

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.*



Whether you choose **'s** or only an **apostrophe** for singular nouns ending in **s** is a stylistic choice. Choose one and be consistent.

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., **Jame'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___ manifesto to the government. (*singular*)
- 2 The study examined the effect of children___ playgroups on development.
- 3 It was difficult to distinguish which ideas were his and which ideas were her___.
- 4 They researched several different compan___ before investing.
- 5 They were interested in each compan___ human rights record.
- 6 I left a messages on my boss___ voicemail.
- 7 The Berke___ went up to the Bechard___ cottage for the weekend.
- 8 It was the author___ opinion that the data was inadequate. (*plural*)
- 9 On the weekend we went to the Farmer___ Market.
- 10 They sat down together to play domino___.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| 1 group's | 2 children's | 3 hers | 4 companies |
| 5 company's | 6 boss's or boss' | 7 Berkes...Bechards' | |
| 8 authors' | 9 farmers' | 10 dominos | |