POSSESSIVES

Possessives show ownership, i.e., that something belongs to someone or something else.

How to Show Possession

English has three main rules to show possession:

1. **For singular nouns, and plural nouns that don’t end in s, add ‘s.**
   
   e.g., He placed the notebook on the student’s desk.
   e.g., He placed the notebooks on the children’s desks.

2. **For plural nouns that end in s, add only an apostrophe.**
   
   e.g., He placed notebooks on all the students’ desks.

3. **For singular nouns that end in s, you can choose whether to add only an apostrophe after the original s or add an ‘s after the original s.**
   
   e.g., He placed the notebook on James’ desk. - OR - He placed the notebook on James’s desk.

Avoiding Possession Errors

Here are some of the key errors that writers make when using possessives:

- **Incorrect** Putting an apostrophe before the final s of a singular noun
  e.g., James’s book.
  
  **Correct** James’ or James’s

- **Incorrect** Pluralizing a noun with ‘s
  e.g., I read four story’s.

  **Correct** stories

- **Incorrect** Pluralizing a family name with ‘s
  e.g., The Walker’s came with us to the restaurant.

  **Correct** Walkers

- **Incorrect** Using a singular possessive when you really need a plural
  e.g., They had a girl’s night out.

  **Correct** girls’

- **Incorrect** Leaving the apostrophe out entirely
  e.g., The womens change room - OR - the girls change room

  **Correct** women’s; girls’

- **Incorrect** Using an apostrophe with a possessive adjective
  e.g., They said the book was their’s.

  **Correct** theirs
Practice with Possessives

Fill in the blank with s, ‘s, or s’.

1. The leaders took the group’s manifesto to the government. *(singular)*
2. The study examined the effect of children’s playgroups on development.
3. It was difficult to distinguish which ideas were his and which ideas were her’s.
4. They researched several different company’s before investing.
5. They were interested in each company’s human rights record.
6. I left a message on my boss’s voicemail.
7. The Berke’s went up to the Bechard’s cottage for the weekend.
8. It was the author’s opinion that the data was inadequate. *(plural)*
9. On the weekend we went to the Farmer’s Market.
10. They sat down together to play domino’s.