  ______________________
4.  ______________________  9.  ______________________
5.  ______________________  10.  ______________________