

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: POSSESSION WITH APOSTROPHES

If a word does not end in *s*, show possession by adding 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* _____ shoes
2. the *men* _____ tournament
3. an *apple* _____ core

4. a *dieter* _____ delight

5. the *woman* _____ rake

4. HELPER II: POSSESSION 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 (mans, man's, men's) ideas often mean many (mens', men's, man's) actions.
3. (Lois, Loi's, Lois') cap blew off in the car.
4. Several (boy's, boys') books lay on the den floor, making it hard for (Thomas', Thomas, Thoma's) 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* _____ car
2. the *deputy sheriff* _____ job
3. *Arm and Hammer* _____ 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 jobs finished in one days 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-laws 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's) tips were very small
2. The (commander-in-chief, commander-in-chief's, commander's-in-chief) orders for a (day's, days) rest in battle excited the (mens, men's, mens') 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 Jone's wife failed to pick him up on time at Pennsylvania Station, he arrived ten minutes' late for his companys 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 countries' high inflation rate. However, thanks to our managements ingenuity and foresight, Seely and Companys 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."

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| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |